

## Champions 691

### Chapter 691: Jealous

In the middle of the night the day after, Twain called Shania for almost the entire night. At first no one answered, and then it was simply—"Sorry the number you have dialed is not in service."

Twain was sure he had made Shania angry, but Twain was a little confused as to how he made her angry.

Was it because I brought a woman home? But Uncle Tony also wants to have his own life...

Well, if she hates the way I bring prostitutes home... I really should apologize.

Twain waited apprehensively with bloodshot eyes until the next morning.

in accordance with his bad habit, which had been criticized many times by Shania and remained unchanged, Twain read the latest newspapers while he ate breakfast.

He flipped open a tabloid focused on gossip of the stars. He sprayed the coffee that he had just drank all onto the papers. Not only did he choke and cough forcefully, he also coughed till he perspired. His shirt was drenched.

He looked too unseemly. If called Shania were to see, she definitely would have more reason to prohibit Twain from reading the newspapers during mealtimes.

The reason for Twain's unseemly appearance was a front-page story.

<The Staggering Secret Girlfriend of the Famous Premier League Manager Tony Twain!!>

Then a large image under the headline almost took up half of the first page of the edition. It was pieced together by two photographs. On the left, it was a photograph of Tony Twain in an interview, and on the right, it was...Shania dressed as a model on the runway!

How could Twain not spray the coffee?

He immediately went to find out who was the bastard who wrote the damn news. Underneath the "our newspaper's reporters", he saw a photograph and a name.

Lisa Aria.

In the photo next to the name was her frameless headshot: curly brown hair, fair complexion, and freckles on her face. Twain felt somewhat familiar with the face.

He suddenly remembered that yesterday while he was getting drunk in the bar, a woman came on to him. He eventually brought her home, only to anger Shania and caused her to leave. It was this woman!

He swore a foul word. Ah, you're the culprit, the one who caused all this trouble. I'm already giving you face by not looking for you to settle the accounts. I did not expect you start a rumor about me!

Recalling how she left her telephone number yesterday while they chatted happily, Twain pulled out his cell phone and found the new name "Lisa" in the contacts. He was certain that this was the number left yesterday, so he dialed the number.

The call was picked up quickly, and a female voice came on. Except for a slightly different tone, it was the voice that Twain had heard last night.

"Mr. Tony Twain, I knew you'd call me." There was none of the flirtatiousness from last night, but with an added chilliness.

"Just my luck to have gone out to relieve boredom only to encounter a reporter." Twain said with gritted teeth.

"I said I'm not a prostitute."

"That's why I said 'reporter.' I'm so glad now that we didn't sleep together in the end. Otherwise I don't know what other shocking things you're going to write about."

"I think you misunderstood one thing. I'm not the kind of reporter who uses her body to hook up with celebrities for sensational news. Mr. Tony Twain." Despite Twain's uncivil tone, Lisa Aria kept calm and did not get angry.

"Well, I don't care what you do. I need you to take this piece of news down right away and then issue a public apology to me and Miss Judy Shania Jordana in the same placement!"

"Apology? Why?"

"Why? Because you violated my and her reputation rights!"

"I don't understand, Mr. Twain. Is it a shameful thing to admit that you're both in love?"

"Miss Lisa Aria..." Twain was about to explode.

At this time, the other party said, "I think a lot of words can't be clarified over the phone. The best is for us to meet face to face."

"That won't do. I still need to work."

"When do you start work?"

"Nine o'clock..."

"Perfect, it's half past seven now. I promise I won't take up too much of your time. I know where you live. I'll drive over. See you in twenty-five minutes, Mr. Twain." After saying that, she hung up the phone before Twain could refuse, and individually confirmed the meeting.

"Hey..." Twain was helpless.

At this time, he had time to calm down and see what was written on the news.

In fact, the article was very difficult to write. Because the reporter was one of the parties involved. She had gone home with Twain. The readers were adults, and no one was stupid enough to think that a single man and a single woman would go home together to discuss about life and ideals. A Premier

League manager and an entertainment gossip female reporter got together for a one-night stand? The news itself was explosive enough.

As a result, Lisa Aria basically did not mention the seduction in the bar. She only mentioned that she met Twain in the bar and followed him home. From there, she discovered the “a golden house to keep one’s mistress” fact—in Tony Twain’s house was the international supermodel who was currently building her film and television career in Hollywood, Judy Shania Jordana!

Although everyone knew that Jordana and Twain had a personal relationship, some people thought it was due to the Beckhams’, or that they were just ordinary friends. No one thought in the direction of the “romance department.” After all, the age gap between them was too wide. Furthermore, there was a rumor that Tony Twain was actually “gay” and only interested in men. For example, he was very close with his Chinese assistant manager, so close that it was enough for people to generate plenty of associations. Several gay magazines in the United Kingdom had fantasized about Tony Twain.

Who would have thought that Twain and Shania are having an affair!

The news was really shocking. Unfortunately, because the reporter herself was just on a night out to have fun, she did not carry a camera and could not provide any photographic evidence in kind to prove her words. But she was willing to use her integrity to assure her that she did see Shania show up at Twain’s home, and that the two people seemed to have a fight, in which Shania then angrily slammed the door and left.

Twain simply did not know whether to laugh or cry seeing such an article. On more than one occasion, he had gotten a taste of the English tabloids’ ability to distort the truth deliberately, invert right and wrong, and make up stories. But each time it would make him think that these people were too powerful. A single mouthpiece could create so many disturbances.

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The second meeting with Lisa Aria came twenty-five minutes later as she had said.

Seeing the woman again, she had taken off her stylish and sexy revealing outfit and put on a plain professional attire. She even wore a pair of black-framed glasses on her nose, appearing to be very capable.

When he saw Lisa Aria coming out of her car at the door, Twain shook his head, “Women are such chameleons.”

“It could have been a beautiful chance encounter last night, Mr. Twain.” Aria laughed. Only her smile was the same as yesterday.

“Sure, a Premier League manager and a female reporter, two people sleeping together. The news would be so hot.” Although he did not welcome her, Twain still let the lady into the house out of politeness.

“You’re deeply prejudiced about the news media, Mr. Twain. I’m not the kind of reporter who likes to be the main story of the news. Have you read the news? I lied.” She was referring to the chance encounter with Twain.

“You told more than one lie. Let’s talk properly, Miss Aria. I think your article is pure fabrication.” Twain threw the newspaper in front of the other person. But he was a little embarrassed by the coffee stains on it.

Aria was a smart woman. She looked at the newspaper and glanced at the slightly uncomfortable Twain. Then she laughed, “Looks like Mr. Twain’s breakfast was on this?”

Twain cleared his throat and said, “Let’s get back to the point. I think you fabricated a horrible rumor...”

Aria took off her black-framed glasses and slightly narrowed her eyes, “Mr. Twain, there are only two of us here, so don’t pretend.”

“Pretend? I don’t understand.”

“I don’t think everything I saw in this room last night was an illusion. You might have drunk too much, but I definitely did not.”

Twain stared at the woman for a moment and said, “Okay. I’m telling the truth, too. There’s nothing going on with Shania and me. We’re just friends...”

“Liar.” Aria smiled and said, “The excuse is too clumsy.”

“Why should I lie to you?” Twain raised his voice.

“How would I know?” Aria shrugged and said, “Maybe you just don’t want the swarming media to disturb your sweet life together... Anyhow, you’re pretty good to have covered this up so tightly, Mr. Twain.”

“I take you very seriously, Miss Lisa Aria. Shania and I are just good friends, despite our age difference. You know? Our relationship is definitely not what you think!”

Aria did not answer immediately this time but looked strangely at Twain for a moment. “The media all say Tony Twain is a mystery, and it is true. I’m also serious about discussing it with you. If you’re still worried, I can swear that anything we talk about today won’t appear in any media.” She raised her hand and swore solemnly. “Are you still going to lie to me?”

Twain completely could not get angry now because he felt that this was not an issue that could be solved by being angry—he was utterly unable to communicate with the other person. “Why should I deceive you? Like you said, is it a shame to admit that we love each other? But the problem is that there’s really nothing going between her and me...”

“Why is she at your house?”

“Today is my birthday, so she came to wish me a happy birthday. It’s normal for friends to do this, isn’t it?”

“If you’re friends, why did she get angry when she saw us together? She can’t control your life, can she?”

“Not everyone can accept that their own friends bring prostitutes home to do those things...”

Aria went red in the face and interrupted Twain’s words, “Mr. Twain...”

Twain also interrupted her, "It's just that she thought you were a prostitute. I'm not saying you're a prostitute."

Aria felt frustrated for a moment and found that she could not rebut Twain's words, because what Twain said was reasonable. So, she habitually went to push up her glasses, but her fingers found an empty space instead. She went redder in the face. "Well, just... suppose I'm a prostitute... She has no right to interfere with your freedom as a friend."

"She should still have the right to be angry."

"Was she angry?" Aria suddenly was not red in the face anymore. She laughed this time.

Twain was puzzled by her laughter.

"Wasn't she?"

"Do you understand women, Mr. Twain?" Instead of answering Twain, Aria asked such a question instead.

Twain stared blankly. He did not know what the question meant. "I don't know if I understand women, but I'm sure I understand Shania more than you do."

"Not necessarily, Mr. Twain. Don't assume that just because you know her for a long time means that you understand her. Are you sure that you understand everyone around you?"

Aria's words struck Twain's Achilles' heel. Because he thought of Bendtner who was leaving. He thought he knew Bendtner well and understood everyone on the team, that he knew what they liked, hated and wanted... But in actual fact? He overlooked the most important things and still felt regret till now.

Seeing that Twain did not say a word, Aria sensed that she had pinpointed Twain's worry— indeed she had spoken accurately, but the "worry" was not "a matter of the heart."

She smugly declared her victory, "Please forgive my bluntness, Mr. Twain. Last night, your very good friend was not angry, but ... jealous."

Like being struck by a thunderbolt, Twain sat dazedly in his chair and did not react even until Lisa Aria said goodbye.

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Feeling preoccupied, Twain rushed to Wilford and then greeted Kerslake, "Good morning, Dunn."

"..." Kerslake looked at Dunn standing next to Twain.

Dunn spread his hands at him.

"Anything the matter with you, Tony?" Kerslake patted Twain hard on the back which snapped him out of it.

"Ah... It's David, good morning!"

"What's the matter with you?"

“Nothing. I just suddenly feel that there are so many wonderful things in the world that I don’t even exist...”

Kerslake was even more certain that something was wrong with Twain. He said, “If you know all of them, then you’re not Tony Twain. You would be God.” Then he knew it was futile to ask Twain, so he turned to ask Dunn, who had been with Him. “What’s wrong with him, Dunn?”

“A boulder was suddenly thrown into an otherwise normally calm lake. That’s what happened, David.” Dunn answered with a smile.

Kerslake was even more confused by the remark. He glanced at Dunn and muttered, “Is this East Asian people’s mysticism?” You’re both crazy...” Kerslake decided not to care about what happened to them. It was all good as long as Twain still remembered how to train and lead the team. He turned and walked away from the inexplicable duo.

Dunn took a look at Twain and followed Kerslake to walk away.

“Aren’t you playing a guessing game with Tony?” Kerslake asked.

“My lake has always been very calm.” Dunn replied with a smile.

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The abandoned Twain stood alone outside his office when his cell phone rang.

He was not so distracted that he did not answer his phone, not to mention that it was Shania who called.

Shania did not exchange pleasantries with him. She kept the call short and when the phone was connected:

“Are you free at noon, Uncle Tony? Let’s have a meal together.” After she gave the name and address of the restaurant, he only heard the “beep, beep, beep” sound.

Twain wanted to say something, but the call was already disconnected.

## **Chapter 692: Goodbye Kiss**

As the time in university approached its end after four years, the class monitor and the secretary of the Communist Youth League Branch Committee [1] would begin organizing a ‘farewell meal’ that all students – even students who were not usually close to one another, had to attend. Needless to say, students in tight-knit cliques would not only attend this farewell meal, but they would already have had countless of such meals days before that as well.

Twain did not have a lot of friends during his time in school. In spite of that, there were quite a few students who went up to him for a toast during the farewell meal, saying a bunch of inappropriate things before lifting their necks and swigging down their glasses.

There was even a classmate who brought along a camcorder and recorded a video of the farewell meal. The footage was subsequently burned into a CD and distributed to every student as a memento.

Twain did not dispose of the CD that he was given, though he does not remember where he placed it or if he brought it along with him when he moved to Nottingham.

However, that meal left a lasting impression on him, so much so that he does not need to watch the video in the CD again to know what happened. That night, the students all gathered in twos and threes and began talking about things that they did not have the courage to previously under the influence of alcohol. Some were amusing and some were melancholic. There were students who zealously talked about how they will write a brand new chapter of their lives in the society, students who were busy confessing to their crushes, students who pretended to be tipsy and went around asking for hugs from girls, and students who would grab onto their best buds in university and drink gulp after gulp and glass after glass...

In a nutshell, there was only one recurring theme associated with the farewell meal: break up, goodbye or disband.

Even though Twain was aware that Shania was neither a transmigrator nor a university student in China before, he could not stop his restless mind from thinking about the possibility of a 'farewell meal'.

"Uncle Tony. Thank you for all the care that you have given me for these past few years, but I think it is better for me to leave so that I won't interfere with your life. Goodbye!"

If such words were to come out of Shania's mouth, Twain really had no idea what he would feel.

It turned out that he has already grown used to life with Shania around.

He had never felt that the girl was truly away from him and his life, even though she worked in the United States, and they were separated by half a globe.

It is just that we can't meet that often...

Lisa Aria's words from this morning sent shockwaves through Twain.

The word 'jealous' had never surfaced in his mind before, but now he was forced to confront this issue at hand. Even though he has never had a girlfriend before in his life, does not have any plans to start a family, and did not have any successful experiences with love relationships in his past life, he still understood what 'jealous' means, and was also aware of the kind of people who will get jealous.

The issue... Appears to have gotten complicated.

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Twain's head was in the clouds for the entire morning. He was never able to focus his attention on the reserve team's training. Trainings of such a level had nothing to do with him either way, so he simply put on a pair of sunglasses and mulled over the issue by the side of the field.

There was no training session in the afternoon, so everyone decided to head back home when the morning training session finished around noon. Dunn had intended to go home with Twain, but was rejected.

"I have something on..." Twain noticed that Dunn was looking at him without a hint of surprise, and immediately went on to explain, "I'm definitely not headed to some bar looking for a one night stand this time."

"I know. It's Shania, right?"

Twain nodded his head. "She called earlier and wants me to have lunch with her. Oh yes, Dunn, what do you think she will say to me?"

"Happy birthday."

"She has already said that to me at my house late last night."

"That was from me to you. It's your birthday today. As for what she wants to say to you, how would I know?"

Twain thought about it and realized what he said made sense. Dunn was no love expert and was certainly not Shania. How would he know about such things? He was becoming a little too muddled this morning.

"Should I head back home and change into a new set of clothes?" Twain stretches out his hands and does a spin for Dunn.

"There's no need for that. What I mean is, it's the same no matter what you change into. Just head on over." Dunn said with a smile.

With that, Twain headed straight off without changing. Of course, he did not forget to buy a bouquet of flowers along the way, intending to use that to apologize to Shania.

What does he have to apologize about?

Uncle Tony should not bring prostitutes back home...

Ah, Miss Lisa Aria, please sacrifice yourself one more time!

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Twain got into Landy's car and travelled to Beeston, which is located south-west of Nottingham. This was the first time Twain has ever visited this place, as Beeston is situated very far away from the city area of Nottingham. A river separates this small town from Clifton, which is where construction works are underway for Nottingham Forest's new stadium.

Twain surveyed the sceneries of the streets beyond the window curiously and noticed that the cab came to a stop before a narrow alleyway.

"Tony, the Chinese restaurant that you told me about should be here... But I don't see any shops around..."

Landy, the cab driver, turned his head around as he sat on his driver's seat and pointed outside the window. There was a light box at the alleyway with the words 'NOSH Sichuan Restaurant' written on it in a combination of English and Chinese characters.



“There’s a sign but no shop. Chinese restaurants sure are mysterious.”

Twain smiled as he patted Landy on the shoulder. “In China, there’s a saying that has been circulating around that the tastiest, most authentic restaurants will always be opened in obscure places. The most run down shops have the most delicious cuisines. Thank you, Landy.”

Twain pushed the door open and got off. He followed the arrow as displayed on the light box and walked straight into the alleyway. As he came out of the alleyway, he saw that pitifully small NOSH Sichuan Restaurant.

A foreigner approached him. The staff from the restaurant came up to him enthusiastically, adopting a Chinese style of greeting for their customers. It was completely different from the ‘gentlemanly’ etiquette that was adopted in other foreign restaurants, which made people feel as though they were separated by a piece of glass. The staff’s greeting made Twain feel at home, which was something he has not felt in a while. This was likely a feeling that only the Chinese are able to understand...

“Sir, table for...?”

“Uh...” Twain was stumped by the question. He peered into the restaurant. It was lunch time and the small shop was full of customers, most of whom were Chinese students who were studying abroad. They had yellow skin, black hair and black eyes, and were speaking in either Chinese or its dialects, which made finding the person he was after much easier.

“I’m with her.” Twain told the staff as he pointed to Shania, who was reading newspapers in the shop.

