

Champions 711

Chapter 711: The Imminent Passing of 2008

There are no matches between 21st December to 25th December. On Christmas, everyone can leave behind their woes for the year, kick back and enjoy the occasion.

The festive mood for Christmas was discernible in every nook and cranny in the city since the start of December. Christmas is akin to Chinese New Year in China, and is regarded as an important occasion in the West.

It did not matter if you are carrying a truck load of worries. You have to put them aside momentarily during Christmas and celebrate the day with everyone else. The same applied to Twain.

The atmosphere at the Christmas party organized by the club was insipid given how the team has been plagued by a run of poor results.

The Christmas tree was placed where it should be and each player received a small gift as well. However, the atmosphere was still much colder than before. Nobody was in the mood to celebrate the occasion given the bad results. No one knew what lies in store for them in the future, and they just could not bring themselves to celebrate.

Shania gave Twain a call to check on him and to remind him repeatedly to find a chance to sit back and relax so as to not ruin his health.

The two were quite in sync in how neither brought up the incident that happened between them previously. Shania seemed to have made up her mind that Twain has to be the one to speak about the matter first. She will not force him for an answer.

As for Twain, there was too much on his plate right now, and Shania was one of them. He has not found a way to deal with what is happening with the team, and certainly does not have a way to deal with his relationship issues either.

He just talked with Shania casually as he always had while being careful to avoid touching on the topic that will make him feel awkward.

It was only when he returned home in the middle of the night to a pitch black and chilly house that he realized how inconvenient it was to have one less person around him.

Twain spent the Christmas with Dunn at George Wood's house. He thought Sophia's face kept looking paler and paler every time he saw her.

It seems like the winter had not been easy for her either.

The only thing different about Sophia this time round was how she had a twinge of worry in her eyes when she looked at Twain.

Twain had forgotten to shave and he also did not cut his hair for a while, so his hair had grown long and only looked like it would grow longer. His eyes were bloodshot and looked a little clouded.

“Mr. Twain, please look after yourself...” She reminded as they were all having their meal.

Twain laughed. “I’m in fine fettle! Don’t worry, it’s just that I’ve been so busy that I’ve forgotten about my personal hygiene... It’s okay, I will shave and cut my hair when I get back...”

Sophia told him softly, “I don’t know much about what’s going on with the team, but George has been feeling down lately and keeps pulling a long face...”

Hearing her words reminded Twain of how George looked dispirited recently. His performance on the pitch so far has been solid, but could not be considered as particularly outstanding.

Is it because of the slump that the team is in, or is there another reason that he can’t speak about?

“Er... It’s nothing big. The winter will definitely pass, right? Shelley once said, ‘If winter comes, can spring be far behind?’ ... That was from Shelley, right?” Twain turned his head to ask Dunn.

Dunn nodded his head.

“It’s Christmas today. Let’s just celebrate the occasion and not bring up anything else!”

He did not want to hear about the things that have been troubling him for half a year, especially during a jovial occasion like Christmas.

Just let him forget everything!

He wanted to stop frowning just for tonight...

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After leaving Sophia’s house, Twain located his white jeep amongst a row of cars by the road and got into the vehicle with Dunn.

Once inside, he started the ignition, but was not in a hurry to drive the car away.

He just sat on the driver’s seat and spaced out.

Dunn turned his head to look at the dazed Twain and asked, “What’s on your mind?”

“Many... Many things.”

“The team, or Shania?”

Dunn broke into a smile. “Both.”

“I know I probably shouldn’t say this... But, how long do you intend to stay this way with Shania? She has already confessed to you. Shouldn’t you give her some kind of response as a man?”

Twain placed both his hands over his face and kneaded it.

“I know that... But I don’t know how I should face her...”

“Do you love her?” Dunn asked without beating about the bush.

"I don't know..."

"Why won't you just shake your head and say 'you don't love her'?"

"I don't know..."

"Are you still worried about the age gap between the two of you?"

Twain remained silent.

"If you were younger by 22 years and were the same age as her right now, will you like the girl?"

Bang.

Twain and Dunn both raised their heads to look into the distance at the same time, and they saw a cluster of red fireworks bloom in the night sky through the car's windshield.

"I guess... I will probably like her."

Dunn smiled and said nothing else. He looked out the window and seemed entranced as he admired the breathtaking fireworks that went off one after another in the night sky.

Twain turned the steering wheel and drove the car out of the parking lot.

"Do you want to see the fireworks?" Twain asked.

Dunn shook his head. "There'd be a crowd. Let's just go home."

Twain nodded his head in agreement. He was not interested in a fireworks display that highlighted all the good times of the past year.

2008 is about to be over. Should I reminisce it, or should I not?

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Nottingham Forest's first match after Christmas was a game at home against the northern powerhouse team Newcastle.

For non-football fans, the Christmas break has just started and they can choose to go all over the world for a vacation as long as they had the money.

For the football fans, being able to admire high standards of Premier League football is the best form of holiday to them.

The Nottingham Forest fans still vividly remember how the team lost to Newcastle at St James' Park a month ago.

Now that they are on their home ground, they definitely have to make sure that Newcastle gets a taste of their own medicine!

To Twain however, getting revenge was only a complement. The most important thing was to win the match. They had to win no matter what.

His team had lost three times in a row in the Premier League. Their only win since the start of December was against Kyiv Dynamo in the group stages of the Champions League. This losing streak simply cannot go on!

They have to defeat Newcastle and put an end to these excruciatingly suffocating days!

There needs to be change in the new year. They must welcome the new year and pave the way to Nottingham Forest's resurgence with a victory!

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"If the Premier League conducted a poll on the most disappointing or worst football team for each month, then I would give my vote to Nottingham Forest for the month of December!" The experts were doing all sorts of analyses for the match on television.

"Three consecutive defeats and a shocking loss against Blackburn at home. There are absolutely no signs that this team is the two-time defending champion of the Premier League! It feels like the team is in complete disarray when all they have really lost is van Nistelrooy... Don't tell me they won all those matches in the past because of van Nistelrooy?"

"We certainly cannot condemn the team based on one loss, but in the case of Nottingham Forest, it is not just one loss. They have been performing terribly for a long time. When they win, they do it unconvincingly, and when they lose, they make people wonder what just happened. Is this the Nottingham Forest that we know of? The Nottingham Forest that we know of under Tony Twain is a team that wins convincingly and was reputed as a consistently performing team, and even when they lost, they don't leave people wondering why."

"Nottingham Forest's offense has seemingly lost its direction now that Van Nistelrooy is not in the team and van der Vaart and many other players are out injured. Their offense lacks a clear strategy... Look at the players, all they do is to run about blindly not knowing what to do. When the ball reaches a player's feet, he can only fight alone by relying on his techniques. Even the team's passing... The players only pass the ball around because there is a team mate next to them. They lack a clear strategy. Why do they pass the ball, and how they should pass the ball... None of those. They have none of those thoughts going through their heads. Nottingham Forest might be playing at home against Newcastle, but with the way they have been playing, I don't expect them to win. The odds given by the various betting companies all suggest that they see Nottingham Forest as the underdogs going into the match. I don't think their views are unwarranted..."

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Twain did not feel like saying words like 'we definitely have to win this match' before his players anymore. He believes his players have grown sick of those words as well. Therefore, rather than straining his throat to say a bunch of useless, empty words, he decided to say something practical to them this time round.

"The fullbacks should move forward to attack in turns. Try to pass high balls more often and send the balls above Žigić's head. We must make full use of Žigić's height and physicality. Let's use the simplest way to defeat them! Force them to follow our tempo in the game through our attacks. We must score a goal within the first 30 minutes! One goal won't be not enough, we must score two before we think

about switching over to defending! We must make sure we are leading them and have the upper hand before we revert to the playing style that we are more used to, then we can drag the game out with Newcastle...”

His voice sounded very solemn. He was not his usual self where he would banter with the players.

The players listened to him with grave expressions on their faces. They were fully aware of the situation that the team was in. They could not afford to lose... They could not afford to lose anymore.

Twain knew that this was a time where he should play in a more cautious manner, but he still decided to go for an all-out attack on Newcastle. This was an arrangement that suited him better as a gambler, or a gambler who was on a losing streak, because the stakes were high.

“Remember this! Minimize the mistakes that you make as much as you can. If they score one against us in the first half, don’t wait until you get back into our own half to defend. Snatch the ball from them wherever the ball is at! We are the home team. We must always act like one. If we can make them fear us then that’d be even better!”

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Nottingham Forest started the match with explosive energy and displayed the air that one would expect of a defending champion football team.

With their backs to the wall, the team put in a performance that terrorized Newcastle for a while. Newcastle was sent into a frenzy and did not know how to react against them.

Nottingham Forest might not have been performing well lately, but they were still undoubtedly a strong team.

It had only been seven minutes into the match when Ribéry capitalized on a mistake by Newcastle’s defenders to slot in a goal into the bottom corner of the net.

The City Ground erupted into thunderous cheers. Tony Twain jumped high into the air and celebrated the goal by waving his arms in the air.

What a way to start the match!

Nicely done, Franck!

“Ribéry might have been troubled by the transfer speculations around him recently, but he continues to perform remarkably well for the Forest team. His goal is very crucial for the team! Look at how excited Tony Twain is by the side of the pitch. It’s almost as if he’s the one who scored the goal...”

Unfortunately, the good times did not last. Newcastle carried out a ferocious attack towards the end of the first half, and Owen managed to find an opening amidst the chaos before Forest’s goalpost. He shot for goal and scored the equalizer!

The City Ground went silent for a while. Twain did not know what kind of expression he should make as he stood by the side of the pitch.

The commentator made a joke after seeing Twain's drastic change in emotions. "I think we should really give Tony Twain a heart rate monitor... His heart rate right now must be way above average!"

During halftime, Twain was livid and chastised the defenders for trying to carry the ball forward repeatedly and for being too apprehensive on the way they handled the ball.

"Why did you all try to carry the ball forward in our penalty box? For what? Did you all think we could carry it all the way over to the opposition's penalty box? You must clear the ball away quickly! Clear the ball away quickly! Haven't I told you guys that countless times? What's the first thing a defender should do? It's not to show off your superb techniques. It's to get rid of the danger quickly! As long as the ball stays at your feet for one more second, we also stay in danger for one more second! The way you all handled the ball only gave the bastards from Newcastle more confidence! It's like you were telling them 'the ball's at my feet, come and get it! As long as you get it you can shoot for goal straight away!'"

"If you can't find someone suitable to pass the ball to, then just send the ball out of play! Don't care about anything else!"

"Also, if you lot run out of stamina in the second half, then the full backs should stop moving forward to join in the attack... I'm going to say the same thing again. When the second half starts, fight to take the lead! The team that leads always gets to decide how the match goes! I don't want the game to drag all the way till the 90th minute and still not be won by us. We can't let that happen!"

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Nottingham Forest was lively when the second half started and they actively went on the offense. On the other hand, Newcastle tightened their defense and did not give Forest any more chances at goal.

When a game reaches a stalemate, the importance of set pieces becomes accentuated.

17 minutes into the second half, Nottingham Forest wins a corner. Bale crosses the ball into the penalty box. Every single Newcastle player was focused on defending Žigić and they completely forgot about the short Ayala.

The short center back from Argentina jumped high into the air, and accurately located the spot where the ball fell without any players marking him. He then went on to do a beautiful header towards goal!

"They lead once again! Ayala's thrilling header! Žigić provided the perfect cover for him! Nottingham Forest lead Newcastle by two goals to one!"

Twain hugged Dunn who was beside him tightly. His hug was so tight that one could almost hear Dunn's bones cry out in pain. However, Twain was unaware of how tightly he was hugging Dunn, and only continued to exert more force.

Kerslake was the one who saved the pitiful Dunn by turning around to hug Twain. It was only then that Twain let go of a Dunn who was gasping for air.

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"F*ck! F*ck them! F*ck those northern sons of b*tches! Nottingham Forest will win!" The fans at the stands went into hysteria.

Forest's consecutive defeats have left many fans feeling all riled up. Everyone wanted to win against the opponent that defeated them previously now that they are on their home ground.

The face of Newcastle's newly appointed manager, Alan Shearer, who is the club's legend, was still as chiselled as ever. Just like how his face has a strong and clear bone structure, the Newcastle United under him is also a strong team. They will not give up easily.

Shearer will not give up, and neither will his team.

He led the team to a 2-1 victory by catching Twain off guard at their home ground. He intends to win the team that is led by his former temporary colleague at BBC, who commentated on the World Cup together with him, again.

Issues with Forest's stamina started to occur once the match entered the later stages of the second half. Ayala suffered from a leg cramp and was substituted by Woodgate. Ribéry was worn out and could not continue playing and was substituted by Leighton Baines.

Bale was shifted up to the midfield following Ribéry's substitution, and his main role was to defend.

Simply leading by a goal is the riskiest scenario that a team can find themselves in, but Twain was not in a position to think about things like that. He had to thank the gods for being able to lead by a goal.

He waved his hands and asked the players to retreat backwards to defend. Only Žigić was left at the front. All he had to do was to fight for headers and harass Newcastle's defenders so as to keep them in check.

After that, the only thing left for Twain to do was to keep looking at his watch and count how much more time remained in the match...

Newcastle went on the offensive after seeing that Nottingham Forest had run out of energy to attack them. They wanted to level the score before the end of the match.

Twain's heart throbbed wildly every time he saw Newcastle close in on van der Sar's goalpost. He was terrified that the worst case scenario would happen in the next second.

Twain stood by the side of the pitch with his back straight. His waist was starting to feel sore from him keeping that posture for so long, but the pain went unnoticed to him.

All his attention was on the match and before his goalpost.

No matter what happens, we can't let Newcastle score the equalizer!

That was the only thought in Twain's mind.

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On the 88th minute, Martins broke into Nottingham Forest's penalty box with his pace.

None of the Forest players dared to tackle the ball away from his feet out of fear that a penalty would be awarded against them, especially with the end of the game drawing close.

It's not guaranteed that Martins would score if he shot, anyway...

Martins chose not to shoot for goal given the tight angle. He pretended to shoot but had actually passed the ball away!

Alan Smith swept at the ball with his feet as he was brought down by Kompany.

Twain was on tenterhooks. He leant forward, his eyes wide open and his fists clenched tightly.

He watched as the ball went under van der Sar's arm and into the goal...

"Alan Smith! Alan Smith! Unbelievable! Absolutely unbelievable! Newcastle has levelled the score in the dying minutes of the game! Their relentless attacks have finally paid off! Ah! Look at Newcastle's bench area... Everyone's going wild! It's a narrow escape for them!"

The commentator was yelling hysterically. The Newcastle players and fans were equally hysterical as well. They were cheering feverishly.

But, none of that mattered in Twain's eyes right now.

A wave of exhaustion hit him.

He felt really tired, really sleepy and really cold.

"... This goal is a devastating blow to Nottingham Forest! Their players are standing on the pitch at a complete loss... Four consecutive matches without a win! Four consecutive matches without a win... This entire month of December must feel as cold as the North Pole to Nottingham Forest! They've just lost 3 points again... Let's take a look at Tony Twain's expression. We doubt he'd be able to say anything about what just happened!"

No one could see the expression on Tony Twain's face, because he had already fallen asleep.

Chapter 712: A Dream too Realistic

"Twain!" An enraged voice rang by his ear, shaking him from his thoughts.

He lifted his head and looked at the figure in front of him with dazed eyes. Stood in front of him was a bald man wearing black-framed spectacles, who looked a lot older than his actual age. This man looked familiar...

Wait, isn't he that department head from Twain's company? Right?

Twain looked to his left and right, a little space formed by a cluster of office desks appeared in front of him. Everyone lifted their heads to look over, but after seeing Twain, they lowered their heads to continue what they were doing.

Wasn't this where he worked last time? Twain was no stranger to this place. After he graduated from university, he had looked for hundreds of jobs before he finally settled for an admin position.

"You stayed awake to watch soccer again? What kind of a place do you think this is, Twain? This is a company, not a bed in your house!" The department head realised that Twain was not even looking at

him, which enraged him. He leaned down to stare at Twain angrily. This time, Twain turned his head towards him, but he still was not looking at him.

He was still in a daze. Why did he appear here? Shouldn't he be on the coach's bench in the city stadium orchestrating the contest? Dunn? Kerslake? And his soccer players, where were they? Did Newcastle even the score? At this point, his train of thought stopped abruptly. There was still hidden pain in his heart.

Oh, so everything was just a dream... The corners of his lips raised. It was a dream... Should he say 'that's great' or should he be regretting?

George Wood, Sophia, Michael, Gavin, Dunn, Des Walker, Kenny Burns and Shania. They were all characters I imagined, characters who only appeared in my dreams. How was it possible that a small worker scrambling for a living in China became a super coach who led a team to promote and win two consecutive championships? How could a pretty and bubbly world-class supermodel, a superstar, fall for me, a useless homebody? What was it if not a daydream?

Nothing happened, so he lost nothing, yet that type of pain felt all the more palpable.. For some unknown reason, there was a hollowness filling his chest.

"I gave you a chance, little guy. But whether you could become the best soccer star in England depends on yourself."

"Hey, Tony! If we aren't in the Premier League next season, I don't mind showing you what a hardcore soccer fan looks like!"

"Wait till I have money in the future, I will definitely buy Nottingham Forest! Then ask you to be its head coach!"

"Here lies the beloved son of Michael Bernard and Fiona Bernard, Nottingham Forest's most loyal fan and George Wood's lifelong supporter Gavin Bernard."

"Victory! I only want victory! I only want the championships! Other than that, I do not accept any other outcome! Let them be scared! Let them curse us! The worse they curse, the more it proves that we're might!"

"From the second level league to European Champions, Tony Twain and his team took four years. It was as if we saw Brian Clough's shadow... that glorious team reappeared in our vision. This isn't an accident, this is a red storm! Nottingham Forest, a team who won the European champions in two consecutive years, and descending in Europe for the third time!"

"So sorry, Tony. The club is unable to take out money to satisfy your needs... economical crisis, we have no money."

"I can't wait any more... I love you, Tony uncle, I love you."

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Just kidding!

All of these experiences that happened to me which made me laugh, cry, happy and sad, how could all of this have been a dream? What kind of dream would have such realistic feelings? If dreams were really this realistic, then they would not be called dreams. That was reality, and this was a dream.

Twain jerked his head up violently and glared at his department head who was still scolding him.

“What kind of a place do you think this is? We could easily find a kid like you who’s fresh out of university! Don’t think that being here makes you amazing. Let me tell you this: if I fire you now, there are so many people who would kill to take your place! You think a thousand dollars is too little, but even if it were only \$700 there would still be a lot of people trying their best to snatch your job! Why are you looking at me? Not convinced? If you’re not convinced, then leave! I’ve tolerated you for a long time. Your productivity is average and your temper is terrible. Young people these days are really getting worse...”

Twain took a look at that visage, contorted with rage and a hint of fear, and burst out laughing.. This was who he had been in his dreams. Here he had been, sucking up to his manager for a year. Because he could not fit in with his peers, they left him out of good things and he was discriminated even in work, while those who hit it off with this old fogey could draw a better income. After a year of hard work, he was still unable to save much, but the others who buttered up the boss could afford a car after just a year. They kept all their complaints to themselves for fear that, should they lose this one, it would be difficult to find another job. It was as if the weight of the world was on his shoulders and he was forced to trudge forward with his back hunched.

Now, he finally realised this place did not suit. He was totally different from the colleagues who had their heads ducked in fear. He did not belong here, he belonged in the battlefield for real men, a battlefield filled with passion and hot blood! One was one and two was two; a win was a win, a loss was a loss. Legitimacy belonged to the victor.

What was the point in nesting here, in this tight space? No matter how big his aspirations,, how bold his spirit, and all the dreams he had, all of that were trapped in this small space with no means of escape. Trapped, and then assimilated into the infinite space much like this one only to slowly disappear and vanish, as if they had never been a part of his life.

After working tirelessly for half his life, his earnings could not even buy a toilet in a new house. The rich changed their girlfriends daily; they only needed to reveal the goods in their wallet for gorgeous and sexy women to flock to them . But for Twain, he could only jack off to Japanese porn while fantasizing that God blessed him with a girl. He worked hard to butter up his boss, saying nothing but empty words to him, sacrificing his dignity and his values just to cling on to this job during such a tumultuous economic time.

The older generation resented Twain’s generation for always falling short of expectations, repeatedly emphasising in a sincere tone that theirs was a generation that had failed. The younger generation spoke in their Internet slang, in a way that subverted the mainstream, “You’ve been eliminated, this world is ours.” The best way to vent was to drink beer and eat grilled meat from the roadside stores while cursing at the state of China’s soccer.

The worst part about his life being reduced to this was having to live it, but what else could he do? Unsteady at thirty, lost at forty. As he looked back on his life now, he asked himself, "What have I been doing? What did I leave behind? In the next half of his life, what would he do?"

The short ceiling that made it hard to breathe. The dividers that limited thoughts to a 1x1 meter space, where exceeding was overstepping. The white lights that cast a ghostly glow onto faces.

Twain really wanted to laugh out loud. This was a place he once worked in. This was a place he almost surrendered in. This was the dream, and a most ridiculous one!

He pushed away the department head who was blocking his path and walked straight outside. The department head who almost toppled growled furiously, "Where are you going! You're still on the clock! Twain! You fool, if you take one step out this office, you're fired. Fired, you hear me? Fired! You'll be fired!!"

The office lobby was completely silent, save for the old man's heavy breathing. Maybe he had never scolded someone so agitatedly to the point of aggression before. He was panting like an old man who had just gone at it with his wife who somehow had more stamina the more she aged.

From where Twain stood at the entrance, he turned around to look at the pitiful department head and mocked him, "It's none of your business where I'm going, you old fogey."

After saying that, he took a step and walked out without turning back.

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"... I don't know if this counts as good news for Nottingham Forest's opponents. Even though I don't think this news will make anyone happy... Tony Twain, while orchestrating the match between Nottingham Forest and Newcastle this afternoon, fainted suddenly and was sent to the hospital. Currently, he's still unconscious..."

The newscaster reported the breaking news with a stern face. The screen then cut to the hospital entrance of the Royal College of Medicine in Nottingham University. Reporters were flocking to the hospital; rental cars were endlessly driving in to park nearby and, one after the other, reporters alighted from the cars.

A white-haired man wearing gold silk glasses was trapped in the middle of the crowd, like a canoe in the middle of the sea of roaring waves. He waved his arms, shouting, "We're doing our best to save him, but his condition is still critical. I can't guarantee anything! Could you all please make way and stop blocking the main entrance? I'm sorry, I can't say anything because I don't fully understand the situation. We will call a press conference just for this, but it won't be here and it won't be now."