He was brought before Shania. The beautiful girl glanced up at Tony, then lowered the newspapers and pointed at the seat across of her.

“Have a seat, Uncle Tony.” Her voice was a little cold.

Twain sat down and inhaled deeply, trying hard to start a conversation. “Smells of chili.”

“This must mean that this place is as authentic as it gets?”

“Huh?”

“I asked around and they said that this is the most authentic Chinese restaurant in Nottingham. They also told me to order this if I ever visited...” Shania pointed at the plate of food that was already on the table.

Twain took a look at it and exclaimed, “Pork Lungs in Chili Sauce?”

“Try it. I don’t know how authentic it is, but perhaps you will know once you try.”

Twain did not move his chopsticks. He stared at the table full of familiar or unfamiliar Chinese cuisines. It was quite the feast, but he could not grasp Shania’s intention behind ordering a table full of food.

“Do you not have an appetite? Not hungry?”

“Uh... No.” Twain still did not dare to move his chopsticks. He was afraid that it will really turn out to be a ‘farewell meal’ once he ate.

Shania clearly interpreted his actions differently. She held up the glass of beer beside her and said, "That's right, I forgot to say this. Happy birthday, Uncle Tony."

It was surely rude to let a girl hold up a glass and wait. Twain did not figure out her intentions, but still raised the glass nonetheless. Before their glasses clinked with each other, he cautiously asked, "Your next sentence isn't going to be 'goodbye', right?"

Shania, who had pulled a long face up till then, burst out into a short laugh, but quickly regained a straight face once more.

"Uh, I think I should apologize to you, Shania. About yesterday night..." He handed her the bouquet of flowers.

Shania put down her glass and received the bouquet with both hands. She brought it before her nostrils and sniffed. It was fragrant.

"Thank you, Uncle Tony... But I wasn't mad. I think you are thinking too much. I have no right to be telling you how to live your life."

"You are lying," Twain uncourteously called her out on her lie, "The way you have been speaking up till now sounds very unnatural."

Twain felt a little relieved after seeing Shania accept his flowers. He wanted to explain the previous night's events to Shania, but he did not know where to start, or how to say it.

Shania rolled her eyes. "What do I need to do to sound natural? Actually, I did not treat you to this meal just so I can listen to you apologize or anything. This was a meal that I had arranged for a while back."

"Huh?" Her words made Twain feel as though he had just plunged into a sea of cloud and mist.

"This was a meal that I ordered three days ago to celebrate your birthday. It'd be a waste if we don't eat it. Also, your birthday present is in the parking lot. It's the jeep that I drove away in yesterday."

Twain had been completely turned to stone. He understood the gravity of Shania's words even though she had only mentioned them casually.

He was no fool. He was well aware of what was going on. She gave him a car as his birthday present just like that!

Still, it was just a car, and it was something that was easy to put a price on, but, in contrast, the meal... Was something that one could not determine the value of.

Even he has not visited this tiny restaurant that was located in a remote area and was supposedly the most authentic restaurant in Nottingham before. He had no idea who Shania had to ask to get information about such a restaurant.

"I know you like Chinese cuisines... To be honest, British food is horrible." Shania shrugged. "Going to Burns' bar to eat all the time is just going to take a toll on your body one day."

Twain picked up a piece of meat off the 'Pork Lungs in Chili Sauce' dish and stuffed it into his mouth wordlessly. He chewed slowly.

Hmm... It tastes a little more sour and sweet than the authentic ones in China. It's also not spicy enough. But...

He raised his head and smiled at Shania. "This is really authentic."

A small smile emerges on Shania's face.

"Can you stop pulling such a long face, Shania?" begged Twain, who could not get used to the Shania who wore a cold expression on her face, just like the one she would wear as a model strutting down a runway during a fashion show.

"But I don't feel like smiling now."

"So you are angry with me... Honestly, that was all just a misunderstanding. That... That woman was just a... Uh... Prostitute that I met while I was out drowning my sorrows. You know how I need them sometimes..."

"Is that so?" Shania asked. She picked up the newspapers that she had set aside earlier and raised it before Twain's eyes for him to see the headline that was printed on it.

"Shocking! Famous Premier League Coach Tony Twain's Secret Girlfriend!!"

"Was it a prostitute masquerading as a beautiful journalist, or a journalist masquerading as a seductive prostitute?"

Seeing that article made Twain want to bury his head in the plate of 'Pork Lungs in Chili Sauce' before him.

"That journalist was crazy for a shot to fame. It's a load of crap!" Twain quickly explained.

"Load of crap?" Shania shifted her gaze from Twain's face and towards the narrow sky that could be seen outside of the shop.

Twain suddenly recalled Lisa Aria's remark about being 'jealous' as he saw Shania in that state.

"Does Uncle Tony wish for that article to be a load of crap?" Shania reverted her gaze back on him.

Twain did not know how he should answer that question. He felt that the Shania today was odd. She kept on saying baffling things, and kept on displaying enigmatic and inscrutable expressions on her face.

"Do you wish for that?" Shania asked again after seeing that Twain was not responding to her.

Twain had no choice but to confront the issue. He carefully recalled every single moment that he spent with Shania and went silent for quite a while. This time, Shania did not urge him for a response.

After a long time, Twain finally raised his head. He looked at Shania and said, "I don't know."

Shania smiled and did not probe further. To her, the fact that Uncle Tony did not nod and say, 'yes' at once made her very happy.

The two of them were caught up in their own thoughts and they finished the meal in silence. The atmosphere was strange throughout the meal. Thereafter, Shania led Twain to the parking lot to take a look at his birthday gift.

“A Mercedes-Benz jeep. Hope you like it, Uncle Tony,” said Shania, who pointed towards the white jeep as they were in the parking lot.

Twain caresses the cool exterior of the car, unsure of what to say. At last, all he could do was laugh and say, “Shania, this gift of yours is too expensive. All I ever gave you for your birthday were cheap Totoro soft toys...”

“If you liked Totoro soft toys, I would have bought them for you too. If it’s a gift for someone you are keen to give to, nothing is too expensive or too cheap.” Shania did not want to hear those words from Twain. She shook her head and continued on, without waiting for Twain’s response, “Send me over to Heathrow Airport!”

“Airport?” Twain was taken aback.

“I had secretly snuck away to come here. I don’t have time to be playing around here. I have to rush back at once.”

“You flew back from America just to celebrate my birthday?” Twain looked at her incredulously.

“Yes, what of it?”

“Don’t you think... Don’t you think... It is too far and too troublesome?”

“I don’t think so,” Shania shook her head, “This is the first time I’m celebrating your birthday for you. I don’t want to just say a superficial ‘Happy Birthday’ to you over the phone.”

“Actually, I’d have been happy if you just called to tell me that, Shania.”

“I wouldn’t be happy! Like I’ve said, no matter how far it is, I won’t think it is far, and no matter how troublesome it is, I won’t think that it is troublesome if it is for someone I am keen to give to! Send me to the airport now!”

Without waiting for Twain’s response, Shania had pulled open the door to the front passenger seat and got into the car.

Twain could only shake his head as he pulled open the car door. He realized that the day had been strange. Ever since the moment he confronted Shania, he has never once gained the upper hand in their interactions. That was not how it had been in the past...

“All right, I’m saying this first. My driving skills... are terrible.”

“My life is already in your hands. Do what you can, Uncle Tony.” Shania began to fasten her seatbelt as she settled into the front passenger seat.

Twain admitted defeat.

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“Do you have a lot on your mind recently, Uncle Tony?” Shania asked Twain, who was completely focused on driving, as they were travelling on the M1 highway en route to London.

“It’s nothing worth mentioning.” Twain wanted to make himself sound more authoritative, but it came out sounding weak instead.

“I’ve asked Dunn before, and he said that you’ve been smoking and drinking much more than you did in the past. Is it due to the transfers?”

“It’s normal for the manager to dwell over things like that.”

“How can that be counted as normal? You don’t need to rely on alcohol and cigarettes to relief your stress. Frankly speaking, Uncle Tony, I’m very worried about your health condition. Have you gone for a health check-up before?”

“What good can come from doing that?”

“It’s better for you to go for it.” Shania began to count Twain’s ‘misdeeds’ on her fingers. “Irregular daily routine. Poor sleeping habits. A lot of stress from work. Alcoholic. Smokes a lot. Lacks exercise... Do you perhaps think that your life is too long for you, Uncle Tony?”

If not for the fact that he was currently driving, Twain would have held up both hands and surrendered. Today, he was truly scared of this girl.

“All right, all right. I will listen to you. I will go and do a check-up tomorrow, and quit drinking and smoking after that. I will make sure my life follows a set routine... But I don’t quite care about stress from work. There’s no such thing as a manager without stress in this world.”

“It’d be great if you really can do all that.” Shania clearly knows all about Twain’s trustworthiness. She sighed in exasperation.

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The two had to bid farewell once Twain sent Shania to the check-in counter at the airport.

“Next time, don’t secretly sneak out anymore. You are just making things difficult for Mr. Fasal.” Twain handed a bag that he had been carrying to Shania, who had now donned a pair of wide frame sunglasses and a sun hat.

“If I don’t sneak out, it’s going to be very difficult to see you, Uncle Tony.” There was finally a hint of reluctance in Shania as she turned around to look at the counter.

“Are you that busy?” Twain asked.

“Very busy.”

“Uh... Once this season is over, I’d definitely go over to America and play with you for a while.” Twain did not know how else to console Shania and that was all he could say.

“I have to wait 10 months for that.” Shania pouted.

“To be exact, it’s 9 months. The league ends in May.” Twain corrected her.

“That is way too long...”

The two of them sank into a period of awkward silence.

Twain looked at the human traffic around them and reminded Shania, "It should be time to check-in, right?"

Shania nodded her head.

"Then... Goodbye, Shania." Twain waved his hand to bid farewell.

However, Shania did not respond in the same way and say, "Goodbye, Uncle Tony."

She stood very close to Twain. Shania had kept her head down and displayed reluctance initially, but she suddenly raised her head to look at Twain. Her fiery gaze enchanted Twain and sent him into a trance. He did not know what Shania wanted to do.

An announcement urging passengers flying to Los Angeles to finish their check-in processes began to play in the airport, yet Shania did not turn around to leave. She took a small step forward, almost nestling herself into Twain's arms, then lifted her head and planted her tender red lips onto Twain's.

The soft and moist sensation of her lips was like a knife that had stabbed and embedded itself in Twain's mind. Shania's every breath was fragrant. Twain felt intoxicated just from the scent alone, almost like there was a glass of fine wine that had just been placed right by his lips. Both his brain and body failed to respond, as if he had just consumed a lot of wine. His whole body was stiff and did not know how to react.

In between consciousness, he heard Shania murmur by his ear, "Maybe you'd think this is all too sudden, Uncle Tony. But I can't wait any longer... I love you, Uncle Tony. I... Love... You."

It was all too much to process for Twain's brain. Too many outrageous things had happened in the span of one day and he could barely keep track of them all.

Shania's brazen kiss from before had lessened the impact brought about by her confession.

As he continued to stand there in a daze, Shania had already leapt away from his arms, giggling.

"This is a goodbye kiss. Goodbye, Uncle Tony!"

### **Chapter 693: I Love You, Do You Love Me?**

A scene that he had never dared to think about and had never thought about before had just happened on this very day, and it impacted Twain deeply.

His heart that had been beating furiously came to a stop when Shania whispered the words 'I love you' by his ear.

He stood rooted at the spot like a statue, and did not even react when Shania waved him goodbye.

He was not a moron. He understood what 'love' is, and what 'I love you' meant. He could not lie to himself and say that those were just words of admiration that Shania had said to someone older than her. She might be able to say the words 'I love you' to her parents, but to say 'I love you' to a man without any blood relations with her could only mean one thing.

She had truly fallen for him.

Twain felt as though his head was about to explode.

Something like this... Something like this... How could it happen to him?

It felt like a story without build up or sex without foreplay. Everything happened too quickly and Twain's heart really could not handle it all.

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As he sat in the car that was given to him by Shania, Twain was still reminiscing about everything that had happened these two days. He wanted to connect the dots and find the clues hidden within. He then realized that what the journalist, Lisa Aria, said had been completely right. Shania was not angry as he had assumed she was. She was just being jealous.

A girl who was in love with him wanted to give him a surprise, only to find that he had brought a seductive woman home. What was she feeling when she saw that?

Twain had never been in love before, but he had watched soap operas so he knew.

The problem is, why would Shania harbor such feelings for him? He had deliberately avoided using the word 'love', because he felt that the word 'love' was heavy and embodied a sense of responsibility. It was a word that he was not fully prepared to accept just yet.

Is it because they are always together?

There is a Chinese saying that states that 'familiarity breeds fondness'.

However, Twain did not think that there was anything about him that would make a girl fall in love with him after a long period of interaction. He liked to drink, smoke, was temperamental, never cared about trifles or hygiene, not good at sweet-talking, would never give expensive gifts, was a male chauvinist, was full of himself, selfish, possessive, rude, unreasonable, was someone who would rather betray the whole world than to let the whole world betray him... And, at times, he was also a little superficial.

Frankly, what the media had been reporting about me so far was not wrong. There is nothing positive that can be found on me. Twain mocked himself in his thoughts.

Twain fished out his hand phone and dialled for his cab driver Landy. "Is this Landy? Are you free right now? Yes? That's good. Can you come over to Heathrow Airport to pick me up and send me home? No... No, you don't need to drive your cab over. You just need to bring yourself over here and help me drive my car back. Yes. Thank you!"

After finishing the call, Twain continued to sit in his car's interior to rack his brains over the problem that had already given him a terrible headache.

Could it be possible that the little girl simply mistook 'like' and 'admiration' for 'love' because she had been spending a lot of time with me?

Twain immediately shook his head and threw that thought out of the window. Shania was not a 13 year-old. Moreover, she was a Brazilian girl. Not knowing what 'love' was when she was already 18 was impossible.

Twain decided to stop thinking about things that he could not make sense of for now. He raised his head and looked at the blue sky beyond the car's window, and watched as plane after plane took off and landed. This was a busy airport.

What was Shania feeling after saying those words?

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Shania made use of the few minutes before take-off to call and notify her manager that she was on her way back.

"Has everything been sorted out, Shania?" Fasal asked over the phone with a laugh.

"Yes, all done."

"What was his reply?"

"I left before hearing it. I think he might still be standing like a log there. Uncle Tony is not mentally tough..." said Shania as she pursed her lips.

"You are one to talk. You are just like him. What do you plan to do from here on out if you don't even know his answer?"

"What else can I do? I can only wait. Maybe he'd call me, maybe he won't... Mr. Fasal, am I being a little too stubborn?"

"A little stubborn, yes, but you can't deal with people like Tony without being stubborn. I can only wish you good luck, Shania. It beats me what Tony will think about it all."

Shania ended the phone call and followed the stewardess's instructions to fasten her seatbelt as she sat on her seat. She began to recall the conversation that she had with Mr. Fasal when she decided to take time off to fly to Nottingham.

She came to the decision to tell everything that was on her mind to her manager. She told Fasal about how she has always liked Uncle Tony, and how those feelings slowly developed into love. She did not know how to explain what brought about the change in feelings, and how those feelings came about. All she could say was that she was truly in love with Uncle Tony.

She was already 18, and Uncle Tony was about to turn 40. She did not want to wait any longer and so she definitely had to fly back to Nottingham and make use of the birthday celebration to confess her feelings to him.

Fasal was not surprised in the slightest at everything Shania had said to him. He only asked Shania if she was confident in getting Twain to accept her feelings.

Shania's response was that she was very confident that she would be able to do it. After years of spending time with Uncle Tony, she felt that he was someone who truly treated her well, and his



kindness was not something that a stranger would be able to give. After all, Twain was not her father, and not a relative of hers. She believed in that kindness that she was shown.

However, her confidence wavered once she arrived in Nottingham and witnessed Twain bringing an unknown woman back home. It was only until the end of the trip that she was able to muster all her courage and tell him everything that she had kept within her heart. She did not dare to hear his reply, so she made use of her boarding the airplane as an excuse and fled from the scene.

Right now, she has no idea what will happen in the future.

However, she had thought it through. The words have already been said, and whatever was going to happen from now on was out of her control. There was no use thinking about it. All she could do was wait.

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As Shania's plane was flying through the skies above the Atlantic Ocean, Landy, who was here to drive Twain home, saw him standing in front of a jeep, with his brows furrowed and lost in thoughts.

"What a great car." Landy patted the bonnet of the car gently and whistled. "How much did it cost?"

It was only then that Twain realized that he did not ask Shania about how much the car had cost. He shook his head in exasperation and said, "I don't know. It was a birthday gift."

Landy looked at Twain and asked, "Shania?"

Twain nodded.

"She's so good to you, Tony." As he made sense of everything, Landy went on to say with a smile, "Good for you, too."

How could Twain possibly not understand what he was getting at?

He forced a smile as he pulled the car door open. "Get in the car. I need to trouble you to be my chauffeur, Landy."

"But, I do recall that you can drive?"

"Not now, I'm afraid I'd get into an accident and die on the way home."

"You look like you have a lot on your mind. Did something happen between the two of you?"

They may have met by chance, but Landy has always treated Twain as a very good friend. Hence, Shania, who would always sit in his car when the two of them went out together, was also naturally his friend. He was familiar with both of them and so he asked Twain out of concern.