A group of people who were sitting in a coach, lifted their heads to watch television on the bus announcing all of these, and became speechless. They were the Nottingham Forest players who had just ended their match and were preparing to return home. The competition had not ended when Twain suddenly collapsed. Initially no one reacted. The Newcastle players were still celebrating their goal. Nottingham Forest's players were taken aback and did not know what to do; the fans could only use their silence to express their discontent.

The commentator had still been teasing Tony Twain, and wanted to see his expression for the current situation. Once the screen changed, the person who was supposed to be standing could not be seen on the coach's seat. Instead, captured on screen was the assistant coach, Dunn, who jumped out from the coach's seats. Following Dunn's actions, everyone then saw the main protagonist who were lying on the ground and was not moving.

Dunn shouted to attract the attention of the surrounding people, and everyone panicked. Even the Newcastle players who were initially celebrating their goal were helplessly looking over to Nottingham Forest's coach seats. George Wood ran over to the side of the field; following him was the head referee who realised something was off.

Newcastle's fans stopped singing. The city stadium fell silent in that moment.

The stretcher, meant for rescuing injured players, was brought over. The ambulance stopped right outside of the stadium also charged in. Even after Twain was carried onto the ambulance and sent to the hospital, the majority of the people in the stadium was still in shock.

The match ended, resulting in Nottingham Forest's fourth loss in the league season. Their ranking continued to fall but at this current moment, did anyone still care about that?

Dunn jumped onto the ambulance and left with Twain. Kerslake took over all post-match matters by himself, and the press conference was also cancelled at the last minute. Concerned, Alan Shearer asked Kerslake what happened to Tony Twain.

After the match, the atmosphere in the changing room was lifeless. The players of Nottingham Forest were devastated not because they did not win, but because they were worried that something terrible had happened to Tony Twain.

Gareth Bale, who was sitting in the last row of the car, had his hands in his head and he started weeping softly. Although it had already been more than half an hour, but just thinking about Twain falling onto the ground suddenly and seizing scared Bale. It was as if his leader was dead.

His crying broke the silence within the cabin. Kerslake stood up and clapped. "Let's go back... Don't think much into this; this isn't a problem for you guys to worry about. Let's... continue training tomorrow." His tone revealed his helplessness and fear.

Please, do not let anything happen to Tony!

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When Twain woke from darkness and chaos, what he saw was, unsurprisingly, the white ceiling. He heard some whirrs. Turning towards the source of the sound, he was shocked to see a familiar back view.

With her back turned, she lowered her head to blow on a steaming cup in an attempt to cool it down. She then took a spoon and dipped it in before bringing it to her mouth to test the temperature, only to be scalded and almost threw the stainless steel spoon.

"Ha," Twain chuckled. His weak laughter shocked her, and this time she was so surprised she almost dropped the cup in her hand.

“Uncle Tony, you’re awake!” The person turned. There was a kind of indescribable joy in her voice. Who would it be if not Shania?

“What a conventional line.” Twain was a little weak, breathless after just a sentence.

However, Shania could not stop crying, tears ceaselessly flowing from her eyes and leaving two silver trails on her pretty cheeks.

“Why are... you crying?”

Shania was still crying and did not answer.

“I’m okay.”

At his words, Shania then wiped her tears and grabbed Twain’s hands, her voice filled with sorrow. “You were unconscious for exactly 24 hours. At some point, the doctors had wanted to give up. Dunn called me and I rushed here as quickly as I could, I was afraid —” Tears flowed down again. Shania could not bring herself to continue her sentence.

“I... I’m good...” Twain had to repeat what he said just now.

Shania continued to speak through her crying, “We were supposed to be in Tokyo for promotional activities, but I’m not going. It doesn’t matter if I’m not famous. I prayed to God, hoping you would wake up”

Twain heard her complain about how she pulled through in these 24 hours and felt a little guilty. He discovered that Shania’s phoenix eyes were bigger than usual and they were red, obviously swollen from crying. Within this 24 hours, how much had she cried? Twain would never know.

A warm glow filled his heart. He lifted his hand with much effort, trying to wipe the tears on Shania’s face. Instead, he discovered the needles inserted into his arms which restricted his movement. Thus, he could only lift the edges of his mouth to smile at her. “Don’t worry, I’m evil. God wouldn’t want me.”

Shania did not reply. She only lowered her head to weep continuously, as if she wanted to pour all her turmoil and fears in front of Twain. This was not right, how could he let this bubbly and cute little fairy be so devastated? Twain decided to change the subject. He shifted his view toward that cup that still seemed to be steaming hot. “Is it water inside the cup, Shania?”

Shania shook her head, “No, it’s not water. It’s the paste you fed me when I had a fever last time... Are you thirsty, Uncle Tony? Let me pour you some water.” After saying that, she made to get up.

Twain shifted his hand to stop her. “I’m hungry, Shania. Can you feed me?”

Flustered, Shania turned to grab the cup, almost knocking it over. Twain lied on the bed, taking all of this in. He was hungry. Being unconscious for 24 hours, that was a full day...

Shania carefully carried the cup. She scooped up a spoonful of black paste which smelled like sesame and blew on it before feeding it to Twain. This was the Chinese black sesame paste Twain had fed her where she had been running a fever. It was surprising she remembered.

After finishing half the cup, Twain signalled that he could not eat any more. He regained some of his energy after eating and continued to lie on the bed, quietly watching Shania who was red with agitation.

“Uncle Tony is evil, and all evil people live a long life, so I won’t die. Stop crying — look, your eye bags are gonna show. How will you promote your movie with your eyebags showing?” He made fun of her. Drawing a long face at this time was just not good at all.

“I put aside my work. I’ll be by your side this whole time!” Shania sternly said. “Don’t even think about ditching me and leaving!”

Twain did not say anything, but only continued to watch Shania. Seeing how she was pretty even when she cried made Twain recall the ridiculously devastating dream he had before. If he were still in the working class sitting around waiting for death, would he have a chance to have a life-and-death farewell with a world-class supermodel? If he were still a nobody in the working class, would Shania still say “I love you” to him? Even if this were a dream, he would rather live in this dreamland. The Twain from that other world, just let him die. Who cares!

His eyes were fixed on Shania and it made her feel a little embarrassed. Both of them had already known each other for five years, but this was the first time Uncle Tony looked at her so directly and overtly. Plus, the main reason she was shy was that there was something in his eyes that had not been there before.

“Shania, did you know? I just had a very interesting dream.”

“What? What dream?”

“I dreamt that I was going to die. Then I thought of going to heaven, but God chased me out, He said I was born evil, so I should die like a demon and shouldn’t go to a place like heaven,” Twain slowly explained, like a scholar. “At this moment, Satan appeared, he used his bewitching voice to tempt me to hang out with him...”

Shania widened her eyes and stared at Twain, she did not know whether Uncle Tony was speaking the truth at that moment. Plus, before this, Uncle Tony had never spouted nonsense in front of her.

“Then, I thought about it. He was right, I was indeed made to be evil. So I followed him. But I didn’t think that b*stard Satan would raise his arm to block me. He pointed at the black door in front and said,” Twain tried to mimic Satan’s voice by making his voice more hoarse. “Whether you’re going to heaven or hell, it means you’re willing to give up everything you have in the living realm. If you want to follow me, you’ll have to forget all your feelings you had when you were alive before you can walk through this door.”

After saying all that, Twain paused to take a breath and he sneaked a look at Shania. Even when Shania was bawling her eyes out, she was still pretty. There was a sort of beauty in her sorrow, like Lin Daiyu.

“Actually, I’m not afraid of dying. I don’t think dying is a big deal. If I have no ties to the world, I think dying isn’t that big a deal. Living is not that different from being dead. Honor, money, reputation... I can’t bring these to the grave, so what is there to miss? I was going to walk through that door, but then I suddenly remembered something that made me hesitate. Shania, do you know what that was?”

Shania frowned and shook her head. “I don’t know...”

Twain looked at her confused face, which was undeniably adorable. He chuckled. "I forgot I still owed somebody an answer."

"Oh..." Shania raised her eyes and was shocked to see Twain beaming.

"I, Tony Twain, have never owed anyone anything. I didn't want this person to stalk me until the depths of hell for this answer, I'm unable to bear that responsibility... So, I apologized to Satan and said, 'Mr Satan, I'm terribly sorry but I can't follow you and become a demon. Why? Because I discovered that living is beautiful, and I still have a lot of things I can't let go of! I can't follow you.' Satan became depressed and reprimanded me being too greedy, saying that the good things can't be kept, so the earlier I forgot about it, the better it'd be for me. I shook my head to object. I'm greedy. I like those good things, I want to keep them forever by my side, and I just can't let go of a person..."

After saying so much, Twain paused to take another breather.

Shania did not respond either. She sat on a chair and quietly waited for Twain to continue.

"Is it too late now to say sorry?"

Shania pouted, her eyes glossy with tears, and frantically shook her head.

Twain stretched out his hand and gently held Shania's soft hands. "I'm really sorry, I'm too stubborn. I almost brought my stubbornness and regrets to the grave. If something this serious had not happened, my stubbornness might really be incurable for the rest of my life. Luckily, I almost died, which made me understand a lot of things..." Twain's voice felt weak, he recalled that he used too much effort after speaking so much.

"Can you continue to call me 'Uncle Tony'?" he asked.

Shania nodded shyly. Twain gestured for her to lie by him. Then, he painstakingly shifted his head to whisper by Shania's ear. "Shania, I love you too."

Upon hearing this, Shania's eyes widened. She was shocked and happy at the same time, and did not know what to say at that instant. That line seemed to zap all of Twain's energy. After that confession, he lay back down on the bed to look at the ceiling and grumbled. "I'm tired, I want to sleep."

Shania tensed up. Making such a confession at this time was not a good sign. She gripped Twain's hand tightly and reached for the emergency button at the front of the bed. To her surprise, Twain raised his hand to stop her.

"Don't worry, I'm just going to sleep." He smiled to calm Shania who seemed panicky and lost. "I still have a lot of days to live, and a lot more things I can't let go of. I just discovered that I fell in love with a person, how would I be willing to find Satan? Don't worry, I guarantee... this time I won't sleep for long..."

He slowly closed his eyes, and then his breath evened out. This time, he was really sound asleep. Maybe he was dreaming of something again, but it was probably a beautiful dream this time.

Chapter 713: Relief

When Tony Twain fell asleep for the first time, several things occurred in this world.

The doctors knew this head coach had been in a coma for 24 hours before he woke up abruptly. He had also drunk a cup of paste-like food and chatted with Shania for a while. Then, he went back to sleep. This news made the doctors really happy. This indicated that treatment was successful, and Tony Twain's life should be out of danger now.

Dunn, who had been constantly helping out in the hospital, knew about this news immediately as well. He was relieved and went home to rest so he could prepare to start work again. He then entrusted everything in the hospital to Shania.

The reporters surrounding the hospital also received this news. The hospital called a press conference to report on the latest situation, informing the general public through this. Those who had still been worried about Tony Twain's safety could finally catch their breaths. The Nottingham Forest fan club website also immediately announced the news of Twain's condition stabilising.

"After being unconscious for 24 hours, Tony Twain finally woke up for a short while. We are extremely happy about this occurrence." The BBC newscaster announced this with a wide smile.

After the Nottingham Forest players found out that Twain would live, they were extremely relieved and could finally focus on their training and the competition.

There were also people who cared about more than just Twain's health condition. Tony Twain's sudden collapse brought back to attention an issue he had once denied, and had now become an irrefutable reality.

When the news of Twain's collapse first broke out, Judy Shania Jordana, who was originally supposed to promote Cruise's new film in Shanghai, China, suddenly disappeared from the namelist. After 14 hours, she quietly appeared at London Heathrow Airport and, after another hour, she was sitting by Tony Twain's bed. This was spread by the doctors and nurses from the Royal College of Physicians, and some fans even took the time to use their phones to take a picture.

If both of them were simply friends, why would Shania be so affected by this incident? Others would, at most, make a call to ask about it. Only she would fly from such a faraway land and go to great lengths to take care of him, and the worry on her face was undeniable — she did not even try to hide it. On the road, she had still been trying to keep it low profile to avoid the pestering paparazzi, but once she was beside Tony Twain, she could not hide anything. She opened up to those busybodies to see clearly.

So finally, the answer was out and clear — Tony Twain and Shania were no ordinary friends. They were indeed a couple! It was unthinkable that Tony Twain's collapse could reveal such a shocking truth...

After finding out that Twain was not in life-threatening danger for the time being, the media became active again. They immediately caused a clamour about the news regarding the loving relationship between Shania and Twain.

While the public was remorseful about the troubled fate Twain had these days, they were also commending how he could win the heart of a pretty 18-year-old supermodel. The Chinese media claimed that this was the modern soccer version of "blessing in disguise" .

Even BBC news, after they confirmed the truth behind Twain and Shania's relationship, jokingly said, "Losing on the field, but gaining in the relationship field. No matter what happens, Tony Twain never loses."

Shania did not make an appearance to clear things up either. She could not be bothered with what outsiders thought about the relationship between Twain and her. In this period of time, there was only Uncle Tony in her heart and nothing else.

What about work? She had already thrown it far away. Other than the promotional activities for her film with Tom Cruise coming to an end, she had already turned down all of the fashion shows during the Christmas season up till January of the following year. Through her agent, Mr Fascal, Shania had declared that she would not leave until Tony Twain got better. She did not care if she was throwing away her partnership with famous international brands. This was as good as publicly announcing her relationship with the 40-year-old man.

"Love makes people do crazy things, but a love as crazy as Jordana's...this is my first time seeing something like this," Some fashion magazine commented on this matter.

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When Twain woke up again, he had already slept for 12 hours. He turned his head and laughed when he saw Shania, who was sitting by his side looking a little sallow. "See? Like I said, I didn't sleep for too long this time."

Although his body was still weak, his mental state was a lot better compared to the last time. Twain shifted his eyes, discovering he had a bed beside him. Obviously, it was for Shania to sleep on. Hence, he asked. "How much did you sleep in the past few days?"

"I don't remember." Shania's hair was a little messy and her bare face seemed extremely haggard and devastated. If she walked out like this, even the most loyal and hardcore of her fans would not recognise her.

"Go sleep. I'm fine already."

Shania stubbornly shook her head to decline Twain's suggestion. "I'm not tired."

Just as both of them were still talking, the door to the room was pushed open. Some doctors and young female nurses walked in. They all seemed surprised but happy upon seeing Twain lie sideways with his eyes opened.

"This is great! Thank God, Mr Twain, you're awake!"

Twain smiled and thanked the doctors who saved his life, "I haven't even thanked you all, my saviours."

"Ha." A middle-aged male doctor who seemed to be the leader, gleamed. "You can save those words of thanks; it's our job to save lives. As for the person by your side, however..." He looked at Shania. "Ms Shania stayed beside you this whole time. You should thank her properly."

Twain looked over at Shania but did not say anything. Despite that, they both knew what the other was thinking about. Of course he should thank her. He was prepared to spend the next half of his life to thank her...

Witnessing such a warm scene, even fools would know what was going on. The doctors and nurses were not surprised at this, but the middle-aged man still coughed to interrupt the two who were still looking at each other. "Sorry to disturb the both of you, but we actually have something for Ms Shania. However, since you are awake, Mr Twain, then it's better that we tell you directly."

"Is this regarding my body?" Twain asked.

The man nodded, then he stretched his hand towards Twain. "Hi, Mr Twain. I'm your head physician Stanley Meley, but you can call me Stanley."

Twain also held out his hand. They exchanged a simple handshake.

"Have you had a flu recently?" Stanley Meley immediately went straight to the main topic after the self-introduction.

Twain nodded.

"Did you cough?"

"Initially I didn't, then I did. I didn't get any better, but I didn't take any medicine either," Twain recalled.

Stanley exchanged a look with his colleagues. Shania stood by the side, uninterrupting, looking at them in silence.

"Mr Twain," Stanley looked at Twain and said, "You have pulmonary heart disease."

Twain was not shocked to hear this. Instead, he chuckled. "Which head coach doesn't have some sort of heart problem?"

Stanley also nodded to agree with his point. "You're right. Being a head coach comes with tremendous psychological stress, so working in this stressful environment in a long time would easily induce various heart diseases. However, you're barely 40 and you've already contracted this disease. It's simply too premature. This is related to your incorrect living habits."

After saying this, he looked at Shania for a brief moment.

"Alcoholism, smoking, unhealthy snacking, irregular work-rest cycles, plus the job which already comes with enormous amounts of stress... Truthfully speaking, Mr Twain, when I saw you collapse suddenly on television, I had already guessed it was a heart attack. That flu was a symptom, which induced minor bronchial asthma. The smoking caused great damage to your lungs. Nicotine causes accelerated heartbeat and increased blood pressure, but excessive smoking would cause your blood pressure to decline, an increased oxygen consumption of your heart, vasospasm, irregular blood flow and an increased platelet adhesion. Alcohol, which contains ethanol, also directly impacts the health of your heart. Alcoholism not only increases the pressure on your heart, but it might cause arrhythmia, which impacts fat metabolism and promotes the formation of arteriosclerosis. Lastly, it's regarding your work."

Stanley Meley pushed up his glasses. "You know, there are rules in life. Being in a good mood will prevent you from being over-emotional and over-exhausted, which are efficient means in preventing heart disease. But the unique requirements which your job entails clash with all these requirements. This is also why I agree with your point on head coaches being at high risk of contracting heart diseases."

"Honestly speaking, Mr Twain, although you are conscious now, I don't think you're out of danger yet. Right now, your body is weak, your heart condition is still unstable and there might be danger any time. I am not here to scare people off, but I have a duty to tell you that you have to be extra careful this month. You cannot go anywhere else as we need to put you under 24-hour surveillance."

After listening to all that, Twain laughed bitterly. "Is my body in such a poor state?"

"Heart disease is only one of the many issues. Your lungs and liver are in different degrees of danger. I seriously suggest you quit smoking and drinking, improve on your diet and having a regular work-rest cycle. This is if you want to live a few extra years."

Initially he was still somewhat friendly, but once he started talking about Twain's condition, his expression and tone immediately turned cold. As if he were reading off a script, he was emotionless.

Twain looked at Shania who seemed a little nervous by the side, and then waved his hands. "What more can I say? You're my god now, Stanley. I'll listen to you and quit smoking and drinking immediately, but as for work..."

"Don't tell me you still want to go back to lead the team for training and competition?" Stanley Meley frowned. "In this state of yours, even leaving the hospital will be too dangerous, let alone going back to the head coach seat! I suggest, for the sake of your health, that you disregard all types of soccer and sports news and don't think about the condition of your team. That isn't what you should think about. None of my colleagues and I are unable to guarantee that you wouldn't faint by the side of the field again, and if you faint again..." He gave Shania a look. "You might not be as lucky."

"Uncle Tony," Shania chimed in, shaking her head furiously at Twain.

Twain sighed. "Ok, I'll give in. I will cooperate with you, Dr. Stanley, just let me leave this place earlier."

Stanley then started smiling again. "We also hope that day will come fast. After all, I am a Nottingham Forest fan as well."

He smiled and left with the other doctors and nurses.

After they left, Twain then turned to look at Shania. Ever since the people came in, Shania had had his hand in a vice-like grip and his palms were now sweaty.

"Well, your Uncle Tony has become a pitiful being who can only lie on the bed and rely on others for help with everything he does..."

Shania bent over to use her lips to stop Twain from continuing talking. Twain could feel the lips, which used to be soft, were now dry and cracked. The past few days must have been really hard on her. He used his other hand to wrap around and pat her back.

While they were still focused on each other, someone coughed from where they stood at the door. Even then, neither of them backed off. It was only after a while that Shania, embarrassed, moved away from Twain and sat by his side to pour water for him. Twain turned to see Dunn and Fasal at the door.

“It’s really lively. A huge group just left and now another two have come. Hello guys.” He was not at all embarrassed that he and Shania were interrupted by them.

Fascal looked at Twain with a huge smile on his face, then at Shania who was busy, and said, “Seems like you’re recovering well, Mr Twain.”

“The doctor said I’m not completely out of danger yet,” Twain beamed while answering.

Dunn’s face became a little more stern. “I heard you woke up again, so I came over to see you.”

“Thanks.” To this “brother” he had known back in China, Twain need not say so much.

“Everything is fine with the team, you don’t have to worry about anything. The Chairman has already asked me to be the temporary head coach for the team. While you’re receiving treatment, I’ll be in charge of leading the team during the competition.” Twain trusted Dunn the most. Though Dunn was Chinese, he was naturally the best candidate to succeed Twain when the latter was not around. Evan Doughty did not care what country Dunn came from, or the soccer standards of that particular country, he only trusted Twain’s opinion.

“It’s been hard on you.” Twain nodded.

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Twain thoroughly followed Stanley Meley’s suggestion and did not actively ask about the team’s state. Dunn obviously knew that Twain should not be stressed any further, so he did not mention it either. The trio then chit-chatted for a little longer before Dunn and Fasal both bade him farewell.

Before he left, Fasal asked Shania outside to talk for a few minutes. Shania came in afterwards to see Twain’s concerned look. She smiled and said, “It’s nothing much, just that I’ll lose a few contracts and earn a bit less. Anyway, I’ve already finished spending the money I’ve earned before.”

Twain did not say anything. After years of interaction, he understood Shania’s temper. If there were things she acknowledged as important, she would deal with those immediately with little care for the consequences. Even if there were any dire outcomes, she would only bother with those after she had dealt with the matter. As such, there was no point convincing her. Although, there was something he had to nag about.

“You should go rest. Even if it’s just for an hour, it’s still better than staying up like this.” Seeing how Shania was going to refute, he straightened his face. “If you don’t rest, how can you take care of me? I’m relying entirely on you and only you now, Shania. If you’re over-exhausted, what will I do?”

At this, Shania immediately lay on the bed with her clothes on. Before she fell asleep, she did not forget to tell Twain “good night”. Almost immediately after, he could hear soft snoring. A beauty snoring and being able to fall asleep so quickly... She must have really over-exerted herself. No matter how tired she was physically, her mind could not be at peace and she could not relax at all, which was what was really

draining. Twain could relate to that feeling, because he was like this as well before his heart attack. The stress piled and piled until he could not take it any longer and collapsed.

Models might look like they are in good shape but that did not necessarily mean that they were in good physical condition. In fact, a lot of them are actually in worse states than the average person. Twain really hoped that nothing bad would happen to Shania.

The doctor did not allow him to think about the team, and he really was not planning to think as well. However, in this period of time, he was still wide awake and did not want to sleep. What should he do? He turned his head to look at Shania who was sound asleep and continued to watch her quietly.

Once he was sure about his intentions, his inner self calmed down and it was as if nothing else could shock him anymore. As long as Shania was by his side, he would be warm and there was nothing for him to think or worry about. He also did not care if Dunn would be able to take on the burden of leading a soccer team, or the rumours on the news, or the injury reports, the underperforming results, criticism from the media, the immense pressure and the expectations of the fans. He could disregard all of those. Let those who had to be busy go and be busy, he just wanted to enjoy this peace by himself.