"Did the two of you fight?"

"It's more complicated than that... Forget it. It's nothing. Just drive."

Instead of driving, Landy pulled the keys out of the ignition. "Am I someone you can't trust, Tony? I won't go around telling tales. I'm just concerned about you." Landy looked at Twain and said in a serious tone.

“All right, I’d talk. Just drive.” Twain shrugged and said, “Shania just told me she loves me.”

Landy missed as he tried to insert the keys into the ignition.

Twain watched him and Landy immediately explained himself, “I’m not surprised! I’m not surprised at all! I had already guessed that this was the case long ago. I just never thought she’d tell you today. Happy birthday, Tony! You just received the best birthday gift.”

Twain looked at Landy, who was starting to gesture around excitedly. “Why do you look so excited about this?”

“How did you think I’d act, Tony? Did you think I will cry and pull a long face? This is clearly great news!”

“Why?” Twain threw out his hands before him. “There is a huge age gap between us. I’m older than her by 22 years! People won’t find it odd if I was her dad, right?”

“Then how did you perceive her all these years? Did you see her as your daughter?”

Twain went quiet for moment before replying, “Sometimes... I do feel that way. She’s just like my own daughter. I want her to be happy, to have things go her way in life and be safe. I want to take care of her, just like how I would take care of my own daughter. Did you know, her parents hardly care about what goes on with her. I am in charge of everything that has to do with her. I had to call and ask a friend to take care of her now that she’s in Hollywood. I don’t think of this as love at all... How can I possibly not feel like a dad taking care of a daughter?”

“Sometimes it’s hard for people to see things clearly when they stand too close.” Landy revved up the engine, and slowly drove out of the parking lot.

“You didn’t sleep yesterday right, Tony?”

“Hmm?”

Landy pointed at Landy’s eyes. “I noticed it earlier in the afternoon. They are terribly red. Go ahead and rest, I will wake you up when we reach your house.”

Twain felt a wave of exhaustion assault him right as Landy said that. It was true that he did not sleep. The events that had happened were so horrifying that he became overstimulated. Now that it has all come to an end, it was time to take a rest.

“All right, I’m tired... Wake me up when we reach my house, Landy.” His body slid down as he reclined against the front passenger seat. He cocked his head to a side and closed his eyes.

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“I love you, Uncle Tony...”

Shania snuggled into Twain’s arms. They had just been engaged in a wet kiss. She looked up at Twain with eyes full of passion, her cheeks flushed and her lips looking breathtakingly beautiful.

“I object!” A man appeared before the two of them.

Color drained from Shania’s face as she pressed herself against Twain’s chest. “Dad!”

“Jordie, you have utterly broken my heart...” A grief-stricken woman appeared beside the man and gazed at Shania.

“Mum...”

“Mr. Twain! I may have left my daughter in your care, but it was not to make it easier for you to trick her into bed!” Shania’s father was extremely agitated. “Is this how you repay my trust?”

Shania’s mother reached out a hand and looked as though she wanted to pull Shania. Her face was streaked with tears that glistened under the light.

“Jordie. I don’t understand. Why would you fall in love with a man old enough to be your father... I’m so disappointed with you... So disappointed with you...”

“Mr. Twain, you are worse than an animal!”

“Jordie, come with me. Come with your mother...”

“Don’t say anything more!” Shania shrieked, and hugged Twain even more tightly. Her hug was so tight that Twain felt as though he could barely gasp for air. “I won’t accept anyone else other than Uncle Tony! I want to be with him. I want to be with him for the rest of my life!”

“Mr. Twain, what have you done to my daughter?”

“Jordie, please stop throwing a tantrum...”

“I’m not throwing a tantrum, Dad, Mum.” Shania glanced at Twain shyly and lowered her head a little. “Actually, I’m pregnant with...”

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Twain was scared awake. However, that uncomfortable feeling that made him feel as though he could not breathe was still there, and it misled him into thinking that whatever just happened was not a dream in his daze.

“You are already awake?” Landy’s voice called out from the side. In this moment, Twain found his voice to be the most melodious voice in the whole world. He wanted to hug Landy and kiss his wrinkled face.

He realized that he was immobilized. He looked down and found that the seatbelt was still fastened. This was what made it difficult for him to breathe.

“We have yet to reach. You can sleep for a while longer.”

“No thanks, I can’t sleep...” Twain wiped beads of perspiration off his forehead.

“What’s wrong?”

“Had a dream about a boring, cheesy and obscene soap opera.”

“Look at how scared you are... What kind of soap opera can make you this scared?”

“A very horrifying soap opera. The kind that airs at 3am in the morning...” Twain rolled down the window, intending to let some fresh air in, only to find himself gasping for air as a gale of wind blew

against him. He clumsily rolled the windows back up. It was then that he remembered that they were travelling at a speed of over 120km/h on the highway.

"This car is really great!" Landy patted the steering wheel and praised the car once again.

"If you like it I can..." Twain noticed that Landy was staring at him, and raised both hands. "... Not give it to you."

Landy laughed.

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Dunn did not probe about what happened between Twain and Shania during lunch when Twain returned home. Twain said nothing to him as well. His head was in a complete mess and he really was not in the mood to be sharing about his own personal life with others.

There was only one thing that would help him forget about his troubles momentarily.

Work.

The international games were about to end, and the players who had been scattered all over the globe will begin returning to their teams one after another. The Premier League that had been suspended for two weeks will begin once again. The UEFA Champions League would kick off soon as well. Things were going to get very busy.

Before things got busy, he typed an e-mail to Shania, who was far away in America.

"... Thank you for your birthday gift, Shania. Thank you for your goodbye kiss... I really like Shania as well, but I don't know whether my feelings are 'love' or not. It's very difficult for me to explain to you the kind of feelings that I have.

... As you know, I'm actually someone who's really dumb. This problem is too complicated and I can't come up with an answer in a short period of time. So please allow me to owe you for now. Remember that I owe you an answer..."

"Is this an indirect rejection, Mr. Fasal?" Shania showed the e-mail to the person beside her whom she felt the closest to.

Fasal shook his head and smiled. "No, Tony is swayed. The good thing is, he's not averse to the fact that you love him. Keep at it, Shania. Let him see your heart clearly."

Shania pouted. "I love him. Does he love me?"

"Why? Did you just lose confidence in yourself?"

"I don't know, I just... Think about it occasionally. Maybe it's possible that he does."

Fasal smiled. "The British are different from you Brazilians. Most of them are conservative, reserved, reticent and shy. They are not too willing to show what they feel directly, and they always make people feel like they are hard to approach. But the truth is, once you make your way into their hearts, you will receive the warmest reciprocation you can ever get. The warmth will be beyond your imagination and tolerance. Isn't it ironic? The French say that the British are naked pirates once they shed off their outer

layers. I think this saying makes a lot of sense. Tony is actually quite different from most of the traditional British. But this part of his here..." Fasal pointed at his heart, "Is still as sturdy as a castle. In Britain we have a proverbial saying which goes, 'An Englishman's home is his castle'. What it means is that the British care a lot about their privacy, and you can interpret it as saying that the British guard their most private things as though they were a sturdy castle, and they will not let anyone snoop around easily."

"Mr. Fasal, you know a lot about the British..."

"That's because I'm a British myself." Fasal lifted the teacup and took a sip. It was time for afternoon tea.

"Uh... I've been with Uncle Tony for too long. I almost think that every British acts like him. I forgot that there's people like you." Shania scratched her head in embarrassment.

"What he represents is the British after they've shed their outer layers."

"What about you?"

"As for me," Fasal lowered his teacup elegantly, "I'm a gentleman."

Seeing that Shania was still a little down on spirits, Fasal continued his attempt at enlightening her, "Don't worry. Even if his heart is a sturdy castle, you have already made your way into it. It's just that pirates tend to be a little careless, so they don't really pay attention to the people and things around them. But once they notice them..." Fasal smiled. "I need to start racking my brains over what is the best thing to get the two of you for your marriage."

Shania blushed.

#### **Chapter 694: Remnant**

Up till the end, Twain did not find Lisa Aria to ask for them to withdraw that news article and to release a public apology. This was not because he had forgotten about it, but his current self did not know what to expect. No matter if he agreed or not, Shania had indeed become his rumoured girlfriend, solely based on the fact she confessed her feelings to him. Thus, this article would not count as one that is fabricated.

Besides, he did not want to find those publishers again for a chance for the media to use this opportunity to blow up the issue. He was not sure of his inner feelings and he did not want to find trouble — he was never afraid of the complications from soccer, but he hopes to have less, if not none of those troubles that includes feelings and other women.

The reality was not too far off from what Twain hoped, the news publishers Lisa Aria supported had limited reputation. Adding on the fact the amount of rumours related to Twain's rumoured girlfriends were plenty, it was initially Clarice Gloria who attracted some attention, but after that came news of some Turkish beauty which became dull and no one cared. The two "rumoured girlfriends" mentioned above even had photographs as proof. However, the publishers could not even produce pictures proving the rumours between Tony Twain and Shania, how can they claim this to be "shocking news"? Is it only

because discovering that both of them are friends gave them the right to freely fabricate such ridiculous news? They “were even able to guarantee the truth on their honor”. At today’s age who would not know that these entertainment producers sell their honour for a living. Definitely not many would believe Shania was Twain’s rumored girlfriend.

At this moment, if Twain’s rumored boyfriend was not a chinese Tang but was actually David Kerslake or David Beckham, this news might have been more sensational.

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Since that incident, other than writing that email, Twain has never contacted Shania. His current self did not know how to face that little fairy, he would feel a little uncomfortable until being simply did not want to think about it.

Luckily, he still had work to distract himself.

The new league champion group match schedule had already been arranged. Nottingham Forest, who successfully won the league champions, has gotten unprecedented attention. The experts were also optimistic about the performance of the seeded team. There was even such a voice speaking. “No matter which group Nottingham Forest is allocated, or what the other three teams in the group were, Tony Twain’s team would always win the group, and eight, nine of tens times topping the group. The other teams’ only option was to get the second spot of the group.”

The final outcome was Nottingham Forest being allocated into the last group.

The H group, other than the seeded team Nottingham Forest, had the old-school team Juventus who only returned to Seria A last season to win the championship in this current season. The Ukrainian traditional team FC Kyiv Dynamo and Belarus’ team Borisov were in the group too.

Only Kyiv Dynamo could create some upsets, Borisov was already been determined to be the minnow for the other three teams to win matches from. If everything goes as expected, the two teams leaving the aforementioned group should be Nottingham Forest and Juventus.

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The international team competition had reached a pause and players concurrently returned to their respective teams. George Wood had finished his happiest fortnight in the national team as their first team starter. In the two matches on the 6th and the 10th, he gave his best in his debut and used actual results to repay Capello’s trust in him. In the matches where away team England won Andorra with two goals, 4 : 1 to defeat Croatia on away to take revenge for their elimination during the UEFA European Championship finals, George Wood’s midfield defense had a decisive impact.

Capello, who rarely personally praises a single player, told the media after their match with Croatia, “with George Wood, our offensive efficiency is a lot higher.”

Why was it higher? It was because they did not worry about frantically returning to defense after losing the possession.

George Wood used his unwavering sprinting and fierce defending to stop Croatia on their every attack. Croatia could not penetratrate the center path in midfield at all, their only plan was to take the side

flanks. Croatia's new star in the midfield, Tottenham Hotspurs' Modrić was successfully subdued by George Wood where he only played for 65 minutes.

Twain was proud of Wood's performance, he heavily complimented Capello on his own column. He said Capello was genuine talent in being a gold medallist coach, and under his guidance, England would definitely go far.

Of course, he did not forget to praise Wood's performance. After all, his own proud discipline did not made him lose face. "... I said this earlier, George is England's most outstanding defensive midfielder. It is a pity in the past where there were various reasons he could not be placed in an important position. But now I am glad he met a head coach who could truly appreciate his talents. I can even say, England would welcome the new "George Wood's era" in the near future.

Twain was not even slightly afraid that exaggerating about George Wood will "kill" him. Because he was well clear that George Wood was not one who would be complacent because of his own pride, his past life experiences enabled him to be more calm than most people, and to be able to experience high honour and disgrace.

George Wood's outstanding performance display was one of Twain's few positive results from the international matches. The rest were injury reports.

Ribery, in France's 2 : 1 victory over Serbia, left the match due to injury at the 77th minute, needing therapy for a week.

Martin Petrov in Bulgaria's away draw 2:2 with Montenegro, was injured, and needed rest for 15 days.

Eastwood, after representing Wales' match against Russia, was over exhausted and his fitness coach recommends him to miss the league game that was 3 days later.

Adding those who was still under the injury list, Van Nistelrooy with Van der Vaart who recently recovered and returned to the team whose condition was not guaranteed. Twain felt like it was a pitiful few number of players that he could use.

Although it was home field, and the opponent was Sunderland, Twain did not feel comfortable at all.

The negative scenes from the past summer were frequently reappearing, thus it would be weird if he could feel easy.

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"As the following week we still have the champions league match, we need to use some rotations... Eastwood is recommended to not play for this match, Bale should be rotated out as well and Beckham should rest, Fleming suggests Van der Vaart should not play in the match against Sunderland because he was worried the rough Sunderland will cause him to be injured again..." says Kerslake, as he reads the report.

Twain waves his hand to interrupt him. "You should just say who is able to be allowed on field uh? Left flank totally has no people, center road only has two defensive midfielder, and there is not even a reserve for a striker."

The group became silent, this situation was truly too tricky.

In the end, Twain arranged a roster where Akinfeev replaces van der Sar as the main goalkeeper, left defender being Leighton Baines, middle defender being Woodgate and Ayala, right defender being Rafinha.

Middle midfield being Tiago and George Wood — This time having clear role allocation, Tiago being in charge of defense and George Wood prioritizing attacking, which meant George Wood was pushed into an offensive position.

Left side midfielder being Kris Commons, right being Lennon.

There was no options for the strikers at all, Twain let Zigic partner up with Arshavin.

After this arrangement, Twain discovered the seven in the reserves did not need to decide on their positions, they just needed to be there.

Van der Sar, Chimbonda, Kompany, van der Vaart, Sun Jihai, Bale, Beckham.

The rest of the people were either injured or have no avouchment on their physical fitness, hence being unable to go on field.

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Keane obviously knew about the plight of Nottingham Forest. Although his relationship with Twain was not bad, he could not vouch on that friendship. To defeat this half-beaten up Nottingham Forest, Sunderland picked up 120% of their efforts and bringing out their full main roster, striving to fight for an outcome which Keane desired.

Suffering from the drag from the international competitions, Nottingham Forest players were in their low states whilst having poor physical fitness. The whole of Sunderland team were actively fighting for the ball without holding back. Fleming's worries were definitely with reason, Sunderland had exaggerated actions liken to a brute. As long as they could take back the possession, they did not care about the overwhelming booing from the audience stands. Luckily van de Vaart did not risk coming on field, or else who knows how long he had to rest after this match.

Nottingham Forest started scoring at the start of the second half, but Sunderland, with their tenacious force snatching, gotten an opportunity in the opposing half and evened the score after five minutes. This goal impacted Nottingham Forest's morale, facing the malicious Sunderland, the mentality of being afraid of being injured made the players over-cautious in their performance, causing them to not being able to display even half of their usual standards.

In the end, Nottingham Forest drew against Sunderland in their home field. Their rank in the league fell to the 5th place, placing them in the same position as Aston Villa and Hull City, whom they triumphed with a five goal lead.

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Zigic's debut was definitely not considered a success. Being the tallest player on the field, he was not able to adapt to the tactics played by Nottingham Forest. Plus, after losing van der Vaart and Ribéry, the support the midfield could give him was pitiful, he was not the type of striker who, after getting the possession by himself, could penetrate the defense, dribble past the guards, solo defeat the everyone



on the defensive line and score. Even though his performance was average, Twain still left him on the field to play the full 90 minutes. On one hand it was simply because there was no one else to substitute in, but on another he was hoping Zigic would adapt to the team's playbook as fast as possible. After all, Twain did not buy him to sit on the stool to watch and learn the game but to push him to join the rotation immediately.

After the end of the match, everyone in the changing room was busy changing in order to quickly leave the stadium. Drawing to a team like Sunderland on home field did not make anyone happy, but there was no choice, this is soccer, no one could guarantee winning all their matches. Besides, everyone was clear that the team had more injuries than usual. So Twain also did not criticise the team's performance, he only hoped that the team would perform with a different standard in the next week's champions league match.

On the day after the game, Twain, with the help of translation, notified Zigic to talk to him personally.

The Serbian thought Twain was going to criticise his performance yesterday, but the first sentence that came out from Twain on their meeting was. "Have you experienced the difference between the Spanish League and English Football League?"

Zigic nodded. The match yesterday was totally different from the Spanish League match which he was used to.

"Could you tell me the difference?" Twain asked.

"Speed and tempo." Zigic blurt out. Both teams, in yesterday's match, had quick tempo changes between offense and defense, errors made this speed even faster. There were times Zigic was preparing to run back to defense, but Nottingham Forest had already intercepted the possession in their defensive half, preparing for yet another counter attack. In this endless running back and forth, Zigic expended tons of physical stamina, being another reason for him to be unable to display his best.

Twain nods with approval. "Absolutely, although there were also other differences, speed and tempo decides everything. English Football League, compared to other leagues, are a lot faster in terms of speed and tempo, so the demands to one's physical form is higher, and you need to be smart enough. Yesterday, you expended a lot of physical strength... hasn't Coach Tang told you before? What does our center forwards need to do? "

"Make space, attract the opposing defense's attention, make plays for teammates and shoot for the goal."

"I feel like yesterday you... Ok, how do i say this, were a little too modest. You are a center forward, you should put "shooting for the goal" as your priority. If there is a scoring opportunity and you would give it up for others, in what situations will you choose to pass the ball? When you are pressurized by the defenders and are unable to turn the body, where your position is not optimal, when your teammates have a higher chance in scoring ... then passing is your best choice. Yesterday you prioritized in passing the ball instead of scoring for yourself. Is this trying to win everyone's hearts over?"

Zigic, after being told off by Twain, became embarrassed, he nodded to admit this original intention.

Twain smiled. "There is no use in this. I found you to become a center forward and not to play as a side midfielder. I indeed did value your abilities to make plays, but you are the center forward. If you want to let them accept you, like you, recognise you, it is actually very simple — score, repeatedly score. That way, everyone will like you."

Twain had decided to focus on cultivating and supporting Zigic, if he was not adapted to the Premier League, then he would work hard to make Zigic to be comfortable, if he is unable to score, then he would work hard to create opportunities for him to score. He wanted to reestablish a tall center forward, he wanted to let those who are waiting to make fun of him to know, losing Bendtner did not cause huge losses to him, because he had Zigic!

Bendtner was able to pursue the type of soccer he truly wanted, he could enjoy the superiority of being the main core in Man City. But his team, Tony Twain's team, would continue to win matches and championships.

### **Chapter 695: Only a Matter of Time**

The team suffered two losses in the Premier League following a series of injuries that prevented them from playing their best team. They also only managed to scrape a narrow 2-1 win over the Belarusian team FC BATE Borisov at home in the Champions League.

To Twain, the only good news was that the team's injuries had mostly recovered after that match. There were no players suffering from major injuries, and the players who were suffering from minor injuries have all recovered as well and could be employed in their next match.

The Premier League had gone on for over a month by then, and Twain was finally able to play a match with a more complete team.

In the fifth match of the Premier League, Twain played his strongest team against Tottenham Hotspur in an away game.

Van der Sar, Pepe, Kompany, Gareth Bale, Rafinha, George Wood, Van der Vaart, Ribéry, David Beckham, Arshavin and Van Nisterooy.

Spurs came in second in the Premier League in terms of money spent during the summer to buy players, but they are currently last in the table after losing three of their past four matches and drawing one.

Juande Ramos was having a very hard time at Spurs. It was said that he would be sacked if he did not clinch a victory over Nottingham Forest at home.

Twain was certainly not in a position to feel sympathy for another person. If he were to sympathize with Ramos, then who would sympathize with him? Nottingham Forest's team morale was low and he desperately needed a gratifying win to boost their morale. This made Tottenham, who looked to be down on their luck, the best team to help him achieve his cause.

Twain and his team of coaches were meticulous with their preparations for the match. He told his players that there was nothing that would make them and everyone else happier than being the undisputed winners of a match. They did not only need to win, they needed to win thoroughly!

The final score was 3-0. Nottingham Forest had a resounding victory over Spurs whose team morale and predicament were much worse than them.

Following the loss, Juande Ramos was sacked by Levy over the poor results, and he became the first manager in the new season of the Premier League to be shown the door.

The days of having to play two matches a week were yet to be over, however. Nottingham Forest had to keep their spirits up and face their next challenge.

On 25th September, Nottingham Forest had an away game against Ipswich in the EFL Cup. Twain employed a team that was mainly comprised of reserve players and they achieved a 4-1 win at the end of the match.

The two victories helped to reinvigorate the team and dispel the negativity that had imbued them following a rough start to the season.

Before the team travelled back home, Twain commended everyone in the dressing room for the performance.

“Oh.” On the bus back to Nottingham, Kerslake suddenly let out a low shout while examining the fixture list. He then passed the fixture list in his hand over to Twain who was seated behind him.

“Take a look at our next opponent.”

Twain brought the paper before his eyes and scanned for their sixth opponent.

Manchester City.

Dunn broke into a laugh beside him.

“The press must be ecstatic,” said Kerslake.

Twain shrugged and made no further comment.

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Bendtner was already feeling the pressure from external parties. His time at Manchester City following his transfer was not that much better than his time at Nottingham Forest.

During his time at Nottingham Forest, his pressure came from his authoritarian manager Tony Twain. At Manchester City, his pressure comes from the media and the fans' scrutiny of him.

His debut appearance for Manchester City came during the very first match of the season at home to Chelsea. Bendtner was put on the bench and was only substituted onto the pitch when the game was all but lost. Robinho scored a free kick in that match, but Manchester City went on to lose 1-3 to Chelsea.

Bendtner only played for five minutes in that match, so naturally, he was not blamed for the loss, and no one pointed the finger at him for not scoring a goal either. However, things were different in the second match.

In the fifth match of the league, Manchester City faced Portsmouth at home. That match was akin to a festival to the Manchester City fans, because the team won by six goals over Pompey. Bendtner started in that match, but the six goals had nothing to do with him at all.

He had no assists and no goals. It was as though he was alienated from Manchester City's tactics and set-up.

Robinho scored a hat-trick in that match. He had quickly become a fan favorite by finding the back of the net repeatedly since joining Manchester City.

After the match, a reporter cornered Bendtner in the mixed zone and asked him why he acted as though he was sleepwalking on the pitch. Bendtner pushed the blame onto the fact that he had only just joined the club and had yet to develop a chemistry with his new team mates.

The reporter then pressed him to explain why Robinho was able to perform so well despite also being a new addition to the team just like him.

Bendtner could only explain to the reporter that Robinho was a midfielder and so he was able to receive the ball a lot more than he did, which provided him with more opportunities at goal as a result. Since he was a center-forward, he needed support from the midfield.

What he meant with those words was that a difference in positions would lead to a difference in results. However, the words were twisted by the reporter, and they came out as 'Danish forward complains about the lack of support from his team mates' instead.

The fans who did not know the truth were enraged by the report. For the past two days at training, the fans would stay outside of the training grounds and boo Bendtner whenever he received the ball. He was met with antagonistic gazes within the dressing room as well.

This was a situation that he had never encountered in Nottingham Forest before. While he was still at Forest, he had Tony Twain, who would attract the attention of the reporters who enjoyed making things difficult for people. The atmosphere within the dressing room was also always amicable. He did not need to worry about how to deal with reporters either. With Tony Twain around, no one was interested to ask him any questions.

But now...

It has been half a month since he joined Manchester City, but he had not made a single true friend other than Ashley Young, who was also an ex-player of Forest just like him. He had no interactions with his new team mates beyond greeting each other when they met and when they parted ways.

Unlike the Brazilian Robinho who was lively and cheerful, Bendtner seemed a little reclusive.

Even though he has left Nottingham Forest, he still has the habit of finding news related to Nottingham Forest whenever he browses sports news. It is a habit which he feels conflicted and annoyed over. Habits are fearsome things...

As a result, he was generally kept abreast of the current situation that Forest is in. He might be carrying an immense pressure on him, but the pressure on Twain's shoulders was not any lighter than his.

He sat alone in the dressing room of Manchester City's Carrington training ground. All the other players had left, but he chose to stay and practise his shooting. He had only just gone back to the dressing room and was preparing to shower and change into a new set of clothes.

This was also a habit that he picked up during his time at Forest. Tony Twain was not personally involved in the team's training, but he was very particular about players' attitudes towards training. A player would receive a harsh dressing down from Twain if they were caught slacking during practice.

Additional practice also became a way for young players to catch the eye of the manager and fight for a chance to play in matches following the success of George Wood.

Mark Hughes never said that additional practice would lead to a guaranteed spot in the starting team now that he is a player for Manchester City, but Bendtner continued to do as he had always done in Forest nonetheless.

Bendtner walked out of the shower room naked and was about to put on his clothes when the door to the dressing room swung open.

"Ah..." The person who just came in was a little surprised. It was the manager Mark Hughes.

"Nicklas, you have not left? Did you just do extra practice for your shooting again?"

Nicklas nodded his head. "Yes, boss."

"Good timing. There's something I want to speak to you about. Go on..." He gestured for Bendtner to continue wearing his clothes. The sight of his pants hanging down his thighs was certainly not very pleasant.

"It's about that interview..."

"The reporter twisted my words, boss. All I wanted to say was that the same standards should not be applied to players playing different positions..."

Mark Hughes nodded his head as a gesture to tell him that he understood. "From what I have observed so far, you are not the kind of person to say things like that. However, the atmosphere in the dressing room right now is not beneficial for you. I think you should take the initiative and explain the situation to them instead of not saying a thing. It's fine if you don't care what the press says about you, but you can't not care about how your team mates perceive you. There's one thing that you said that is very true. You are a center-forward, and you need support from the midfield. If they don't view you in a favorable light, then you won't be able to get a lot of support from them... Do you get what I'm saying?"

"I get it, boss. I will apologize to them before practice tomorrow."

Mark Hughes smiled. "Not scoring in one match isn't the end of the world. Don't be bothered by what the press says about you. If they don't exaggerate their words they can't attract readers to read their stuff. Just play as you always have and don't let others influence you."

Hughes's words could be seen as his promise to Bendtner. Bendtner had been worried that he would be criticized by the manager over what he said, but Hughes's words had made him relieved. Hughes still thought highly of him...

Frankly, it was impossible for Hughes to not think of Bendtner highly. He was the only center-forward that Manchester City brought in over the summer. He had no one else to rely on other than Bendtner. Hughes had placed his stakes on Bendtner. He believed in Bendtner's abilities. It was just that he has yet to get used to Manchester City's style of football, and does not have a rapport with his team mates. These two things have affected his performance on the pitch. He believed that as long as the Danish Boy regained the kind of performances he made for Nottingham Forest last season, all his critics would shut up.

"By the way. What do you think of... Tony Twain as a manager?" asked Hughes, who had originally intended to leave, but had changed his mind.

His question stumped Bendtner.

What kind of manager was Tony Twain exactly?

Good? Bad? Neither good nor bad?

Bendtner shook his head. "I don't know. I don't know how to describe him..."

Hughes nodded his head. That was something that perplexed him as well.

"You are starting in the next match as well." Having said that, Hughes turned around and left the dressing room.

Bendtner did not get excited over the words that he was going to continue being a starting player. He had said it before he came to Manchester City, that he would become a valuable player for them. He definitely had to start in games.

He turned his head to look at the fixtures list that was pasted on the wall, and found a familiar name written behind 'Match Day Six'.

Nottingham Forest!

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"Bendtner finally gets a chance at revenge. But I think Tony Twain would also not give up on a chance to humiliate both Manchester City and Bendtner... I think we can already imagine how this match would lead to the creation of numerous exciting stories."

Sky Television's show '90 Minutes of Football' was doing a pre-match analysis for every match in the new season of Premier League. Nottingham Forest faced Manchester City at home. The match was the last to kick off amongst the other fixtures for Match Day Six, and was also the fixture that would be broadcasted live throughout the country.

"Our reporter had interviewed Tony Twain over at Wilford regarding the upcoming match earlier today."

The screen switched to a shot outside Forest's training ground, where Twain was surrounded by a horde of reporters who all had their microphones held out towards him.

“What you all have said was right. He told me that his style of football was different from mine. This was what he said to me personally. I’m very glad to be able to see for myself what is that style of football that he seeks...” Twain said as he tried to squeeze his way out.

The screen switched again, this time to Bendtner, who was pulling a long face as he spoke to the camera, “This is just a match like any other.”

Ashley Young nodded his head beside him. “Yes, a match like any other. I think you guys are just blowing it out of proportion.”

Twain pointed at the television and said to Dunn beside him, “Do you believe what these two are saying?”

“I believe in Young, but I don’t believe in Bendtner.”

“I don’t even believe in Young. I won’t believe he’s not out to use the match as a chance to take revenge against me. He didn’t succeed in our last two encounters. Now that he has Bendtner on the same team as him, I’m sure he’d be even more fired up than before. Every single player that I have chased out of the team harbors a hatred towards me. I know that much.” Twain said with a smile.

“But Bendtner was not chased out by you. He was the one who...”

“That’s what makes him all the more detestable. I won’t allow the team to lose this match!” Twain clenched his fist.

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Ever since he cleared up the misunderstanding with his team mates regarding the interview in the dressing room, Bendtner had become accepted by his team mates once again. During the last training session before the team headed out to Nottingham for the match, Robinho even patted Bendtner on the back and told him that he will pass the ball to him during the match and help him score against Forest.

“Brother, we are all on the same path!” He told Bendtner in his non-native language of English.

He was right. They were both players who shared the same fate and were both not sufficiently valued at their previous clubs.

Hughes released the list of players who would be brought along for the match after the conclusion of the training session. Both Ashley Young and Bendtner made the list. If everything went as they expected, then both of them should be given a position in the starting 11. Hughes would definitely make use of the two players who were familiar with Forest to create trouble for Twain.

Ashley Young’s ability to attack the flanks and pass the ball into the middle coupled with Bendtner who was a powerful center-forward...

Surely Tony Twain would regret the decisions he made?

After returning to the dressing room, Ashley Young sat beside Bendtner and jabbed him with his arm. “You didn’t think you’d go against Forest so fast, right? You are not used to it, right? It’s okay. You’d feel good about it very soon! Actually, it’s good that we have become their rivals. I just love to see their faces when they lose the match. Humans are so ironic. In the past, it felt good to see him mock reporters and

our opponents when we won matches. Now that we are his rivals, seeing him act that way makes me pissed...”

Bendtner had to cut Ashley Young off after seeing that he had more to say. “I can’t wait to face off with Forest, Young. I’m also going to make a bet with you. I’m going to score in the match!”

Ashley Young glanced at him, looking a little surprised. Then, he got to his feet and yelled excitedly, “Everyone quieten down. Everyone quieten down!”

Every single person stopped what they were doing after hearing his shouts and turned to look at him.

“You must be up to something again, Ashley.” Someone grinned as he looked at Young.

“Nicklas just bet that he would score a goal against Forest in tomorrow’s match!” Young pointed at Bendtner and announced loudly. “If he really does score tomorrow, how about we get him to treat us to beer?”

“How can someone be expected to pay if they win the bet, Ashley?” Someone objected.

“Then let’s add a number to it...” Ashley Young grinned as he looked at Bendtner who was sitting on the bench. The whole thing felt like an encouragement, but also felt like a taunt a time at the same time.

Bendtner realized that everyone in the dressing room was looking at him. Some were grinning and some looked confused. A surge of zeal shot up within him. He held out two fingers.

“At least two goals. I will definitely score at least two goals in the match against Forest! If I were to only score a goal I’d treat everyone to beer!”

A group of people started to clap for him and then started making more noise by whistling.

Bendtner felt that he had been completely accepted by his team mates after seeing their reactions. He had nothing to worry about for the match against Nottingham Forest.

I can’t wait for the match against Tony Twain...

## **Chapter 696: We Dare You**

The media from all over the world flocked to Nottingham. There were a lot of highlights to watch for the game to them. If they did not go to the live game, they would miss out on a lot of exciting stories.

The most important part of the day for the league tournament was Everton’s home game against Liverpool in the “Merseyside derby”, which Liverpool eventually won the derby with two goals from Torres.

Nottingham Forest and Manchester City did not have ties to a derby, and there was no deep hatred and feud between the two teams in their history. The attention that the game garnered was all due to this summer. Perhaps Twain had made history again—a new history whereby Nottingham Forest and Manchester City found each other objectionable.



"I don't have to tell everyone what these two teams have been through this summer. You just have to look at what the players of both teams are currently saying in interviews to know how hot the game is." The television host introduced the game to the audience at the television station.

The footage turned to the scene of the interview with the players of both teams.

"I'm certain I'll score in this game!" Bendtner said to the camera very seriously.

"Can you give us your thoughts on your manager?"

"Manager Hughes is an outstanding manager. I believe Manchester City will forge ahead with brilliance under him."

"Let's talk about Tony Twain..."

"I don't want to talk about him."

Bendtner turned and walked away. Ashley Young immediately appeared on the screen.

"Your teammate said just now he's going to score against the Forest team..."

Ashley Young nodded with a grin and extended two fingers, "We made a bet with him that not only he will score, but also score at least two goals. If he doesn't do it, he'll treat us to dinner! But I'm happy to help him win the bet."

"Do you think he can do it?"

"I believe in his strength. We are all together at Nottingham Forest and Manchester City. I believe in him." Ashley Young raised his fist and waved it in front of the cameras.

Next up was an interview with the Nottingham Forest players.

Van Nistelrooy was grabbed by the reporters who insisted on hearing a few words about Bendtner's departure, "Why did he leave? I don't know. I think you should ask the boss. I wish him good luck."

With that, he was going to leave but the reporter pulled him back, "Bendtner said he will score at least two goals against the Forest team..."

"I've never heard of this matter." Van Nistelrooy found a reason to dodge them and no longer cared about the reporters' questions. He just turned and walked away.