The special treatment ward was completely silent, other than the low-pitched noises from the instruments. The sound of cruel battles from the fields and the days where he would be locked in constant strife with the media were slowly becoming further and further from him. This small ward was like a long-lasting village of oblivion which allowed people to forget all their troubles and go into slumber peacefully.

Twain settled his gaze, full of love and joy, on Shania's face, staring until he felt drowsy as well.

Chapter 714: The Core

Twain's daily routine became normal at long last—it could be said to be normal because he could now sleep at night, wake up in the morning, and eat three regular meals a day.

He felt he had no problems anymore and could be discharged from the hospital at once. But Stanley Meyer strongly disagreed. He thought he should continue to be under observation, so Twain was still in the intensive care unit until now, where he was cared for in every aspect by Shania who never left his side.

During this period, Twain received a number of phone calls from people who cared about him, inquiring about his health. His answer was consistently, "I feel good, thank you!"

Most of his people who cared about were his friends and his friends in Nottingham made personal visits. They chatted together to help Twain relax his mood and ease his state of mind. The players of the team entrusted both George Wood and Eastwood to visit and present flowers and greetings. In order to prevent Twain from getting emotional again, they did not talk about the team's situation, and Twain did not ask. It looked like he made up his mind to leave the work to the others.

The friends who were not in town, called in succession to inquire after him through phone calls and text messages. For example, Des Walker and Ian Bowyer, as well as the ex-Forest players from Brian Clough's era had also expressed concern about the Forest team's current manager.

Twain even received Michael Bernard's regards through a call from as far away as the United States, which moved him so much that he became a complete mess.

The other people who send their regards to him were the managers of Premier League teams. No matter how hard they competed on the pitch and appeared like they were sworn enemies, those things were forgotten by people at this time.

Roy Keane and Alan Shearer called. Even Benítez, a manager whose team had been suppressed for three years in a row by the Forest team, also sent a text message to ask about him.

Evan and Allan also came to the hospital to visit him once and said what Dunn had said before to exhort him to take good care of his health and not think about anything else.

The Arsenal manager, Wenger and Manchester United manager, Alex Ferguson had specially traveled from London and Manchester to visit Twain. It put him in a very good mood for the two days.

He had previously thought that his bad mouth and character had caused him to offend all the people who could be offended in the industry, and now that he suffered this great difficulty, those enemies must be laughing up their sleeves endlessly. He did not expect these people to care about his health. He felt some sense of accomplishment in his heart—I, Tony Twain, am rather popular!

Once he felt good, his heart functioned more normally. Stanley Meyer's smile gradually became wider. Shania was also not so afraid anymore—it was actually the thing Twain cared about the most.

These days, Shania did indeed look thin and pallid. If she had to do a runway show again, she probably did not have to control her weight.

In fact, the reason that those Premier League managers had expressed concern for Twain one by one, was perhaps because the sudden collapse of Tony Twain, a manager who had just turned forty this year, gave them the chills in the winter just after Christmas—everyone was the same and no one had less stress than anyone else. Seeing Twain lying in his hospital bed and unable to continue working now made them a little afraid—Could this be our future? When will I suddenly collapse on the sidelines of the field or on the training ground? Am I going to die because of it? Tony Twain's life was saved after twenty-four hours in a coma. He is lucky, and it has a lot to do with the fact he is forty. What about us, the old men? When it's suddenly our turn the next time, will we be ready? Will we be that lucky? Can our aging bodies survive this winter?

Wenger's words in an interview after his visit to Twain represented almost all the Premier League managers' common thoughts, "I hope Tony will still be as sharp, full of fighting spirit, able to withstand the pressure and conquer the heart. The last thing I want to see is his downfall. Seeing him in this position for years, I feel I might be next..."

Ferguson also added, "I had a pacemaker installed four years ago. I can understand Tony Twain's feeling at the moment. He felt that he was in control of the world but was knocked down by the heart and pressure. Having personally experienced it, I can only tell him that it's no big deal. I'm already sixty-eight years old, but I'm still doing a good job in this position. I receive at least ninety minutes of intense stimulation a week. I'm full of energy and don't feel tired at all. If I can, I want to keep doing it."

Roy Keane briefly remarked and expressed his hope for Twain, "I have fully felt the different feelings that this new job has brought to me. If he can get back to the technical area, I think he'll be a hero to all of us. At that point, when our two teams meet, I'll applaud him in respect.

No one wanted to be the second "Tony Twain" and no one wanted Twain to collapse due to this. Because that would make them feel a little despair—could this be where all the football managers end up in?

The greatest manager in the history of the Scottish Premiership was Stein, who died of a heart attack in a match; Liverpool's former manager, Houllier, suffered a heart attack during a match against Leeds United and only came out of danger after fighting to stay alive for eleven hours; and Nottingham Forest's legendary manager, Brian Clough even went so far as to say, "I'd rather shoot my grandmother if I had to, in exchange for three points"; Taylor resigned from Aston Villa because he could not bear the pressure; the former Newcastle United manager, Glenn Roeder was diagnosed with a cerebral thrombosis after a heart attack; in 2004, Ferguson had a pacemaker put in for his heart just in case...

These examples were sufficient.

Was it now the turn of the fearless "Forest King", Tony Twain, who thought that no one in the world could subdue him?

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The observation lasted a week, and Meyer came to him again one day. After examining his body's indicators, he put on a consulting tone and said to Twain, "Mr. Twain, what do you think about installing a small device inside you?" He pointed to Twain's heart.

Twain wondered, "You want to install what?"

"A lovely little thing called a pacemaker."

The term gave Twain a scare.

"Isn't that something an old man..."

"As long as there is arrhythmia, there's a possibility to install it. It's not necessarily an old man's monopoly, Mr. Twain." Meyer was exceptionally amiable today.

Twain began to feel apprehensive inside. Did Stanley not say that things are getting better day by day these days? Why is he suddenly going to install a pacemaker in me? Don't tell me... that my condition is actually worse?

"Give it to me straight, Stanley. Is my heart giving way?" He frowned and asked gravely.

When he asked the question, Twain could feel Shania's grip on his hand tightened.

He did not expect Stanley Meyer to laugh instead. "You're recovering well, Mr. Twain. But it did break down once." He said as he pointed to Twain's heart, "We can't guarantee that there's not going to be a problem here in the future. Moreover, your own circumstances determine... Unless you plan to quit from Nottingham Forest and never work as a professional football manager again, maybe then you'll probably be in control of your emotions. Are you willing to accept my suggestion? Mr. Twain."

Twain did not expect to hear this. Telling me not to be a professional football coach?

Stop kidding!

What else can I do besides this? If I don't be a manager, what am I going to do at home? Wait to die?

He suddenly thought of the dream he had in his coma.

I'm never going to live that kind of life again... What's happening here now is my life. I may encounter failure, may be lying in a hospital bed like this, but I fought here before and will continue to fight.

"Eh, Stanley. I really don't know what else I can do but this." Twain said with a laugh.

Stanley Meyer also laughed and said, "Look, I knew you'd give that answer. So, I asked you directly if you wanted to install a pacemaker, and not asked first if you wanted to quit the manager's position. Listen to me, Mr. Twain. Your career is a high-risk job for heart patients. The world's most brilliant cardiologists and cardiac surgeons cannot guarantee that a manager who has had a heart attack will not relapse ... And the probability of a relapse is frighteningly high. Have you ever heard of such a thing?" Meyer paused at this point.

Twain indicated with a look for him to continue.

"One year, ITV installed a special device for two Premier League managers to test their pulses and had them to carry it with them while they directed the games. In general, a normal person's heart beats between sixty and a hundred beats per minute. But the figure shown on the device was twice as high as the standard! Generally speaking, it only happens to astronauts and people who are bankrupt from stock speculation..." Meyer spread his hands and said, "I can't guarantee that your heart won't have problems again when you are in such an environment for the heart rate for a long time."

Twain found that Shania had tightened her grip on his hand more and more. He glanced at the anxious-looking Shania, then turned his head and smiled at Meyer, "I'm afraid I can't answer you right now. Can I think about it?"

Meyer pushed up his glasses and replied, "Of course, as you should. After all, it's a matter that is as common as going out to buy a pack of cigarettes."

He turned and took his leave.

Twain glanced sideways at Shania. He knew that Shania had something to say, and he could probably guess what Shania was going to say.

But Shania did not say a word.

The two people looked at each other, and finally Twain spoke first, "I know what you're going to say, Shania. You're going to try to persuade me to quit, right?"

Shania nodded.

"But I can't listen to you this time, Shania."

Shania's mouth was set in a grim line as she said, "Why? Isn't your life important enough?"

“Of course, my life matters, especially for people like me who had died once. There’s nothing more important in the world than to be alive. But ...” Twain’s tone quickly turned around, “But there is also an equally important thing as life, and that is to live.”

“Isn’t that the same meaning?” Shania said with a frown. She could not understand Twain’s words.

“Of course, it’s different. Living is not simply about being alive. Shania...” Twain looked at the little fairy in front of him, “Your Uncle Tony is a very incompetent man. I can’t do anything besides being a manager. If I quit this job, I wouldn’t be living even if I had a hundred years of life. You and football are proof that I live in this world, and I don’t want to give up either one of you.”

Yes, both of you make me feel like I’m not dreaming right now. I was not dreaming for the last five years. The time was actually not long, but I had left some traces in this world that belonged to me. If I abandon football, that trace will fade away with the passage of time and no one will remember me. There will be no evidence of my existence and the meaning to continue living. So, what if I’m alive?

To be a zombie, making a living and waiting to die, just getting by, drifting and living without purpose... These words should not appear in my life.

Who am I?

The young clerk in Chengdu, Tang En, died when he was twenty-six years old! Now I’m the 40-year-old Tony Twain, the manager of Nottingham Forest!

Shania’s sigh broke the silence in the room.

“I knew Uncle Tony would say that. That’s so you.” She shrugged and said, “If you’re not allowed to go near football, you’ll be worse off than dead... As long as there is football, you can even forget about me... To tell you the truth, Uncle Tony, I’ve always been jealous of football.”

Twain smiled and hugged Shania, “You don’t have to be from now on. You both hold the same places in my heart...”

Unexpectedly, Shania did not get mad and laughed instead, “Who comforts people in such a way? Shouldn’t the normal way of saying it is to look at me lovingly and say: ‘From now on, you are the first in my heart’? All right, I’ll grant you this. But please pay attention to your health. Don’t treat my words as in one ear and out the other this time.”

Twain nodded vigorously and said, “Don’t worry. I still have a long way to go in my life.”

People who were not afraid of death were often because they had lost all interest and attachment to the world. So, they could meet death without regrets. Tony Twain was not afraid of dying...

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Stanley Meyer was a competent doctor who was good at understanding others. The method he prepared for Twain was the best of both worlds. He did not have to worry about sudden death or to give up football for it. Implanting a pacemaker in the chest cavity was a good idea.

Some people might think that it was somewhat an exaggeration for a forty-year-old man to install a pacemaker. But for Twain, who nearly died, the problem with a little dignity was out of his consideration.

Both he and Shania agreed to undergo the operation to implant a pacemaker.

Before the operation, Meyer offered a number of pacemakers for them to choose from. His top recommendation was certainly the improved r-wave inhibited pacemaker which Twain was keenest on this type of pacemaker because it was an on-demand artificial pacemaker.