The cameras wandered about and the reporters found George Wood walking over in front of them.

"Wood, can you talk about Bendtner's talk of scoring at least two goals against the Forest team?"

Wood said with a cold expression, "I welcome him to come try."

Then he cut straight through the reporters' encirclement without turning his head to look back.

The image cut back into the studio and the host spread out his hands, "You see, that's the way it is."

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Twain did not know what kind of mentality Bendtner had for suddenly announcing that he was going to score at least two goals against the Forest team.

Revenge?

Or to show off his abilities?

Or was it just that someone else had manipulated him?

Because during the four years at Nottingham Forest, the side that he showed did not give Twain the impression of a brash character.

In an interview, he was asked about this matter and he even showed magnanimity.

“I believe that it was possible to do so with his strength. I think highly of him and he’s very talented. It’s not hard for him to score goals...”

The media were surprised by these remarks. They initially wanted to get Twain’s abusive response.

Twain was naturally angry on the inside, but he could not show it. He could not afford for the media to be given the opportunity to hype up this matter. He must consider the Forest players’ feelings at this time as well.

They were not computer-generated virtual data, with no thought and temper. What would the players who stayed in the Forest team think of him if he had been critical of a player who had just left the team? They certainly would not be starry-eyed and worshiped him collectively to say, “Wow, the boss is so cool!”

What happened to Bendtner gave him a clear look at the group of players. No matter how well-behaved they were in front of the manager, they would have their own little schemes, which they carefully concealed from him. If any of them were unhappy with Bendtner’s remarks, it was their own business, and they had the right. But the manager’s actions to force the players to accept the discontent was another matter.

For a former teammate who had just left the team, the influence he had left in the team had not dissipated. There were still people here who had a good relationship with him. If he publicly rebuked Bendtner, it would only disillusioned them.

At this critical moment, Twain had to be careful in all aspects. The team could not withstand another turmoil.

Of course, if someone in the team misunderstood his words and felt hurt, Twain could immediately apologize to the other side in the sincerest tone.

For example, Pepe protested with some displeasure at a tactical meeting on the day before the game.

“Boss, I think what you said to the reporters yesterday made me and the other defenders feel hurt.”

Twain knew that someone would be unhappy by this because he could not satisfy the values of everyone in the world. However, it was never too late to improve once he knew the fault. He apologized at once.

“Ah, I’m so sorry, Pepe. You know, sometimes when we face the media, we have to say things that may not be consistent with our will... Saying those remarks absolutely did not mean that I underestimated you guys. I actually didn’t add another thing—I’m sure he has that ability, but not against Nottingham Forest!” Twain chuckled.

The defenders laughed, and they were satisfied.

“Okay, guys.” Twain motioned for them to stop laughing. “When I expressed humility, it did not mean we admitted defeat. In fact, for this game, I ask—not hope, it’s a demand—you have to win. I don’t need to spell the reason out since you should all be clear. Truthfully, if you need me to say it, I can list a lot of different reasons. But I don’t think that’s going to help. They are only reasons and I can find plenty more reasons. But losing is not an option, absolutely not! If we still want to win the league tournament, then we absolutely cannot lose to a team like Manchester City! Not only Manchester City, but other opponents too!”

Next, Twain beckoned for Dunn to come up and explain the specific tactics.

“The formation for this game is 4-5-1. Wood and Tiago, you’re starting. You need to assist the defense on the sides when you’re defending in the middle. Manchester City has Ashley Young and Robinho, so their sides need extra attention. With Wood and Tiago in charge of assisting the sides, Ribéry and Lennon must pull to the middle when necessary, giving Bale and Rafinha space to plug in from the back row... Simply put, we’re attacking and defending the sides.”

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Meanwhile, Manchester City held a tactical meeting at the Hotel where they stayed. Unlike Twain, who left everything to his men to execute, Mark Hughes was hands-on. He wanted to take advantage of the momentum of their victory against Portsmouth to defeat Nottingham Forest.

The players sitting around the conference table listened carefully as he spoke in the front. Some of them were absent-minded. Bendtner was chatting with Ashley Young in a low voice.

“Nicklas, have you thought about how to deal with their defenders? You know Pepe, he’s fierce one-on-one.....” Young asked softly.

“It’s not that I had not score against him during a contest. I often scored goals in the team matches.” Bendtner was not wrong at all. Pepe always represented the main force side during the contests within the team, and Bendtner often represented the substitutes. Although they had not played against each other in an official competition, he was familiar with such contests.

Ashley Young knew he told the truth, so he stopped asking questions about it. Instead, he changed his tack, “Have you thought about how to celebrate after the goal?”

Bendtner smiled, “I haven’t thought about it. I’ll see how it goes when the time comes. If I overthink it now, it will be too silly when I do nothing at the time.”

“... Nottingham Forest is characterized by flank attacks. From the full backs to the wingers, they all have the ability to plug in and attack. We need to be extra vigilant on this point.” Mark Hughes continued, “I ask that you do not back down in the confrontation with them and step up the offensive on the side. Especially when it comes seizing hold of the gaps behind the two full backs who plug in to assist! No

matter how powerful George Wood is alone, he can't take care of both left and right sides. There is bound to be gaps. Grab hold of them! We'll attack from the flanks and not play in the middle for tomorrow's game. Use the sides to break down their defenses!"

"The boss has put a lot of effort into it..." Ashley Young muttered. He liked this kind of arrangement because he would be one of the leading players on the pitch. He wanted to use his speed and passing to help Manchester City tear up Nottingham Forest's defense and take the victory away in front of Twain's eyes.

"Nicklas." Hughes called the Danish striker.

Bendtner looked up at his manager.

"Your task is simple." Hughes laughed, "It is to score goals."

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The Forest bar on the eve of the game was buzzing with the most hardcore Forest fans gathered here. They were talking about how best to cheer the team on in tomorrow's game and put pressure on the away team.

The owner of the bar, Kenny Burns leaned on the side next to the few tables where the crowd of fans gathered holding a beer to hear their heated discussion.

Their leader, Fat John, crouched over a cleared space on the floor and wrote something with a brush on a large piece of white cloth.

"We have to teach that Danish bastard a lesson!" Someone among the fans made a loud declaration, "As soon as he gets the ball, we'll hiss at him! Until he passes the ball out, we'll not going to give him any breathing space!"

"Yes! Hiss at him!"

"Curse at him! Give him the middle finger!"

"Make him go crying home after the game is done, so that he no longer dares to step into the City Ground stadium!"

"Mommy, I want some milk, I'm so scared... Wow ha hahahaha—"

The discussion became increasingly heated and the words became more irrational...

Someone finally offered an opposing view, "We don't have to be so mean, do we? He had no choice but to leave. To be honest, I don't think Tony really gave him enough playing time and attention... Why can't we applaud him, just like Pearce, who also came back, representing Manchester City..."

He heard a crashing sound before he could even finish speaking. Skinny Bill suddenly stood up and knocked over a pile of beer glasses in front of him. The amber liquor flowed down the table and splattered his T-shirt hem and trousers. But he did not care. He just glared directly at the man who said those words with fire in his eyes.

“Boy, I’ll give you another chance to take back the last remark you just made! Otherwise I don’t care where you’re from, I’ll beat you to a pulp now!” The thin man now looked as if he was full of strength and force. “I want you to know one thing—the Danish boy will never be eligible to be compared to ‘Crazy’ Pearce! And he’ll never receive the treatment Pearce gets! Never!”

At the same, someone else stood up and shouted at the man who had said the wrong thing, “Do you know what Pearce means here? You dare compare that little asshole with the greatest captain in Nottingham Forest’s history?! Mate, are you drunk or deliberately looking for trouble?”

“If you don’t understand how Stuart Pearce’s position is, I don’t mind using my fist to let you know.” A burly chap raised his hairy arms.

Seeing that it was about to turn into a bloodbath, Burns, who had not spoken, cleared his throat at the side. Everyone turned to look at him.

“I do not allow fights here.” Burns held up his glass to signal for everyone to drink.

Everyone calmed down. Skinny Bill and the others sat down to continue drinking, and the man who said the wrong thing stood in fear, not knowing whether to leave or stay.

At this time, Fat John, who turned a deaf ear to the conflict just now as he continued to keep busy with his own task, finally stood up. He smiled apologetically to the frightened person and said, “I’m sorry. Did that scared you? I haven’t seen you here before. Your first time here? They are like that. Don’t mind them. To think that Tony was fooled by us when he first came...Ha.”

The others laughed as well. Someone shouted, “That was not the same, John! Tony is not like this scaredy cat!”

Indeed, he was not the same, because he spilled alcohol on the football hooligan, Michael, and mocked John, who was also a football hooligan, as a fat pig. He even had a scuffle with Michael and gained the upper hand...

Because he was different, he was now the manager of Nottingham Forest, and this poor thing was just a wretch who was frightened and weak in the legs.

It was a memorable time and they recalled it as if it were yesterday.

The poor hapless guy saw the fat man across from him and felt calmer as he took in his smiling and kind appearance and felt sure that he would not be beaten.

After he apologized to him, the fat man shook open what he had just written and showed it to everyone, “Guys, it’s done! Take a look at the end result!”

“The words are really big...” The fans who gathered around to look, offered a variety of comments.

“It’s going to be hung behind our goal during the game. If the words are too small, the Manchester City bastards can’t see them! They’re all short-sighted—” John squinted his eyes to mimic the appearance of a short-sighted person not wearing glasses.

“Hahahaha—” His look amused the others, who laughed in unison.

Although he was just startled just now, similarly as a Forest fan, the snubbed friend still came forward to see what was written on the white cloth. There were a lot of people like him. Everyone crowded around, trying to see what was written on it.

John saw everyone pushed forward, and it was a little chaotic. So, he simply said “sorry” to Burns, and then gave Bill the eye. Bill jumped on the bar first and John followed suit. The two men stood left and right respectively at both ends of the bar. John tossed one end of the white cloth in his hand to the thin man. Next, the two men loosened the cloth in their hands to unfurl it.

A moment of rustling, the white cloth was shook open, as if it was a flag in the hands of the flag-bearers.

There was nothing extra on it except for only two sentences. A self-assured and arrogant provocation was written in red paint:

Wanna score at least two goals? We dare you!!

### **Chapter 697: Before the Kickoff Whistle**

The final game of the sixth round of the 2008-2009 English Premier League season kicked off at 3 P.M. local time.

By lunchtime, the fans from all over the country consecutively flocked to the City Ground stadium on the banks of the Trent River.

The people who came early did not need to worry there would be nothing to do when they came. On the day of the match outside the stadium was simply like a huge football theme park. There were all kinds of people eating, drinking, playing soccer together by the river, peddling small merchandise, sightseeing... There was no worry about keeping entertained here.

The City Ground stadium on the day of a home game was as bustling as the “Cattle Market” more than a hundred years ago. Although the “Cattle Market” was still around, only the kind of bustling created by people flocking from all over the country here more than a hundred years ago was comparable to the football fans feverishly following the team.

Manchester City’s fans were among the first to arrive and were mostly in groups, wearing light blue jerseys and carrying light blue Manchester City flags. They waved pale blue scarves and looked impressive gathered together.

But compared to these visitors, the hosts appeared slightly less consolidated. Because the true hardcore fan base had not appeared yet. They were the main force which created clamor in the stadium stands.

Although the two teams had been somewhat hostile to each other in recent times, that did not stop most fans from chatting together. Of course, they each supported their own teams. The Manchester City fans excitedly declared that Manchester City would win the game by two goals, while the Nottingham Forest fans shook their heads to deny the claim and that Nottingham Forest would win by two goals.

Then the two groups got together for drinks and continued to chat about their own teams.

After two o'clock, there were more and more media on the pitch, and the fans who had gathered there became the focus of their attention before the teams showed up. The reporters who had not started work watched the lively scene, while the others were busy interviewing the fans and preparing the first-hand source material.

At 2.15 P.M., Fat John, Skinny Bill and the others carried a bundled white banner and appeared outside the stadium, suddenly attracting the attention of many people. Everyone was a Forest fan, and the teams of fans in this city knew each other well. Moreover, when John and Bill previously followed Michael to mix in a football hooligan firm, they had a reputation. At this time, there would naturally be a lot of old qualified fans who came forward to say hello and those who sat a little farther also raised their glasses in greeting.

The roll of white cloth they carried caught everyone's attention.

"Hey, fat man. What's this that you're struggling to carry?" A middle-aged man came up to say hello.

"Good stuff." John grinned with his neck askew from carrying the thing.

The banner was very long. He and Bill had dangled it in a space on the ground when they showed it in the bar last night. Now that it was completely pulled open, rolled up, and then folded in the middle before it was tied up with a rope, it was even a little hard for four strong men to carry on their shoulders.

"Don't be so secretive. Just say it, what's in there?"

"You'll know it during the game. It gives the fun away if I say it now. And....." John pointed to the reporters and television press that lingered around nearby. "We're going to give Manchester City a big surprise!"

The men stopped following and just watched John's party enter the stadium from the admission gate. Carrying such a big item, they were asked to open it for inspection. John stepped forward to ask the other side to come over, and then opened a corner, mysteriously letting the other side have a look.

The man was seen laughing happily and waving his hand to let them through.

So, it looked like there would be scene to watch at the stands in a while...

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At half past two, right on time, the buses of the two teams drove into the dedicated parking area outside the City Ground stadium. They were warmly welcomed as they passed the fans.

Ashley Young had a year's experience and had no special feelings about returning to Nottingham Forest's home round for games. Bendtner was different. At first, he took those fans outside in red jerseys as his supporters. As soon as he raised his hand and wanted to wave his hellow, he saw a few fans putting their lips together to hiss at him. Then he realized that blue was now his color.

What would the fans, who once cheered excitedly for his goals, use to greet him now?

Bendtner was not frustrated by the attitude of those fans. Instead, he looked forward to the upcoming game. Even if the entire stadium booed him continuously, he was going to prove with real actions what a serious mistake Tony Twain had made when he did not value him!

In the words of Julius Caesar, that was—

I came, I saw, I conquered, I left, and you regretted!

Well... Did Caesar say the last phrase? It did not matter. The important thing is that I conquer you.

Ashley Young saw Bendtner deep in his contemplation and nudged him to say, "Penny for your thoughts? Are you worried about what they're going to do to you?" He pointed to the window outside. "Don't be afraid, it's just booing. It was the same when I first came here. When I thought about it later, it was the same everywhere... When we played for the Forest team, were we booed less by the fans of the other teams?"

Bendtner shook his head and said, "No, I'm not worried about them booing me."

"Then you are.."

"I'm envisaging my performance in the game later."

"You're such a weirdo!"

"The boss... didn't Twain always have a phrase hanging on his lips? The enemy's hisses and abuse are the best compliment and recognition for you. I think I understand the meaning of his words now." Bendtner pointed to the people clad in red jerseys outside and said, "They're all my enemies."

Ashley Young gaped. When he first came to the City Ground stadium as part of a visiting team, he was so alarmed by the hissing that he basically could not play at his usual level and was brought off early. He really could not adapt to the sudden shift in the role. He did not expect Bendtner to have completed this role swap long ago, and behaved as if he had played for Manchester City for twenty years as a loyal veteran... He wanted to click his tongue in wonder.

Ah, there are truly all kinds of people in this big old world...

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The Manchester City bus arrived first. When they had all entered the locker room, Nottingham Forest's bus came speedily as if it had been planned.

In the parking lot, Twain was the first to jump out of the bus. With a stern expression, he faced the crowds of cheers and the microphones held by the reporters who thronged around.

"I don't have anything to say. It's just a regular league game."

Someone among the reporters booed him in a low voice. Only a fool would believe the man's words.

The players who then got off the bus did not plan to be interviewed by the reporters. They dashed into the dedicated passageway with their heads down.



The surrounding Forest fans gathered around to loudly chant slogans such as “Nottingham Forest will win.” The atmosphere was so explosive that it did not seem like a “normal league” at all.

After all the players had gone, Twain waved to the waiting reporters and said, “See you after the game, everyone. If I’m in a good mood, I can answer any questions you may have.”

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Fat John and the others already stood in their own stands and were getting ready for the game which was about to start. The bundled-up banner was thrown at their feet and left unattended for the time being.

The players on both sides were warming up on the pitch. Sporadic boos could already be heard, and the target was certainly Bendtner, who wore a vest with the Manchester City emblem.

He behaved as if he did not care and just did his own warm-up.

After four years of being under Twain and his rich experience of competing against other teams had told him that in the face of those people who hiss at him, he would lose if he really fly into a rage.

Consequently, he was calm at heart at this moment.

When could he break out and fully vent the anger? When he scored in person during the game, he would have taught the people who booed him a lesson.

You’re all going to... pay the price!

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“Just look at that kid, it irks me to see him!” Bill pointed to Bendtner in the stands.

John glanced at him and guffawed, “When he was still in our team, you cheered the happiest when he scored a goal. You even said, ‘the future of Nottingham Forest depends on him.’”

Bill looked ill at ease and retorted, “That’s because I once had high hopes for him, so I cannot tolerate his betrayal!”

John stretched his back lazily and said, “I don’t feel much for his departure from the Forest team. Anyway, there are always people coming and going every summer. I’m tired of seeing it these past decades. So, what if they were talented players? No one can guarantee that they will be chained here for life. If they leave, they leave. Anyway, I think as long as that bastard, Tony Twain is around, Nottingham Forest will survive no matter how many people leave.” Then he pressed his hands on the railing and looked down at the pitch below. “All I’m upset about is that he shouldn’t have said ‘at least two goals against the Forest’. Who does he think he is? What does he make of Nottingham Forest’s defense?”

“Actually, I think Tony’s must have blown his top now.”

“I think so too. How can he tolerate another person who considers everyone else beneath him?”

“No, it’s more like considering ‘him’ beneath.”

The two men looked at each other and smiled.

“There’s a good show waiting for us in this game.”

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In the locker room, Dunn repeated yesterday’s tactics before Twain came on.

“Pepe.” He called the main center back’s name.

Pepe stood up, not knowing the reason.

“I forgot to say one more thing yesterday.” Twain put up his left index finger. He was referring to his explanation over his response on the matter of Bendtner to Pepe and the other defenders.

“I really, really believe in my team’s defensive ability. You are the best defensive line in Europe. But...” He pointed to the team captain and said, “George.”

Wood stood up too.

“If you all let Manchester City score two goals in this game, all the players in charge of the defense will run back to Wilford from here!”

Someone’s face paled, but Wood calmly nodded and replied, “Okay.”

Pepe shrugged with a grin, “What if we do not let them score even one goal?”

“You’ll have an extra half-day holiday tomorrow.”

Pepe looked at the other defenders and snapped his fingers, “No problem!”

“If there’s no problem, then get out there and show them what you’re made of!”

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“Welcome to the last game of the sixth round of the 2008 to 2009 English Premier League! The competing teams are the home team, Nottingham Forest and the visiting team, Manchester City. Before the game, the most closely watched person is naturally Tony Twain. For almost the entire month of August, Twain was entangled with Manchester City. Because of this, he lost the much-regarded young center forward, Bendtner in the final moments before the transfer window closed. As for this game, it is also Bendtner’s first time as an opponent back in the City Ground Stadium. What will be waiting for him? I hope it will not be pig’s heads and lighters... Perhaps Hughes can take advantage of the opportunity to take a good look at Bendtner’s psychological quality.”

“The Dane vowed to score at least two goals before the game and made the game even more highly anticipated. As we all know, Nottingham Forest’s defense is famous in the Premier League. For the past two seasons, Tony Twain’s team relied on an impregnable defense to win two UEFA Champions League titles and last season’s Premier League title. They rarely had a game in which their opponent would score two goals against them, let alone two consecutive goals from one player. Although Tony Twain said he believes Bendtner can do it, I’m sure of one thing and that’s Twain must be angry.”

“The game can also be considered as the revenge by two young men who was respectively driven out of Wilford by Tony Twain. Ashley Young and Bendtner are both in the starting lineup for the game. Hughes clearly also wants to the ex-Forest players who are familiar with Tony Twain’s tactical ideas to become the sharp edges to wipe out Twain. But we can’t say how the effect will be. I remember last season Ashley Young’s poor performance when Manchester City played at the City Ground stadium. I wonder if he has made any progress after a year?”

“Mark Hughes had lashed out at Tony Twain, his junior for being a clown and an insatiable disgusting person during the transfer incidents of van Nistelrooy and Bendtner. Tony Twain will also be keen to use the victory of this game to refute Hughes.”

“Will Manchester City, who lost a lot of face during the blank check-gate affair, use the game to win back what they had lost?”

“It’s hard to say... No matter who wins or loses in this game, there will always be people who feel angry and disappointed. So, our dear media have a lot to do. Martin, based on before the game, this match has all the makings of a classic campaign. As for the game itself, we’ll find out right away.”

Sky TV’s old partners appeared live on the commentators’ box again at the City Ground stadium.

They were Martin Taylor and Andy Gray.

One was wise and steady and the other was passionate and humorous. These two men were Sky TV’s headlining sports commentary partners.

Martin Taylor was seen as a voice that represented Britain. It could be seen how much importance Sky TV placed on the game for the two of them to come broadcast the game.

As the two men said, with so many exciting stories and highlights to watch, how could this game not be entertaining?

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The players on both sides had made their appearances and observed all the pre-match formalities. Nottingham Forest was given the right to pick the side and the ball was given to Manchester City to kick off.

Bendtner stood in the center circle in the middle of the field, next to Robinho. He stepped on the football, waiting for the referee to whistle.

The game had not started yet, but the loud hissing had already started, all directed at Bendtner alone. Just because... he touched the ball.

Robinho was a little puzzled by the sudden booing, and he glanced at Bendtner.

Not caring if Robinho could understand him, Bendtner laughed and said, “The fans here... make a clear difference between what they like and hate.”

After hearing the hissing, even Martin Taylor, who was in charge of the game commentary, laughed, “Bendtner has received the warmest greetings from the Nottingham Forest fans. I hope he’s used to it.”

“He’ll get used to it. If he wants to score at least two goals alone.”

Bendtner also did not take his foot off the football amid the boos. He raised his head and looked toward the goal, where his former teammate van der Sar stood. From here to where van der Sar was, there were plenty of former teammates in red jerseys who were now the enemies he must bring down.

Just like what his former boss said, he must step on their bodies to accomplish himself.

At the thought of it, he set his sights on the Forest team’s technical area on the sidelines.

With his arms across his chest, Tony Twain crossed his legs as he sat in his seat in the technical area while he seemed to be looking at himself too.

—Then you use your style to win the championship!

As you wish, we’ll start with this game.

The referee put his hand in front of his body and blew the opening whistle of the match amid the loud boos.

### **Chapter 698: The One Who Has Left Me, Disturbs Me**

As the whistle that signalled the start of the match blew, an eye-catching banner appeared at the stand behind Nottingham Forest’s goalpost.

It was the item that John and Bill had been creating in secret. Now everyone knew what it was.

There was a line of big alphabets written in red paint over the white cloth:

‘Score at least two goals? Try it if you dare!!’

As soon as the banner made its appearance, it attracted the attention of everyone in the stadium. Some fans applauded after seeing the words on the banner, and there were even fans who changed their insults against Bendtner into ‘try it if you dare!’.

For a moment, everyone’s attention was diverted onto the banner.

Twain looked at it and could not help but laugh. “Must be the doing of Fat John and Skinny Bill.”

Martin Taylor laughed as the cameras focused on the words on the banner and said, “That banner speaks of Nottingham Forest’s personality perfectly. The fans are just like the team... All right, let us see whether Bendtner has the guts to try.”

The only way to determine whether Bendtner had the guts or not was to see if he could score goals in the match. Bendtner himself had noticed the words on the banner, but he remained expressionless after glancing at it, choosing instead to focus all his attention on the match.

The moment the match began, Manchester City made use of the kick-off to control the ball beneath their feet before launching a fearsome attack into Nottingham Forest’s half of the pitch.

They may be the away team, but they certainly did not act like they were guests. Having already faced each other in the Premier League for numerous years, there was no need to 'test the waters'.

Manchester City charged straight into Nottingham Forest's half!

The atmosphere in the stadium remained completely normal when the ball was being brought forward by the other Manchester City players. The sporadic sounds of booing was still something that was acceptable for most people. There were more people who were cheering Nottingham Forest on instead.

However, the moment a Manchester City player passed the ball to Nicklas Bendtner, the entire stadium erupted into a series of sudden, deafening boos that were more than enough to incapacitate someone with a weak heart.

It was rare for Nottingham Forest's fans to boo an individual collectively. Most of their boos in the past were directed at the entire team instead. It was truly arduous to try and continue to play as one usually does under such a harsh environment.

This prompted Taylor to make the comment that Mark Hughes must have already seen how mentally tough Bendtner was for himself.

Amidst the ear-splitting sounds of booing, Bendtner did not pass the ball straight away, but instead continued to control the ball at his feet while waiting for his team mates to run up and support him.

Bendtner managed to hold onto the ball for 10 seconds before passing even with all the booing sounds around him. He displayed complete composure with the ball at his feet, and his expression was unfazed and calm.

Manchester City's offense was just as Dunn had analysed during yesterday's tactical meeting. They primarily focused on attacking down the flanks. One reason for that was to suppress Nottingham Forest's flanks. The other was to try and make use of the empty space that will be created when the Nottingham Forest's full backs joined in the offense so that they could move in for a counterattack.

The problem was that the match had only just begun, and Nottingham Forest's full backs still did not have the chance to move forward and join in the offense. All Manchester City's players could do was to be patient and try to find an opportunity to attack.

Normally, if Nottingham Forest did not get to kick the ball off at the start, Twain would ask the team to tighten their defense for the first 5 minutes after the match started before trying anything else.

This match was no different.

Manchester City made full use of that period of time to attack Nottingham Forest's goal furiously.

Even though Hughes's tactic was to mainly attack both of Forest's flanks and to counterattack, they did not need to rely solely on counterattack to threaten Forest's goal.

Because they now had a powerful center-forward before goal...

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"Nicklas Bendtner!" Andy Gray yelled. "Oh! What a miss! The ball had gone a little too high..."

Ashley Young did not choose to go one-on-one with Bale after receiving the ball on the right wing. Instead, he passed the ball to the center. Pepe did not react to the change in tempo in time. Bendtner ran up behind him, then jumped high and shot towards goal with no defenders around him.

All van der Sar did was to raise his hands as a gesture. There was nothing he could do with such a close range shot. Luckily the ball went above the bar and flew towards the banner.

There was no goal, but it was still enough to startle the crowd and make them go quiet with their booing for a moment.

“It’s exactly as they had promised before the transfer was completed. Mark Hughes is employing Bendtner as their key attacking option. Players like Robinho would be slightly disadvantaged against Nottingham Forest’s tight defense, but Bendtner would be a perfect fit,” said Taylor, “I think Hughes is taking a gamble, but from the attacks that we have seen since the start of the match, I think it is a good gamble for him.”

Bendtner gave a thumbs up to Ashley Young, who had passed the ball to him. The two of them were beyond familiar with the Forest’s defense. Ashley Young knew that Bale would wait in front and try to stop him from breaking through, which was why he chose to not carry the ball forward and to pass instead.

Bendtner also knew that once Bale had gone to the flank, Pepe would position himself closer to Bale to prevent Young from going into the penalty area, and leave Kompany to guard the space behind him. This was why Bendtner did not get into position at once. Instead, he waited behind for a moment, and only made a run forward when he saw that Ashley Young had the ball. The two of them had read each other minds. He had only started running forward, and Ashley Young had already passed the ball to him. The timing was perfect, and it was how Bendtner was able to shoot at goal for the first time in the match without anyone defending him.

“Just as Tony Twain had said before the match, Bendtner does possess the capability to score at least two goals. I wonder if Twain is regretting his decision to let such a talented striker leave the club right this moment?”

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Did Twain regret?

No.

If he had felt reluctant right after letting Bendtner leave, then those feelings have already been diminished after half a month had passed.

Now, even if Bendtner were to go on and become the best striker in the Premier League, he would not feel any regret. He was not the kind of person who would dwell on the past.

The problem he had on his hands right now was that both Bendtner and Ashley Young were too familiar with his team’s defense. The members in his defense have never changed up till now, and both his tactic and setup remained the same as before. This made it easy for the two ex-players to figure out where were the areas they could exploit.

On the other hand, he was not as worried about the midfield's defense. George Wood and Tiago used the midfield line as the boundary, and was each responsible for one half of the field. The reason why Ashley Young failed to break through the defense and passed the ball straight away earlier was not only because he knew about the habits of Forest's full backs, but also because George Wood was near him, waiting to pounce. If he wanted to break through, he had to be prepared to face being swarmed by both Wood and Bale.

Manchester City's Elano's role in midfield was more like a playmaker. His key mission was to create chances down both flanks. Now that they had Bendtner on the pitch, this style of attacking the flanks clearly suited Manchester City more.

After mulling over it repeatedly, Twain came to the conclusion that they had to start restricting Manchester City's flanks if they wanted to limit Bendtner's productivity on the pitch. Thus, he stood up, walked to the side of the pitch, and hollered while waving his hands, to gesture for Wood and Tiago to move closer to the flanks and assist both full backs in defending the flanks, so as to freeze both Ashley Young and Robinho in their tracks.

As for the defense for the middle of the pitch? He did not think much about it. All Elano could do was to shoot from afar or pass the ball to Bendtner. Even if Bendtner got the ball he had to face the defenders as well. All would be good as long as they did not give Bendtner the chance to turn around...

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Nottingham Forest began its counterattack. During the attack, George Wood and Tiago continued to stay at the two flanks, devoid of any intention of leaving their positions to run down the middle and join in the attack. Ribéry and Lennon both started running down the middle, and they were later joined by Gareth Bale and Rafinha who ran up from the back.

Van der Vaart passed the ball to Lennon, who ingeniously let the ball pass by him, and the ball ended up at Rafinha's feet.

Rafinha carried the ball towards the penalty area before kicking it forward and attempting to run past the defenders. Manchester City's starting left back Michael Barr lost to Rafinha in a battle of footwork, and could only watch as Rafinha skilfully got past him with his techniques and cut into the penalty area behind.

Thunderous cheers broke out in the City Ground Stadium.

Manchester City's captain Dunne swiftly ran up to Rafinha to stop him from gaining any more ground.

The Brazilian passed the ball over to van der Vaart who had been waiting on the other side of Manchester City's penalty area. Van der Vaart did not stop the ball at his feet, because he saw that Manchester City's midfielder Stephen Ireland was closing in on him. He chose to shoot for goal at once!

The powerful shot was blocked by Joe Hart with much effort.

Van Nistelrooy tried to follow up on the rebound, but Richards made use of his stature to block his way before kicking the ball out of bounds.

“Ohh! Nottingham Forest’s offense is also equally good. This whole series of link up play is a feast for the eyes. The full back’s bold attack has added immense pressure on Manchester City’s defense.”

The atmosphere within City Ground Stadium livened up following the team’s attempt at goal. The fans started chanting the players’ names at the top of their lungs, and also further created a din by clapping and stomping their feet at the stands.

Van der Vaart’s shot almost made Twain jump, but the eventual miss left him feeling a little disgruntled.

“We still have a chance.” Kerslake comforted Twain as the latter returned to his seat in the technical area.

“If we had bought Richards in the summer, that would have been a goal.”

Kerslake laughed.

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Elano found that his view before him had become wider all of a sudden. George Wood and Tiago were about 10 meters away from him. He could see Pepe and Kompany from where he was in the midfield, and he could also see Bendtner, who was positioned all the way at the front.

More importantly, he realized that if they were to go along with manager Mark Hughes’s plan, then Manchester City would certainly hit a piece of robust iron plate during their offense.

What Hughes had intended to do was to attack Forest when their full backs had moved ahead to join in the offense. However, there had been a change in the situation at hand. Twain did not act according to Hughes’s script. He made their two defensive midfielders stay behind to defend the flanks while the full backs moved forward.

If Manchester City were to insist on attacking the flanks, the outcome was clear as day...

However, Elano was not the manager, so he decided to continue following the manager’s orders for the time being. He also wanted to test Forest’s defense for himself and see if they are really as robust as an iron plate...

Forest’s throw-ins were usually done by a full back who was positioned on the other side of the pitch, even if they were throw-ins that were very close to the opposition’s end line. Bale stepped up to do the throw-in. Rafinha did not return to his defense position and stayed slightly towards the back, near the midfield line. The distance made it easier for him to charge forward for an attack.

Bale did not go back to defend after he had tossed the ball over to Ribéry either. Instead, he waited for Ribéry to pass him the ball, and the two of them tried to link up at the flank.

Sadly, they were standing too close to each other. Ribéry kicked the ball too hard and Bale failed to stop it at his feet. The ball was then intercepted by Manchester City’s right back Richards, who then passed the ball over to Elano. Manchester City was on the counter attack!

Elano tried to pass the ball over to Ashley Young on the right wing. Bale rushed back to defend, but it turned out that he was not needed, for Ashley Young lost out completely to George Wood one-on-one.



Bale had only run halfway back when Wood passed the ball back to him again. He turned around and went on the attack...

Seeing this, Elano shook his head. He was sure that an attempt down the other flank would also bring about similar results. Robinho's abilities were a notch better than Ashley Young's and Tiago was also less defensively impressive than Wood. However, almost as if those points had already been taken into consideration, Rafinha was positioned not too far away from Tiago. If he were to pass the ball to Robinho, all Tiago needed to do was to try and slow him down as much as he could, and Rafinha would be able to join in the defense speedily and keep Robinho in check. That made the defense on that side of the pitch air tight as well...

Elano realized that the problem rested on the presence of two defensive midfielders. Before the match, Manager Hughes had expected Forest to continue employing a single defensive midfielder, and this would give them the opportunity to attack the space behind the two full backs, because one defensive midfielder would be unable to deal with both flanks by himself. It was not that Manchester City had never considered the possibility that the opposition would use two defensive midfielders for defense, but it was just a consideration that was quickly shoved aside because the set-up had been unfavourable for Forest based on previous matches where it had been employed.

They did not expect Twain to use two defensive midfielders in such a manner...

Nonetheless, there was no such thing as a flawless tactic in this world. Elano still managed to find something that he could exploit.