The pacemaker would not function when the patient's heart rate was normal or higher than the pacemaker's fixed pulse frequency. And once the rhythm of his own heartbeat was lower than the set frequency of the pacemaker, that was, the ventricular electrode could not sense the R wave that occurred in his body's own rhythm, the pacemaker would wait for a predetermined period of time and immediately act in accordance with the inherent pace frequency to release pulses to the heart to put it into a working state. This was currently the most commonly used and most convenient kind of pacemaker.

None of the other pacemakers were suitable for Twain's condition.

In terms of power in the pacemaker, Twain expressed the hope for a battery that could be used for a long time and did not need to be replaced—he really did not like to come to the hospital. He found it unbearable to have to live here for half a month this time. Moreover, replacing the battery was a dangerous operation in itself. He wanted to lessen the risk as much as possible.

Stanley Meyer smiled when he heard Twain's special request, because he thought of something and said, "Although most pacemaker batteries are said to function for ten years, in fact, they only last four or five years. But five years is not considered too short... Well, if you don't want to have to replace the battery for a long, long time... there's one power source that should meet your requirements."

"What is it?"

Meyer snapped his fingers and said, "Nuclear battery."

Hearing the word "nuclear", Shania widened her eyes and turned pale. She was obviously startled. Everyone knew what "nuclear" was and its harms.

Twain clearly had the same concerns, but he obviously did not show it.

"The technology for nuclear batteries has been perfected. You don't have to worry about radiation." Meyer explained to them with a smile, "The maximum radiation dose is the same amount as what the phosphor emits on a watch at night. Within a year, the total dosage of radiation received by the body is equivalent to the dosage of one chest X-ray. The battery is very tightly sealed, and the nuclear substance inside is unlikely to leak. Moreover, even if there is a risk of leakage, then the installation of mercury batteries will not reduce this risk. Once there is a leak, whether it is mercury or nuclear battery, it will be hazardous to the body. So, the safety standards in this area are very, very strict."

Having said that, Meyer stroked his chin and muttered, "I also think it's necessary to require longer-life batteries... After all, there are huge risks to the battery replacement surgery, and very inconvenient to Mr. Twain's job... It's best not to frequently open up things that are implanted under the skin. Nuclear

batteries are really a great choice!” He raised his voice, as if he agreed with the idea himself. “There are now one hundred and thirty-six patients in the UK with nuclear-powered pacemakers. The device of the patient with the longest record, has been working without problems for thirty-four years, and there is no sign of the battery running out at all. You know, most patients come to the hospital on an average of two to three years to have an operation to replace the pacemaker battery. From the looks of it, nuclear batteries are very cost-effective.”

Twain gave a whistle and said, “And it sounds pretty cool. So, it’s decided, nuclear-powered pacemaker it is!”

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Five days later, Twain was pushed into the operating room with Dr. Stanley Meyer personally in charge of the operation to implant this extraordinary pacemaker for him.

Three hours later, the Royal Hospital held a press conference to announce to all the media that Tony Twain’s operation to implant a pacemaker was a great success. From now on, Twain had a nuclear-powered heart.

The “core” would be full of power in the days ahead, and there would be no problem. And as a result of this, people also termed Twain as “the nuclear-powered Twain” ...

Chapter 715: Determined to Hang on to You

When Tony Twain was pushed into the operating room to undergo the surgery to implant a pacemaker, Allan Adams was signing a contract in the Spanish capital, Madrid.

Next to him, glasses of champagne had been poured and placed quietly on the table.

When the person opposite also signed the contract, the two men picked up the glasses of wine and clinked their glasses as a toast. “This is a great collaboration, Mr. Allan Adams.”

“Yes, we each get what we need. Mr. Mijatović.”

“A toast to our cooperation.”

“Cheers.”

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Meanwhile, in Nottingham, England.

Franck Ribéry looked at the two-story mansion in front of him, which he bought with the signing payout after he came to Nottingham Forest. He had already lived in it for four years and would be moving out today.

He would entrust his agent to sell the house on the United Kingdom housing market.

Thereafter, Nottingham would only have memories for him.

Today's weather was no different from any previous day. The sky was gloomy with gusts of cold wind, as if it was going to rain at any time. The brick houses with their red roofs and white walls stood quietly in the woodlands where the trees only had bare branches left. The noisy birds called from the forest, accompanied by gusts of undulating wind. It was not calming to one's mood.

He spent countless days and nights here. He had held a party on the lawn in front of the house to entertain his teammates. He also once pushed a child's stroller and took a stroll together with his wife along the forest path and played with his child here. He also sunbathed alone on the grass, but it was seldom...

He did not return to Wilford to say goodbye to his teammates because he was afraid of facing those disgruntled looks. He knew that since he decided to move to Real Madrid, some people in the team despised him and thought that he wanted to run away when he saw Nottingham Forest fail.

He admitted that he did make up his mind to leave because the boss had collapsed, but he did not think he was running away. He just went to a place to pursue a better life. If the boss was around, he would not have left. He definitely would not have left even if he fired the chattering agent. He would not leave the boss. But now no one... knew whether the boss could return to Wilford or not. He did not have to continue to stay here.

Piqué was gone, Bendtner had left, and now it was his turn. What could still be left of the all-powerful and arrogant Nottingham Forest, which swept across Europe at the time...

The sound of a car horn tooted behind him.

"Franck! Time to go! You're going to miss the plane if it gets later!" His agent, Bruno Heiderscheid shouted at him from inside the car. "The weather's so cold. What are you doing standing outside?"

Ribéry pulled his collar tight and wrapped himself in his coat. He turned and walked to the car parked on the side of the road.

Behind him, the house underneath the dark clouds slowly blurred, as if to blend in with the woods behind. Then the house disappeared, and the City Ground stadium in the open space. Loud noises traveled from there.

"Forest, Forest! Nottingham Forest! We're the champions! We're invincible! Come on—Forest, Forest, Nottingham Forest..."

Amid such a song, Ribéry did not turn his head back as he got into the car and hurried away.

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In the same afternoon, Ribéry arrived in Madrid, Spain. After a simple medical examination, he attended a grand press conference. At the press conference, he took a number 18 white jersey printed with his name on it from the hands of Real Madrid's honorary president, Di Stefano.

Then he greeted the Spanish reporters present in Spanish, smilingly said that he liked the weather in Spain very much, causing them to laugh. Following which, he said he would help Real Madrid through the tough times, and he did not come here to taste defeat.

Next, he went to the stadium to show off his skills and won the applause of the fans present.

After the public event was done, he strolled with his wife and child through the empty Bernabéu stadium to get a feel of the international powerhouse's home ground, which was astoundingly big.

The City Ground stadium was like a high school campus compared to the Bernabéu...

A higher salary, a bigger pitch, more attention... and more honors?

Ribéry embraced his wife with his left arm and his right held his daughter. The sunshine of the Iberian Peninsula was warmer and brighter than that of England. He even felt a little warm, with a fine layer of sweat on his forehead.

Although he was at Bernabéu now, he thought—would the boss fly into a rage since he did not say goodbye? Could his heart take it?

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Sometime later, Nottingham Forest's official website announced that Franck Ribéry had officially moved to Real Madrid for a fee of fifty-five million euros. The official online article was followed by a tribute to Ribéry for his contribution to the team over the four years, thanking him for the number of championship trophies he had brought to the team, and finally wishing him all the best in Madrid, Spain.

The Spanish media sang praises of Ribéry's arrival. They claimed that he was the first man who could change Real Madrid's weakness in the wings and that he was a world-class superstar. After the departure of Robinho and Robben's injury, the admiral of the flanks which Real Madrid had long waited for was finally here. Schuster would be better off in the second half of the season.

But there was no hot topic mention of how Nottingham Forest, which was having a tough time, would survive the winter.

Twain, who was lying in a hospital bed at the Royal Hospital of Nottingham University and had not yet regained consciousness from the operation, was not aware of everything.

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When Twain woke up again, he did not see Shania, but Stanley Meyer's smiling face.

"That's good, you're awake. It's pretty fast this time." He said.

"How long have I slept?" asked Twain.

"Eight hours. The anesthetic had long worn off, but you went on sleeping for a while."

Twain turned his head and saw Shania who was watching over next to him as expected. When Shania saw he was awake, she smiled at him.

Twain was relieved when he saw the smile. This showed that the operation went very well and there was nothing to worry about.

Sure enough, Mayer later confirmed his hypothesis and said, "The operation went very smoothly. You have nothing to worry about. Now you have a nuclear-powered device here, full of power!" He said, pointing to Twain's heart.

“So, can I return to the team?”

Meyer shook his head and said, “No. You just had surgery and haven’t recovered from your heart attack. You need at least five months to recuperate.” He extended his five fingers.

Twain’s mouth gaped, “Isn’t that too long?”

“No, it’s not long at all. Heart patients need the recovery time. The heart is not a finger, which only take a few days to recover if there’s a problem. Your body is still weak and needs to recover slowly. I’m worried that if you immediately return to such a stimulating environment, even an antimatter-powered battery won’t save your heart, Mr. Twain.”

“But the team...” Twain still could not forget Nottingham Forest, which he had thrown all his energy into.

Stanley Meyer had a flash of an odd expression across his face and then he smiled to say, “Just take it that you gave yourself a half-year holiday, Mr. Twain. A chance that a lot of managers can’t get. Don’t pay any attention to anything about football. Let Miss Shania stay with you. In half a month’s time, you can be discharged from the hospital. However, you still need to return for frequent check-ups so that we have a grasp on your latest condition.”

Twain did not care about these matters. He still asked, “So roughly when can I start focusing on football again?”

Meyer thought for a while before he said, “Four months from now. You just finished the operation, and there are a few recommendations you ought to know: stay away from strong magnetic field. Do not open the hood to check the engine if the car breaks down. When using the cell phone, remember to use your right hand and also not to place the phone in the left chest pocket; do not let the pacemaker’s area to come into contact with hard objects. When driving, take care not to let the seat belt press against the pacemaker. You must stay in bed for three days after the operation. No intensive exercise within seven days, do not lift your left arm, and pay attention to not let this arm bear weight in the future...In addition, Mr. Twain, you mustn’t think that just because you’ve got a pacemaker, your heart has no more problems. You must complete all the treatments, carry the medicine with you at all times, and take as prescribed.”

Twain laughed bitterly as he laid in bed, “No matter what I hear, I feel like an eighty-year-old man.”

“It’s a necessary measure to protect your life.” Meyer consoled him with a smile, “Please be sure to follow them strictly. I have also told Miss Shania that it is necessary to pay attention to these things in your daily life. I know Miss Shania can’t always be with you to take care of your everyday life. Please hire a professional medical staff to take care of you later. Mr. Twain, I’m afraid from now on, you must say goodbye to your familiar old habits.”

Twain gently nodded and said, “I know, I know... Although it is sad, I can only follow the doctor’s orders strictly in order to live.”

“Just so long it’s clear, you’ll be fine, Mr. Twain. In that case, I won’t disturb your rest.” He left with the nurse.

Once again, only both Shania and Twain were left in the ward.

Twain looked at his lover and said, "It will take me at least five months to start work again. How about you? Shania, when are you going back to work?"

Shania seemed to already have a plan. She said with a grin, "Would you glare at me if I said I also have five months?"

As expected, Twain wanted to glare at her.

"So, when you're in a better shape, I'll hire a professional nurse for you to take care of your daily life. Then I'll be able to leave with a peace of mind... Of course, we have to hire a male nurse!"

Twain rolled his eyes, "Ah, you know how to get jealous so soon."

Shania held the Totoro soft toy she took from home to sleep with her and hid her face behind the toy. She then carefully stretched forward and said, "I belong only to Uncle Tony, and Uncle Tony only belongs to Shania."