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Manchester City intercepted the ball in their own half and went on the counterattack once again. This time, the ball was passed to Ireland, and Elano raised his hand to ask for the ball. Ireland had initially intended to pass straight to the wingers, but seeing how insistent Elano was with his request, he changed his mind at the last minute and passed the ball to Elano who was in the center of the pitch.

Both Wood and Tiago were positioned at the flanks to defend the empty spaces left behind by the full backs during attack when Elano received the ball. They saw Elano, but did not try to pounce on him to intercept the ball at once, choosing instead to stand slightly closer to the center of the pitch, clearly with the intention of observing his actions.

Elano did not give them time to observe his actions. He accelerated out of the blue, and started attacking Forest down the middle!

"Down the middle! Forest is down on luck, there's no one player there right now!"

It was only then that Wood ditched his position at the flanks and bolted straight for Elano. He did not have the time to notice that Bale had yet to return to his defensive position, and that Ashley Young had already run up to assist Elano.

As a defensive player, it was always more important to defend the center of the pitch than the flanks, because that was where the opposition could directly threaten the goalpost. All the opposition could do was to try and angle a shot for goal from the flanks.

Pepe stood closer towards the flank, preparing to prevent Elano from passing the ball over to Ashley Young now that he has gotten Wood's attention.

However, Wood was still a considerable distance away from Elano, so it was Kompany who rushed out towards Elano first. Since the defensive midfielders were not in their positions, it was up to the center back to fill in the role.

That was exactly what Elano had been waiting for. Seeing that Kompany had rushed out and that Pepe's attention was on Ashley Young at the flank, he kicked the ball forward.

Bendtner turned his head around to see the ball rolling towards him. This was the perfect chance!

He turned to look at the assistant referee as he turned to the side and performed a feint at the same time.

"Cra..." Pepe was aghast when he noticed what was going on from the corner of his eyes. He wanted to turn around, but it was impossible by then. He was not superman. He could not defy the laws of physics. All he could do was to turn and watch with a stiff body as Bendtner received the ball and ran into the penalty area.

Pepe's posture was hilarious, but none of the Nottingham Forest's fans laughed.

The moment Elano passed the ball over to Bendtner, all Bendtner could hear were deafening boos coming at him from all directions.

A fire was burning inside of him. The sounds of booing were like gasoline poured over that fire of his, and they made it burn right through the roof.

Twain's words rang by his ear:

"Remember this, don't be fazed by all the noise that the opposition fans would make against you. The reason why they are booing you is because they are scared of you! They fear you! That's why they will try so hard to make so much noise so as to throw you off. It's nothing to be scared of. The louder they boo you, the more excited you should become. What you all need to do is... Turn what they do not wish to see into reality! Make them cower in fear. We are their worst nightmares!"

Thank you for your teachings, boss...

The sight before Bendtner whizzed by in a flash. He saw an empty spot to the left of van der Sar. That was it!

He raised his leg and gave the ball a hard kick!

The ball flew past van der Sar before crashing against the goalpost with a thud that resonated through the sounds of booing. It then deflected off the post and created an arc as it went into the net.

Van der Sar had one knee on the ground as he turned around to look at the ball in the goalpost. Both his hands were still outstretched and poised to block the ball.

Pepe laid on the ground, his eyes fixed on the skies as he rued, "Damn, there goes my additional holiday..."

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“Nicklas Bendtner! Nicklas Bendtner! Nicklassss Bendtner! He scored! He has really scored!” Gray screamed.

The booing ceased temporarily with the goal.

Bendtner ran straight to the back of the goalpost after confirming that the ball was indeed in the back of the net. He stood below the stand where the banner was hung, and began to strip away at his jersey from his chest madly. His face was contorted and he opened his mouth to shout at the top of his voice. The sight was a little frightening... The Forest fans at the stand went quiet.

The Manchester City players swarmed up to him from behind, all wanting to give him a hug. However, the Bendtner at that moment was like a beast who just hurt his head. He waved his hands about vigorously and no one dared to get close to him out of fear that they might get elbowed in the face by him.

Did you all see that? Why have you all stopped booing? Boo me! Boo this traitor that is me! I scored against you. That defense that you are so proud of was nothing to me! I am your enemy right now! Aren't you guys the ones who draw a clear line between love and hate? Aren't you guys the ones who will never go easy on an opponent?

Why have you all gone f\*cking quiet before me, your greatest enemy? Didn't you tell me to try it if I dared? I tried! Why have you all stopped booing me? This is great, let me score another one. I will do exactly what I said I will and score two goals!

He was roaring hysterically in his mind, but no one could hear the voices that were surging up inside of him.

The booing started once again amidst his wild celebrations. There were more and more spectators at the stand where John stood who stuck their fingers into their mouths.

John did not follow suit, and only looked on coldly at Bendtner who was flailing around wildly below. He realized that he could not come to hate this guy, but would probably never come to like him again after this either.

“F\*ck! So pathetic! All he did was score one, what's he so f\*cking proud about? Try and score another one if you dare!” Bill, who stood next to him, threw vicious words of insults at Bendtner.

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Kerslake punched the seat in anger following Bendtner's goal. He turned to look at Twain, who wore a placid expression on his face.

“Do you think he's trying this hard so that he can prove himself before us?”

“So what if he manages to prove himself?” Twain asked with a cool voice. “Do you expect us to buy him back?”

“But to see such a talented center-forward become our enemy... It's such a shame.”

“On the contrary, I do hope that every single person who walks out of this club is talented,” Twain said, “He is someone that I brought back personally from Denmark after all. If he performed terribly, it’d make me look bad. Did you think that I said that I thought he had the capacity to score simply for the sake of saying what the journalists wanted to hear? Don’t forget, he is someone who walked out of Nottingham Forest!” Twain could not suppress the emotions that were boiling up within him as he spoke. His voice became grave, and he smiled coldly as the edge of his lips tugged up.

Dunn led out a sigh beside him suddenly and recited, in Chinese, “The day of yesterday has left me and cannot be retained. The day of today disturbs and worries me.” [1]

Twain turned his head to look at Dunn. “Don’t use Tang poems inappropriately.”

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Bendtner continued to celebrate wildly under the banner that was about as long as the goalpost. His team mates congregated behind him and raised their hands towards the Nottingham Forest fans as a display of strength.

Behind all of them were van der Sar and Pepe who had just climbed back onto their feet, as well as a bunch of dispirited Nottingham Forest players with their heads hung low.

Bendtner had henceforth made a clean break with his past.

Chapter 699: Possessed

Mark Hughes was still racking his brains over his next course of action after his tactic of utilizing the flanks was kept in check by Twain’s countermeasure, but the goal had allowed him to find the inspiration he needed.

He made use of the opportunity as the players were wildly celebrating the goal to call Elano off the pitch and tell him to rely on his own observations to decide if they should attack the flanks or down the middle for the remainder of the match.

Now, the one who had some thinking to do was Tony Twain.

Bendtner became even more lively after his goal. His team mates also started to pass the ball to him deliberately so that he could take the last shot at goal. It seemed like every Manchester City player wished for Bendtner to win the bet that they had made with him.

The sounds of booing from the Nottingham Forest fans got even crazier with Bendtner’s liveliness on the pitch. It was safe to say that nobody could hear anything else but booing in the entire stadium when Bendtner got the ball. Even the people on the other side of the Trent River would have picked up on the deafening booing noises clearly.

“I have never seen the Nottingham Forest fans treat a person as crazily as this...” mumbled Andy Gray, who was intimidated by all the booing that was going on.

“Perhaps they were triggered by both that throw-in earlier and his celebrations after scoring that goal. Which is why I said that this will be an exciting match! Haha! It has only been four minutes since the match started, and Nottingham Forest has already fallen behind!”

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Twain did indeed have some thinking to do. The problem he had on his hands was that Elano was positioned centrally on the pitch, and he could decide if they should attack down the flank or down the middle. If he were to persist on having the full backs move forward to attack, it will give both George Wood and Tiago a very hard time as they would have to defend both the flanks and the center of the pitch. It was only a matter of time that Forest would give up another goal.

Twain thought about it, and decided to temporarily give up having the full backs move forward to attack. It was more important to tighten the defence for the time being.

He walked to the side of the pitch, whistled with his hands, and gestured to the two full backs who were still 'happily' standing higher up the pitch to retreat back to their defence positions.

Bale and Rafinha looked at the empty spaces behind them and retreated backwards reluctantly.

George Wood and Tiago went back to their positions in the center of the pitch, thereby sealing off Elano's passing routes completely.

Now that the full backs could not move forward to assist in the attack, Nottingham Forest's attack on the flanks was solely reliant on their two side midfielders.

However, Twain felt that the tweaks he made were still far from ideal. After all, without the support from the full backs, the team's offense lacked depth and creativity, and could easily be defended against by the opposition.

Hence, he followed up by gesturing for the two defensive midfielders to take their turns in supporting the offence.

George Wood began to get more lively on the pitch after the changes were made.

The formation that Nottingham Forest had put in place for this match was a 4-5-1. There were 5 players in the midfield. The distance between their attacking midfielder, van der Vaart, and their defensive midfielders was a little far, and their forward van Nisterooy was all the way up front. How do they connect the back of the field to the front?

One way was to rely on the side midfielders, namely Ribéry and Lennon, but those two players were mainly active on the flanks, so it was up to the defensive midfielders to bring the ball forward in the center of the pitch.

George Wood had gotten very familiar with bringing the ball forward. He was no longer that player who would run to the front and just stand around not knowing what to do.

Wood asked for the ball from Tiago and started to bring the ball forward. Elano ran up to him to try and get in his way, so he passed the ball over to Ribéry before running forward. The two performed a one-two combination, before the ball was sent to van der Vaart. Wood did not retreat and continued running forward, looking poised to make his way into the penalty area.

This forced Manchester City to scatter their forces in an attempt to defend Wood. The number of defenders marking van der Vaart lessened as a result, and it allowed him to try for a long shot, though the ball went over the goalpost by a little.

At that moment, Wood had turned around and was running back to his defending position.

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Bendtner noticed that he was getting significantly fewer chances at the ball at the front of the pitch after Forest's change in tactics, so he began to retreat backwards to receive the ball.

Kompany wanted to follow after him, but was stopped by Wood with a hand gesture.

That was because Bendtner had already stepped foot into his territory.

Bendtner raised his hand to ask for the ball while he was in the midfield. Robinho passed the ball over to him after getting it past Lennon. The ball had only just reached Bendtner's feet when he felt an immense pressure coming his way from behind.

He immediately leaned his body backwards to protect the ball from being taken from him. However, doing so also caused him to lose the chance to turn around.

He knew the identity of the pressure that came his way.

The edges of his lips went up. Such a confrontation was really rare...

He understood then that he could not turn his body around, and also knew that Ribéry was on his way back to defend rapidly. It would be bad to be sandwiched between both of them. All he could do was to pass the ball to Robinho who had run up to assist him.

Tiago was marking Robinho fiercely while Wood assessed the situation and tried to find the timing to go in and defend by the side. Bendtner ran up with Robinho and continued to raise his hand and ask for the ball.

As Robinho battled it out with Tiago, he used his heel to kick the ball over Tiago and towards Bendtner who was charging ahead.

Bendtner leant his body sideways to try and receive the ball, but all he received was the tip of George Wood's outstretched boot. Wood had already cleared the ball while it was in the air.

"It's not that easy to break free from Wood!" Gray shouted. It was unclear if he felt bad for Bendtner, or if he was praising George Wood for his quick-wittedness and courage.

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George Wood did not even let Bendtner have the chance to maintain possession of the ball when Bendtner retreated back to the midfield to pick up the ball again. He shoved Bendtner from behind, and Bendtner fell to the ground with the ball at his feet.

Bendtner jumped up off the ground and gestured to the referee that a card should be shown to Wood for his actions. This was a foul. A push from behind!

The booing sounds in the stadium intensified after seeing the gestures from Bendtner.

Pepe could not stand to watch any longer and went up to confront Bendtner. Fortunately, he was stopped by Tiago before he made his way to Bendtner, or else both of them would have clashed with each other over the incident.

Van der Vaart was standing near Bendtner, but he did not confront him directly and only clapped his hands. His gesture was one of complete sarcasm and displeasure.

Bendtner could not care less about how the fans and his former team mates perceived him. He was still hot on the referee's heels, eager to help Wood earn a card. It would be best if he could get a red card!

Wood did not go forward to protest. All he did was to get up off the ground and did a wave to dismiss all the onlookers around. There was nothing interesting for them to see here.

He stood quietly at the spot, waiting for the final call from the referee.

The referee eventually walked over and showed Wood a yellow card.

The booing sounds got even louder.

Twain remained seated, but Kerslake could not restrain his emotions. He rushed to the side of the pitch and started cursing at Bendtner, calling him a 'traitor'. He also told him 'to remember who groomed him, bastard!'.

Twain watched the back of his agitated colleague. He shrugged and said to Dunn beside him, "If we look at this from another perspective... At least Bendtner has professional ethics..."

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"Bendtner got his wish. George Wood has gotten a yellow card under his name. Now Wood will be unable play the game as he likes for the remainder of the match."

"Not exactly. From George Wood's perspective, as long as he is not sent off the pitch, he should still play the game however he likes."

Martin Taylor was right. George Wood's defense remained as aggressive as before after the match restarted, as if he did not care about the yellow card that he was carrying.

George Wood might not care, but Twain did. He gestured for Tiago to participate in the defense more and for Wood to participate more in the offense and draw upon his experience to level the score.

Yes, to level the score. Nottingham Forest has to tie the score before the first half was over, or they would walk into the dressing room feeling depressed or agitated, and that was not a team that Twain wanted to see. It would also leave Manchester City high on spirits and make them think that Forest is unable to do anything to them.

Twain looked at the watch on his wrist. 27 minutes had passed in the first half.

The match had reached a stalemate then. Manchester City's offense met Forest's impenetrable wall and was forced to a stop. Forest's attack met fierce retaliation from Manchester City. Everyone had chances here and there, but nobody really capitalized on those chances.

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Van Nisterooy was all alone at the front of the pitch. He looked a little isolated and helpless in the opposition's penalty box. The truth was that he was not the point-getter in this match since they had only employed a single forward. His role was more about creating chances for his team mates behind him. It was a pity that both full backs could not move forward and join in the attack.

The ways in which Forest carried out their offense were simple. Ribéry and Lennon would either pass the ball from the byline or they would cut into the penalty area. If they saw van der Vaart near the penalty box and saw that he wishes to attempt a long-range shot, they would pass the ball to him. If not, they would pass the ball to Van Nisterooy straight away. George Wood's role at the front was more to pass the balls around.

Manchester City's defense formation remained relatively compact and their defense never faltered regardless of how Forest changed their attacks. It was clear that Mark Hughes was well-prepared to deal with Forest's offense. The primary objective of the tight defense was to deal with Forest's sneak attacks, but it also served the purpose of making it difficult for Forest to carry out their positional play at the same time.

Hughes' tactics for this match were very simple. Defense-wise, the team would tighten the defence at the back and make use of this tight defense to restrict the space and time that Forest can get for their counterattacks. Offense-wise, the team would make use of the powerful Bendtner up front and the impressive prowess of their attacks down the flanks to score goals.

He did not expect that their attacks down the flanks would get sealed off, and that they would get attacked down the middle.

Twain might have been quick to rearrange his setup, but it was of little effect. Manchester City was leading by a goal, and as long as they continued to fortify their defences, it was not impossible for them to take all 3 points from this away game.

As the manager of Manchester City, he knew all about the bet that the players had made amongst themselves. However, between winning a game and the players' bet, he would choose to win the game any time of the day.

Seeing that the first half was about to end, Hughes decided to get the whole team to retreat so as to keep their entire formation compact and hit Nottingham Forest on the counterattack.

Twain knew what Hughes was plotting, but he had to press on and attack right then, because there was not a lot of time left. He was not willing to walk into the dressing room knowing that they are a goal behind.

He waved his hand, and both Bale and Rafinha who had been restricted for more than 30 minutes were finally on the move once again.

With only about 10 minutes left in the first-half, Forest set their very first frenzied attack in the match into motion.

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"Show your spirit!" Fat John shouted at his comrades behind him on the stand. "Don't just think about booing the Danish Boy! What our team needs from us right now is not to boo their opponents, it's to



cheer them on! How many of you want to see us go into half-time being a goal down? Not me for sure! I'd even lose my appetite to drink beer knowing that! Mates, let's sing our song..."

"Oh oh oh oh! Forest, forest! Nottingham Forest!"

"... Forest, forest! Nottingham Forest! There's no battle we can't win, there's no defense we can't overcome! We are the best team in the world... We make our opponents fear us, we make them tremble in fear! The world is in our hands..."

" Oh oh oh! Wood, Wood! Grow into a forest! Wood, Wood! Grow into a forest!"

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George Wood received the ball.

He was going to bring the ball forward from the back. He easily shoved aside Elano's interception. The Brazilian was only making it look like he was trying to defend...

He only met resistance once he made his way to Ireland, though he simply passed the ball over to van der Vaart when that happened. Van der Vaart was unable to turn his body around, so the ball was passed back to Wood, who then passed it to Lennon at the flank.

Lennon crossed the ball to the middle of the pitch. Van Nisterooy jumped up for a header!

The ball was headed out by Dunne.

It fell at Wood's feet once again.

He acted like he was about to shoot for goal, but no one fell for it. Everyone knew how bad Wood was at shooting.