Hearing her said so, Twain suddenly thought of something, "Do your parents know that we are now... in a relationship?"

Shania shook her head and replied, "I did not tell them. But they are not blind, deaf or stupid. I've rejected so many jobs to run back to England to be with you. The media outside have hyped it up so much that they cannot not know. Once they know this matter, I don't think I need to tell them specifically about our relationship."

Twain remembered the dream he had in the car on the day Shania confessed her feelings. So, he asked carefully, "What would your parents think? After all, you and I... uh, have a twenty-two-year-age gap."

Shania continued shaking her head, "I don't know."

"Don't tell me they did not contact you?" Twain did not believe that with such a big thing, the irresponsible parents did not look for Shania. Otherwise he had to wonder whether Shania was their biological daughter.

"They called once. But they did not say anything about this matter. They just asked you about your condition."

"You did not tell them?"

"Why should I tell them? This is my love life, my business, and nothing to do with them." Shania found it strange.

Shania's words rendered Twain speechless. Deep down, he still thought that this was a traditional Chinese love relationship which required both parties' parents to agree before the two people could be considered ...

Well then, I don't have to think whether the irresponsible parents would think I have abducted their daughter. Anyway, they usually do not care how their daughter is. Even if she really was abducted, I reckon that they will not know as long as the kidnappers do not demand a ransom.

Shania burst out laughing, “But when your health is better, maybe we can make a trip back to Brazil together. I will re-introduce you to my parents!”

Twain wondered why Shania suddenly changed her mind when he saw the little fairy smiled at him with her eyes glittered with excitement and sneakiness.

She leaned over and moved closer to the front of Twain. As she exhaled her sweet and warm breath, Twain felt turned on—the tips of her chest intentionally or unintentionally rubbed against his body. Her hair hung down and draped his face. Her fragrant perfume continuously drifted into his nostrils. Once he opened up his heart to reveal the truth of his feelings, he found that he longed to possess this person.

It turned out that the little peach had matured long ago ah ...

But then her words immediately startled Twain.

“Uncle Tony, let’s get married!”

“Huh?”

“What do you mean ‘huh?’” Shania pouted.

“Well...”

“What does ‘well’ mean?”

Twain tried to struggle, only to find himself firmly pressed to bed by Shania. “The doctor said that you must stay in bed three days after the operation, Uncle Tony.”

“It’s too sudden, isn’t it?”

“What’s too sudden?”

“I mean... about getting married. We haven’t started dating yet... How can we get married so soon?”

“But we’ve been in love for five years.”

Twain was completely baffled, “Why was I not aware of it? When did it start?”

“It started when you clumsily tried to make sesame paste for Shania, lying in the sick bed.” Shania’s lips curled up with her eyes curved like a crescent moon and laughed happily. “It was then she fell in love with this middle-aged uncle!”

He picked up a cute young girl with a cup of sesame paste. Twain lamented inside that Shania’s love values were actually equal to a cup of sesame paste.

“How could you know what love is at such a young age...” Twain retorted weakly.

“It doesn’t matter. Five years are enough to let Shania know what love is.” Shania was determined to force Twain to submit today.

“I’ve decided, Uncle Tony! I want to marry you. This is the final ruling. No rebuttals and appeals are allowed!”

“Wow, you’re acting shamelessly!”

“I don’t care if I am! I’m hanging onto you, Uncle Tony! I’ll hang on to you for the rest of my life!”

“That’s not fair, I protest ... Well...”

Shania’s rosy lips had once again sealed Twain’s mouth.

“Your protest is invalid.” After the moist kiss, Shania licked her lips. Her face was flushed, and she was slightly breathless, but she still had a sly smile. Twain could even see a pair of pointed ears shaking smugly on top of her head, and a brown tail swaying behind her.

Chapter 716: 45 Million Years of Love

Twain and Shania spent their new year’s day in the hospital ward. Twain was in a critical condition at that time, and neither of them had the mood to celebrate.

He stayed in the hospital for a month and finally received Stanley Meyer’s approval to be discharged at the end of January.

When news of his forthcoming discharge was made public, the entrance to the Royal College of Physicians’ hospital became jam-packed once again. Media outlets from all over the world rushed over for a shot of Tony Twain, as it was going to be his very first public appearance since his hospitalisation. The reporters had a month’s worth of questions for him. It was easy to imagine the scenes that would unfold at the entrance to the hospital.

To avoid bringing trouble to the hospital, disrupting their operations, being harassed by the reporters when he gets discharged, and because Twain enjoys going against the media even if he is suffering from a heart disease, he chose an unexpected timing for his discharge: 1 a.m. in the morning.

Needless to say, the timing that was released by the hospital to the public was that his discharge would happen slightly later in the day at 9 a.m.

The paperwork necessary for his discharge were finished a long time ago. When it was time for him to be discharged, he walked to the entrance under the accompaniment of Shania.

Everywhere around him, be it the front or side of the hospital or the streets, was deserted at 1 a.m. in the morning.

The frigid temperature outside was below zero degree Celsius and it could turn water into ice. There were no reporters who would wait outside the entrance to the hospital under such conditions just for a shot of Tony Twain.

They successfully evaded the reporters by choosing this time. They shook hands and thanked Stanley Meyer and the other hospital staff who had taken great care of Twain for the past month at the entrance to the hospital before leaving the premises quietly.

The two did not return to the house located at No.13 Branford Garden Lane. Instead, they drove straight to a fancy neighbourhood near the Lace Market, where Shania had previously bought a house at.

Unlike Twain's old residence, this house was not as well-known to the media. Twain did not have to worry about reporters waiting to ambush him outside his door for a long time.

This change in residence had been pre-arranged by the doctor. Stanley Meyer wants Tony Twain to recuperate in peace during this period of time following his discharge. Twain should not do or care about anything else besides recuperating. This meant that he has to stay away from the media as much as possible. If the media really wanted to know about the latest news regarding Twain, they could give Pierce Brosnan a call, for he would be more than happy to play the role as 'Tony Twain's spokesperson' on all things related to Twain.

There were no newspapers related to sports in the house. The television would never switch to the sports channels either.

Twain has to train for half an hour every day, quit drinking and smoking, as well as cultivate a regular daily routine by sleeping and rising early...

He has to start living a brand new life here.

The medical staff who was specially hired by Shania started work as well, and that was when Shania could finally take her hands from everything and rest.

In the blink of an eye, another month passed by.

Towards the end of February, Shania published a post on her official website thanking her fans for their concern, and she also revealed the date for her comeback, which was during Milan Fashion Week Spring.

The way in which she had stubbornly pushed aside a number of her jobs suddenly had caused her to lose most of her brand endorsements and some popularity. It did not matter what reason she may have for refusing the jobs. The modelling industry is very competitive and brutal, and she has to start from the bottom once again, even if she used to be a super model. She has to work hard on the runway and win back the endorsements and popularity that she had lost with her abilities.

Twain was a little worried as to whether Shania would be able to make her way back to the top, but Shania looked full of confidence and fight.

She has been in good spirits ever since her relationship with Twain had been thoroughly confirmed. None of the problems she ran into at work mattered to her anymore.

If not for the fact that Twain was not in good health currently, she most likely would have given her body to him a long time ago...

When March arrived, Shania began practising zealously for her upcoming runway show and became very busy with work. Twain's care was generally left in the hands of the male nurse named Albert Douglas.

Speaking of Mr. Douglas, he was someone who was specially selected by Shania after going through numerous rounds of tests. He was a conscientious man who was very meticulous about his work. At the beginning, his conscientiousness tormented Twain, but Twain soon came to realize that his only option was to give up against an individual who was even more stubborn than him. Thus, he became obedient and listened to every word that Mr. Douglas said.

Forcing himself to quit smoking and drinking was something that pained Twain both mentally and physically. It was only after a month of perseverance that he realized he could sleep well without thinking about his cigarettes and alcohol.

In Twain's eyes however, the best part about Mr. Douglas has nothing to do with his professional attitude towards work or his accomplishments as a nurse, but rather how he is able to cook authentic Spanish cuisines!

Twain has certainly been in for a treat all this while after his arrival.

Shania was forced to give up on her romantic ideas of feeding Twain her home-cooked food after tasting Mr. Douglas's dishes.

The days went by peacefully. Twain would go for a check-up at the hospital every 10 days under the accompaniment of Douglas. His every visit was kept low-key, and he would not say much even if he was caught by the reporters. The way in which he wore sunglasses and pulled a long face made him look like a movie star who was putting on airs instead of a football manager.

The feedback he received from the hospital became better and better with each visit, and the time in between his check-ups lengthened as well.

Both his operations, one to cure his heart disease and the other to implant the pacemaker, were also a success.

On the last day of March, Twain visited the hospital for another check-up once again.

After the check-up, Meyer asked him, "Mr. Twain, why am I not hearing you rant about your life this time round? You've always talked about how your nurse is too strict on you, and how asking you to stop smoking and drinking was like asking for your life, right? Why have none of these come up this time round?"

Twain grinned, looking very proud of himself. "I have quit smoking and drinking a long time ago. Entirely."

"That is definitely something worth congratulating you about, Mr. Twain. That's right, are there any areas that you are not used to in your life right now?"

Twain hesitated slightly, then he touched his nose and said, "I've forced myself to stay away from football for three months, but I still have not gotten used to life without it."

Stanley Meyer smiled as he nodded his head. "I didn't think you'd get used to it either. Actually, I think it's about time you start reverting back to your previous lifestyle."

Twain did not comprehend what Meyer was saying at first, which was why he sat there unmoving for a moment. When the words finally registered in his mind, he was quite surprised. "You mean I can start working again?"

Meyer shook his head. "No, that's not what I meant, Mr. Twain. What I wanted to say was... Your heart is pretty much fine now, so you can start getting yourself into the mood, but you still can't get back to work just yet... Basically, I want you to start getting your heart ready for the future when you do return to work."

Twain was left mildly dejected at his words, but was quick to regain his optimism. "This works as well. At least now I'd be able to know where Forest is ranked..."

Meyer was a little surprised. "You still don't know?"

"I've not looked at a single thing related to football so far. How could I possibly know?"

Meyer sighed after hearing Twain's words. "I thought maybe you'd still learn a thing or two about the current situation of your team. I didn't think you would really completely shut 'football' out of your life."

"If I said I will means I will." Twain felt that it was only natural for a man to be true to his words.

"Well, I suppose it's good that you are not in the know." Meyer smiled again. "Finding out yourself is always better than finding out from someone else. Also, Mr. Twain, you can stop coming for check-ups so frequently from now on. You just need to come back once every half a year. As expected of a 40 year old. You have recovered a lot faster than I anticipated."

Twain was very happy to hear his words. It is only when you fall sick that you come to realize how importance health is. Now that he has fallen ill, the well wishes that he wants to hear the most from others are not wishes for him to be successful in his work or to have a prosperous year ahead, but rather wishes that wish him the best of health.

They bade farewell to Meyer and exited the hospital soon after. Douglas went to the parking lot to get the car while Twain stood by the side of the road and looked at the newsstand across of him.

A colorful array of newspapers and magazines was put on display before the black newsstand. However, Twain did not cross the road to buy the newspapers in the time it took Douglas to drive the white Mercedes jeep before him.

He might have acted like he was really excited to learn about the news surrounding Nottingham Forest back when he was conversing with Meyer, but now that he truly had the chance to find out for himself, he was getting cold feet. He was quite worried about the news that he would learn, because he suspects that the team is not performing particularly well even if he has not heard anything so far.