As expected, Wood did not shoot for goal from 35 yards out. He passed the ball to Tiago, who had run up from behind, and went back to defend himself. He had just switched positions with Tiago. It was now Tiago's turn to attack, and his to defend.

Forest's attack was quickly ended by Manchester City with a long ball.

Ashley Young dashed down the flank with the ball. There was an empty space that was left behind after Bale moved forward to attack. This was the perfect chance for Manchester City to widen the lead before half-time!

However, his run was stopped by George Wood, who cleared the ball at Ashley Young's feet cleanly with a sliding tackle. Wood then took big strides forward with the ball in the opposite direction and left Ashley Young who just got back onto his feet behind.

Tiago saw that Wood was running up the pitch, but he did not go back to defend. There was not much time left before half-time. He wanted to remain in the front of the pitch to participate in the offense.

Elano was the first one to get in Wood's way once again. He almost succeeded this time round, but unfortunately still lost out in a physical battle with Wood and was unable to stop him from breaking through by force.

After he had shaken off Elano with his body and speed, Wood made a gesture that suggested that he wanted to pass the ball over to van der Vaart. He changed the course of the ball and started running towards van der Vaart.

Right as Ireland's attention had been averted onto their attacking midfielder from the Netherlands, Wood passed the ball to Tiago beside him.

Thereafter, he ran towards the edge of the penalty box.

Tiago raised his foot and made it look as if he wanted to go for a long shot. This time, somebody fell for it. Ireland turned around and pounced towards him. That was when Tiago passed the ball to van der Vaart.

Van der Vaart did not stop the ball at his feet. He passed the ball straight into the crowd in the penalty area.

"George Wood!"

George Wood turned his body sideways to receive the ball. He charged forward fearlessly even in the face of Dunne's defending.

The two collided with each other and the ball flew away. Dunne collapsed to the ground, and George Wood looked like he was about to fall to the ground as well.

It was then that his strong body played an important role once again. He managed to climb off the ground in a second by using both his hands and feet!

"Did Wood foul him?"

"No, it was a reasonable clash!"

Manchester City's goalkeeper Joe Hart hurriedly ran forward to try and stop Wood after seeing that he had already made his way into the penalty box.

Wood had already regained his posture and balance by then. He was positioned behind all of Manchester City's defenders, and there were only Joe Hart and the goalpost before him. He raised his right leg.

Hart stretched out both arms and pounced to the side. He wanted to stop Wood's shot!

Richards did not care if his sliding tackle from behind would result in a penalty kick. He slid a leg out towards Wood from behind.

Everyone thought Wood was going to shoot the ball straight ahead with force when they saw him raise his right thigh, because that matched the image that everyone had of him.

Both Hart and Richards were acting under the impression that he was going to shoot in that particular way as well. They were both guarding the bottom corners of the goalpost. Even if Wood shot for the upper corners of the goalpost, there would only be one outcome: miss.

No one believed in Wood's ability to shoot.

Wood whipped his raised right leg against the ball rapidly.

And then...

The ball flew up, created a nice arch in the air as it went around Richard's leg and Hart's body, and went straight into the back of the net...

In that moment, it felt as though time had stopped. Everyone had their mouths agape and gawked at the bouncing ball in the goalpost in disbelief.

What just happened?

Andy Gray's hysterical screams broke the silence. "Ahhhhhh! What did I just see? Paneka? A lob? A screw shot? God! Tell me this is an illusion! The Wood who can miss in front of an empty goal has actually scored an absolute beauty of a goal! Something must be wrong with this world..."

Tony Twain, who had remained seated in the technical area when Bendtner scored, could not help but hug his head as he rushed out of his seat at this sight. He looked at George Wood as though he was an alien and muttered, "Diego Maradona. Bruno Conti. Francesco Cotti. They must have possessed him right there..."

The three names that he had mentioned were all experts at lobs in the history of football.

"I cannot believe what..." Kerslake was also hugging his head in shock alongside him. "... My eyes are seeing."

Only Dunn was a little more composed. "He did attempt it before when I gave him extra shooting practice previously. But he had never succeeded once before..."

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After George Wood had lobbed the ball into the back of the net, he was sent crashing to the floor by Richards who could not retract his feet in time. He had only just stood up when he was brought down once again by his howling team mates who had swarmed all over him. Bale was sprawled on top of him and was hugging his head. Their noses touched each other.

"How did you do that?!" Bale exclaimed.

"I... I don't know. All I thought was that the ball had a higher chance of going in if I lobbed it up slightly..."

Ribery slid towards him from the other side. After hearing what Wood said, he wrapped an arm around Wood's neck. "So you were actually aiming for that! You little... How dare you steal all of our limelight!"

"What other kinds of shots can you do? How about doing the 'scorpion kick' next, George?" Van der Vaart patted his head while grinning.

Everyone at the stands were on their feet. They had their hands high up in the sky and swung their scarfs about. They were jumping around excitedly and singing songs in unison.

Every single person related to Manchester City was dumbfounded. They were all well aware of George Wood's shooting abilities. It was safe to say that everyone in England knew about his abilities. They all knew how bad he was at shooting.

They did not expect Wood to be the one to pull off such a challenging shot that beat Joe Hart at goal and tie the score at 1-1!

Even Bendtner and Ashley Young, who used to be his team mates, had faces of consternation on them. Did that blockhead get injected with some kind of growth hormone? How did he come to know how to do a lob shot out of a sudden?

"All right, it does not matter what went wrong with this world, and it also does not matter how George Wood managed to score that goal. The fact is that he had scored the equalizer. Before the first half ended, Nottingham Forest has brought the entire match back to its starting point!"

"This is George Wood's first goal of the season and it is such a beauty... It can surely become the goal of the match! The 'Wooden Spoon' goal! [1] Hahahaha!"

### **Chapter 700: Wishing Good Luck**

During the half-time break, everyone was enthusiastically discussing George Wood's goal that evened the score, whether it was in the changing room, the bar, or at the car rental area. Even the most loyal of Nottingham Forest fans did not believe that the team captain could score so easily even though he had never learnt how to shoot — if the goal he scored had been a strong volley, it would not have been as shocking.

Twain stood at the entrance of the changing room, not interrupting the team's discussion on Wood's goal. He was glad to see everyone being this way, because he was excited by that goal as well. George Wood sat in the center like a criminal, surrounded by the team. The mischievous Ribéry even used a bottle as a microphone to mimic a reporter, asking for Wood's thoughts on scoring the goal. This made everyone laugh. Although they were still tied at 1 : 1, it was as if no one thought they would lose this match.

Everyone returned to their seats after they had their fun, waiting for Twain to lay out the tactics for the second half. Twain did not spout nonsense; there was not much time, so he cut to the chase. While the team was still playing around, he had already drawn up the formation of both sides on his play board. He then analysed the play board for everyone.

"In the first half, the main reason why we lost the ball was because the dual defensive midfielders needed to assist in defending the side roads after the two full backs assisted the attack, hence opening up the center path. After adjusting to make the defensive line more secure, the attacking strength had instead weakened. This is not right. Man City is the away team, so even taking a point in the contest is sufficient for them. We are the home team; a draw is a failure. Hence in the second half, we have to think of breakthroughs to strengthen our offense. The full backs still should assist the attack. However, we still need to adjust a little ..."

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In Man City's changing room, the team still congratulated Bendtner on his goal, despite George Wood's surprise of a goal that turned their leading advantage into a tie. But Bendtner was not happy. George Wood stole his spotlight with that goal, and he was still one goal behind the two that he promised, so how could he celebrate? He sat on the stool feeling dull, half-heartedly listening to Mark Hughes adjust the formation for the second half.

Hughes' tactics did not change from the first half: it was either assistive attacking the side roads while prioritising the attack on the main road or assistive attacking the main road while prioritising the side road. He repeatedly emphasized a word — patience.

“We need to be patient, because Nottingham Forest are the ones fighting on their home field. I believe Tony Twain will hope to not end the game on a draw in this contest. Under time pressure, they will be forced to attack. That will be our opportunity. Before that, all of you just need to maintain your patience and wait for them to make a mistake. Taking a step back, even a draw is acceptable as well,”

Bendtner frowned. The head coach thought a draw was acceptable, but he definitely could not take a draw. He only achieved one of the two goals he envisioned. He had already made this announcement before the match and made it known to the media. If he were to score only one goal by the end of the match, who knew how those people would make fun of him? Besides, Tony Twain did not accept a draw, so why should he? Bendtner spent the fifteen-minute halftime break mulling.

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At the start of the second half, Man City used a defensive formation, in hopes that Nottingham Forest would bring the attack to them. If Nottingham Forest did not attack, they would not have gaps to take advantage of. As expected, Nottingham Forest then went with an aggressive attack. Mark Hughes saw Nottingham Forest's full backs joining the attack, but he was not happy for long because he discovered how Twain meticulously used the arrangement to defend as well.

In the first half Nottingham Forest's full backs advanced from both left and right sides. It looked powerful and threatening as both added an additional layer of offense. But at the same time this created space on both sides that could have been exploited, hence both defensive midfielders had to defend their respective sides, creating an empty center.

Twain switched it up in the next half. Both full backs still assisted the offense, but they were not allowed to advance at the same time. If Bale advanced to assist the offense, Rafinha must stay at the back, so Tiago would defend the center while George Wood replaced Bale's position after he advanced. If Rafinha advanced to assist, Bale would retreat; Wood would defend the center path and Tiago would temporarily take the role of the full back.

No matter which side advanced, there would not be a lack of players on the defense line or obvious gaps. Hughes, after realising this, scolded Twain being all about defending in his mind. But what choice did he have?

This move indeed blocked all of Man City's offensive pathways — launching a quick counter-attack was almost impossible. Now, Man City only had two options. The first was to defend till the end of the whole match and not allow Nottingham Forest to score, ending the match with a draw. The other was to get out there and face Nottingham Forest, relying on the possession game to search for an opportunity.

Mark Hughes was leaning towards the first option, afraid that Nottingham Forest's counter attack could expose a gap. However, Bendtner did not think the same.

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Bendtner wanted to score. In the offensive half, he continuously raised his hand to signal for a pass, but most of the time he just seemed like an island in the middle of the vast sea; There was nobody near him who could assist him. Nottingham Forest's attack was aggressive, so Man City's players had no choice but to repeatedly return to defend. Bendtner was only able to stay on the field because Hughes had expressly allowed him to do so during the break. Originally, Hughes had wanted to counter-attack Nottingham Forest.

Bendtner was a center forward, so he needed support from the midfielders or he would be of very limited use. On top of that, there was basically nothing he could do except passing once he retreated to the midfield which was too far from the goalpost.

Twain led Bendtner for four seasons, so there was no way he would not be familiar with Bendtner's speciality and style of playing. He used high offensive pressure to suppress Man City, which was as good as cutting Bendtner off from the team. Bendtner could either continue to wave his hand to signal for the ball at the front, or he could run for the ball and plan an attack. No matter what he chose, his threat to Nottingham Forest's goal was pitifully negligible. Twain watched from his seat as Bendtner ran back and forth for the ball but to no avail.. He crossed his legs.

George Wood did not let that goal get to his head. He was still dedicatedly carrying out Twain's new mission for him — defend. With great difficulty, Bendtner finally received the ball, only to be tackled by Wood. Bendtner immediately fell to the ground upon losing the ball, in hopes of getting Wood another yellow card. The jeering started up again; the audience regarded Bendtner's stunt with disdain.

Wood paid no attention to Bendtner's stunt and dribbled the ball to initiate a counter-attack. There was an unspoken rule in soccer: if there was an injured player, the ball should be kicked out of bounds to allow the player to receive treatment. However, Wood had no intention to do so. Not only did he dribble past Elano, who compromised defense to signal for Wood to kick the ball out of the field, he also charged past Ireland who tackled too aggressively.

Humiliated and angered, Ireland shoved Wood. The referee's whistle finally rang out, cutting through the cacophonous jeering. He gave Ireland a yellow card. Both players quickly charged at each other, looking to start a fight. The referee and some of the calmer players rushed to pry the pair apart, trying to stop a fight from breaking out.

The culprit who started the chaos, Bendtner, stood up sulkily once he saw Wood pass Ireland. He sure did not look injured at all. Both sides managed to prevent a fight from happening, but the jeering intensified every time Bendtner had the ball.

Twain shrugged at the people around him. "Self-created mess."

"The performance in the second half was not as good as it was in the first half." David Kerslake was starting to pick up on things.

“If he placed all his thoughts on the match instead of filling his mind with vengeance, he might have scored two goals.” Twain shook his head, shrugging. “But he’s not so scary now.”

“What does that mean?” Kerslake, an Englishman, could not understand the last Chinese word Twain used.

“It means ‘nothing worth fearing’,” Twain translated for him.

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There was nothing worth mentioning about what followed after. Man City was not able to score, and was only able to shrink back to its defense. With Hughes shouting angrily, Bendtner had no choice but to return to the defensive half to participate in defense. At the 70th minute, as the Nottingham Forest fans cheered loudly, Twain substituted Nistelrooy for Žigić and switched Lennon out for Beckham. Thus started the high bombardment tactic.

Beckham came together with Rafinha at the right road, partnering with great chemistry. They did a one-two and then passed to Žigić who was using his height and strong build to create chaos in front of the goal. It would be good if they could score, but even if they did not, this could be a chance for another teammate to score.

At that moment, Man City’s goalkeeper aerial defense alarm rang incessantly. Dunn became flustered and Joe Hart’s heart was in his mouth. At the 82nd minute, his heart dropped to the ground.

“Nikola Žigić!! Beautiful header bomb! A heavy bombing machine! He made Man City’s full backs helpless!”

Žigić opened both arms and ran towards Beckham who passed him the ball and both players hugged to celebrate his first goal in the English League. Twain waved his fists about excitedly. Žigić scoring a goal was what he wanted to see the most. Bendtner might be gone, but they still had a stronger aerial overlord!

While Žigić was leaping amongst the crowd with his arms wide open, a huge shadow was cast on Joe Hart, who looked like he had seen a B52 bomber machine. Dunn was virtually holding onto Žigić with both his hands, but that did nothing to stop his run-up. With the ball and the player in place, the ball shot into the goal. Look — this was what it meant to dominate the penalty area!

“A height of 2.02 meters... Too scary...” Gray sighed. Even if Žigić did not jump, it would have made people in front of Man City’s goal dizzy. Even Dunn and Ćorluka, who were 1.88m and 1.93m tall respectively, seemed like children in front of him. Most importantly, Žigić’s jump was not weak. Had he jumped with all his might, he would have been more than just “outstanding”.

“Twain favoured center forwards with strong builds like him for a reason. Sometimes they are indeed very useful...”

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While still recovering from his injury, van der Vaart launched a counter-attack after Man City’s furious attempt to even the score. In the end, he scored a goal which utterly destroyed Man City.

The match ended with Nottingham Forest winning 3:1 on its home field. Bendtner played the whole match, but he did not fulfil his promise of scoring two goals. At the end of the match, Nottingham Forest fans were happy for their team's win, but did not forget to mock the traitor who was too ashamed to show his face.

Bendtner, who had been running nonstop for 90 minutes, stood rooted to the ground like a puppet after the whistle was blown, unable to accept the outcome. At that moment, Nistelrooy walked over. He took off his jersey and placed it in front of Bendtner. Bendtner looked blankly at his opponent.

"It doesn't have to be like this..." Nistelrooy smiled. "I get injured frequently these days, and my health is declining."

Bendtner lowered his head, taking off his own jersey. They shook hands after exchanging their jerseys. "Good luck to you, Niki."

Nistelrooy threw the number 9 jersey over his shoulder and left, joining the team that was celebrating their victory. As Bendtner watched his old teammates who were wearing the red jersey and thanking their fans, an indescribable emotion rose in his heart.

Twain charged into the group, his left hand holding on George Wood who scored the first goal while his right was grabbing onto Žigić who scored the second. Because the two players stood at different heights, Twain looked funny, but this did not affect the smile on his face.

"Do you like winning? Do you like champions? Then come to Nottingham Forest!"

"Then you use your set to get the championships!"

Bendtner had chosen his path. It might be a path might be full of thorns, but he had to keep walking. Regretting would not help, so he would not regret. Wearing Nistelrooy's jersey, Bendtner lowered his head and slowly walked out of the stadium. This would be his last time wearing a red Nottingham Forest jersey in front of everyone.

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At the interview after the contest, Twain was asked for his views on Bendtner's problem. He refused to express any opinions on Bendtner's performance in the match and simply said, "Personally, I wish him good luck." Then, he changed the subject, "I am more willing discussing with you all my two players who scored in this contest. George Wood scored a noble goal and Žigić played his best 20 minutes since he joined Nottingham Forest. I believe both of them would have bright futures."

Reporters were not content seeing how Twain was not willing to answer the question regarding Bendtner. Only Pierce Brosnan could understand Twain's intentions — the past was already the past. What point was there in discussing it? No matter how outstanding the people who left were, they could not bring Twain another victory or championship. As such, it was best to focus on the present instead. Compared to those who left because of various reasons, prioritising and treasuring people who were with him should be what he most optimally want to do currently.

Twain was still praising the performance of his team on stage. As for his opponents, whether it was Mark Hughes, the Man City team or Bendtner, he did not have any opinions.



What has passed is past.