The situation was disastrous enough when he was in charge, and he did not think that Dunn could do a better job than him and turn things around. If Dunn could, then surely he would not have not won a single match during that time when he took over when Twain was served a three match ban.

It was not hard to imagine the kind of predicament that Nottingham Forest would be in given how they have no money to buy players and had suddenly lost their manager.

Nottingham Forest was a team that Twain had personally built from scratch. He was very familiar with every area, every component and every person in the team. He could tell the team had not been performing well even with his eyes closed.

Still, he felt that his heart was not fully prepared for what was to come... He was afraid that the news that he would see the moment he bought a copy of newspapers would be news about the team that could not get any worse.

If that were to happen, Twain would probably have to be re-admitted into hospital. However, fainting right before the hospital does make things a lot easier, and he might also get the chance to witness the

prowess of the nuclear-powered pacemaker that was implanted in him, and see if it is powerful enough to let him reach his climax.

Douglas pulled up the car by the side and stepped out of the car to open the door for Twain. He realized that Twain's gaze was fixed on the newsstand across the street.

"Do you need me to buy a few copies of the newspapers for you, Mr. Twain?"

Twain shook his head and got into the car. "No, there's no need for that. Now's not the time yet."

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Shania returned with endorsements from three world-renowned brands after her work in Milan. Her abilities, popularity and Mr. Fasal's means had allowed her trip to Milan to be a lucrative one.

When she learned that Twain's heart was fine, she became so thrilled that she announced on the spot that she was going to bring Uncle Tony back to Brazil for a vacation!

Twain was taken aback. He understood that there was only one reason why they would go to Brazil for a vacation. How could they not meet Shania's parents if they were in Brazil?

How should he handle the situation when he meets her parents? Even if Shania insists that she will not let her parents interfere with her love life, he still feels awkward...

He still remembers the scenes when he last met her parents. It was clear that Shania's parents treated him as a friend who could take care of their daughter in Britain. Yet, during their next meeting, his status would have changed from 'guardian' to 'your daughter's future husband'...

That gap was not something that everyone could accept easily.

However, he could not find it in him to reject Shania's proposal after seeing how excited she was. All he could do was to force himself to bring along a few pieces of summer wear as well as his male nurse Douglas, who was highly conscientious, could cook, could drive, was willing to do anything without complaints, never talked nonsense and was very subservient.

The three of them flew from Britain to Rio de Janeiro the following day.

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Just like the last time he was at Brazil, Twain saw Shania's parents waiting outside the airport the moment they stepped out.

Shania left Twain behind and pounced towards her parents the moment she saw them. Her actions were like that of a child's.

On the other hand, Twain stood awkwardly behind their daughter, with Douglas standing next to him with a solemn look on his face.

How should he address her father?

Address him as "Bruce Tenório", perhaps? Does that sound too distant? After all, I am their daughter's boyfriend...

Or maybe address him as 'Dad'?

Stop joking around! We are of the same age... What's more, I haven't gotten married to Shania yet, that's just inappropriate!

Just call him 'Bruce'? That was how he addressed him previously.

But... Should I really be addressing him in such a chummy way?

As Twain was lost in his thoughts, Bruce Tenório had already reached out a hand towards him. "It's good to see that you have been doing well, Mr. Twain."

And so, he reached out and gently shook Tenório's hands. "Thank you for your concern, Mr. Tenório. It's been a while..." The expression on his face and his tone as he spoke were a little unnatural.

However, Tenório did not seem to mind. He extended his hand to Douglas behind him next.

"Hello, this is the first time we meet, Mr. Douglas. I'm Shania's father, Bruce Tenório."

Douglas shook his hand back half-heartedly.

He was not the main cast over here and naturally did not care about what Tenório thought of him.

Twain looked at Shania who was babbling away endlessly in her mother's embrace. It was the only moment that he felt that all three of them looked like a family. Shania was truly their daughter, and they were truly Shania's parents.

All of them are usually busy with their own lives and only get to meet a few times in a year, which is why Twain has the tendency to forget about the existence of Shania's parents.

The ones who are forgotten are the most troublesome...

Mr. Tenório's lack of enthusiasm told Twain that this trip to Brazil was not going to be easy for him.

Sunshine. Waves. Palm trees. Beach. Beautiful women in bikini... As compared to having a holiday in such a country, I would rather be holed up in my damp and cold house in Britain watching a replay of a football match...

Tenório smiled at the sight of Shania in her mother's arms. "All right, let's save the talk for later, Jordie."

It was only then that Shania let go of her mother and returned to Twain's side. She then reached out and hooked her arm over Twain's naturally.

Twain's body was still a little stiff as he gingerly followed Shania into the car. He did not forget to observe her parents' reactions, and he realized that neither Shania's mother or father appeared to be upset by Shania's gesture.

That was when Twain heaved a sigh of relief.

Shania nestled against him as they sat in the back seat of the car. Twain suddenly felt like he had been acting too cowardly this whole time. Why can't he act like how he did the last time they met and be all smiles and jest? Why is he acting so reserved this time round, almost like how someone acts when they meet someone older than them?

In contrast, Shania has not been holding anything back and she clung onto Twain tightly like an octopus. She paid little heed to Douglas, who was seated next to them and was being a third-wheel.

It seemed like she was intent on showing her parents how far her relationship with Uncle Tony had developed.

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On the way back home, both Tenório and his wife showed concern for Twain's health. They asked him several questions about his heart problems, and the atmosphere in the car could still be considered as amicable.

Once they arrived at Shania's house, they each began settling down in their respective rooms. Shania stayed in her own room, while Twain shared the guest room with Douglas so that it was easier for Douglas to take care of Twain.

After they had settled into their new rooms, Douglas sharp-wittedly went out to the balcony to gaze at the Copacabana beach, leaving behind the other four in the living room.

The red flags in Twain went off. He knew the crux was about to happen.

Shania's mother, Giselle Tenório, looked at her daughter. "Jordie, isn't there something you should tell your parents about?"

Shania pouted and intertwined her arm with Twain's once again. "I thought I've already made things pretty clear."

Twain felt like he could not utter a single word in a family's talk like this. He was almost like a backdrop that one would see at theaters. The only thing he needed to do was to show how deeply in love they were with each other, and... keep his mouth shut unless asked to speak.

Shania's father, Bruce Tenório, opened his mouth to speak. "To be honest, I'm not very surprised at this development." He turned to speak to his wife as he placed his hand gently over hers. "Our Jordie has always been unique as a kid. She never played around with boys of her age. I still remember asking her why. Do you know what she said? She pouted and said 'they are too childish'! Haha!"

Mr. Tenório could not restrain a laugh as he talked about Shania as a kid.

"I will never forget how Jordie looked like as a nine year old as she said those words. She had a look of seriousness and displeasure." Bruno Tenório averted his gaze onto Shania. "We watched that interview that you did in Hollywood, Jordie. I don't have anything else to say. This is an issue that concerns only you. Neither of us have really interfered with what you did growing up. We always gave you as much freedom as possible, and we intend to keep doing that. You have the right to choose who you love or do not love. Your mum and I will never get in your way."

Twain heaved a sigh of relief after hearing his words, and his body that had been stiff all along relaxed as well.

Shania felt the change in tension in Twain's body. She looked up at him and smiled at him, looking very pleased at how things had turned out.

“However, your mum is still very upset at the fact that you did not call to tell us that you have fallen in love with someone, Jordie.” Tenório went on to say.

Shania grinned. “But I brought him back for the two of you to see! Actually, I still have something else on my mind. I plan to get married to Uncle Tony this year!”

Looks of bewilderment were written over both her parents’ faces at what Shania just said.

One look was all Twain needed to know that her parents had not expected her words.

Looks like it’s still not the time to relax just yet...

“You cannot do that!” Giselle’s rejection came out of her mouth without much thought. The smile that would sporadically appear on her face was gone once and for all.

“Jordie, I hope you can reconsider that.” Her father, Mr. Tenório, had a solemn look on his face as well.

“I knew it...” Shania shrugged her shoulders and sighed. “The two of you only give me freedom to decide on trivial things. You will always do this whenever it concerns something important.”

“Jordana.” Her father’s voice became cold quickly. “We might agree to you being in a relationship with Mr. Twain, but that doesn’t mean we agree to your marriage. Marriage is a serious matter. How can you make a decision so easily?”

“Shania, if you were to get married so early, what is to happen with your modelling career? Or your career in Hollywood? Do you understand what a woman needs to sacrifice when she gets married?” These words came from Shania’s mother.

Twain recalled that Shania’s mother used to be a model in the past as well. However, she left the modelling world after getting married to Shania’s father, and has rarely made an appearance on the media since then.

Shania once said that Chinese blood runs in her mother’s lineage, and it looks to be true. There are certain traditional viewpoints that are just hard to rid of...

Shania stubbornly refused to relent. Her obstinate side was beginning to surface again. “If I have the freedom to fall in love with whoever I want, then why can’t I have the freedom to marry whoever I want? I want to get married to Uncle Tony within this year. I know full well what kind of consequences that might bring to my job. I’m not a kid who doesn’t know anything!”

Twain could not help but cough after noticing that the joyous mood they had earlier was about to dissipate. “I’m sorry... Do you mind if I said a few words? After all I did play a role in this...”

All three turned their gazes onto him.

Twain scratched his head, then said, “Where should I begin? To be honest, I only came to truly understand who it was that I loved about three months ago. I’m a little dense when it comes to these things... But Shania has loved me for five years, from the very first time we met. The love that we have between us is very special. At first I treated her as my junior, and I sometimes called myself her ‘surrogate guardian’ in Britain. After all, I’m older than her by 22 years... I can’t escape from that fact. I’m just...” he looked at Bruno Tenório, “Younger than you by a few years, Mr. Tenório. The fact that we

are able to be together now is itself a miracle, especially after how I lived through my heart disease and experienced such a big happening in my life. Shania stayed by my side through it all, even at the expense of her endorsements. I am not a religious man, but I can only thank fate for that.”

“I think I can understand your worries and concern, but at the same time, I can understand Shania’s feelings as well. On 9th September this year, I celebrated my fortieth birthday. Half of my life is gone, and I’m a sick person. I have a nuclear-powered pacemaker implanted over here. I don’t know when I will suddenly... Fall asleep again. To Shania, I am someone who is living in constant danger. She doesn’t know when she will lose me forever, and likewise, I don’t know when I will lose her. Thus, to the both of us, every minute that we can spend with each other feels exceptionally precious. We can’t waste even a minute or a second. The reason why Shania so desperately wants to get married to me must be because she wishes to cherish the present.”

“Shania loves me, and I love Shania. There’s no problem with that. To someone like me who has died once before, there is nothing that fills me with more assurance than waking up and seeing that the person I love is still beside me. The two of you will not be able to imagine just how much I cherish everything that I have in my life right now... Maybe you might even be skeptical about the feelings that I have for your daughter as well. The truth is, I don’t know how many more years I have to live, but there’s one thing that I’m certain of... And that is that right till the moment I die, my feelings for Shania will never change.”

Shania looked on in shock as Twain conveyed his deepest feelings. Even when they were alone, Uncle Tony would always act like he’s the elder, and would rarely be so forthcoming with his words. She thought that the Uncle Tony whom she had fallen in love with was someone who was inarticulate, unromantic and did not know how to sweet-talk.

“So, out of consideration for our desire to cherish the present, I sincerely ask the two of you to agree to let me marry your daughter.” Twain straightened up on the sofa and said the words in a grave tone.

“Uncle Tony...” Shania did not expect Twain to be the one to bring up marriage. She thought that deep in his heart, he actually did not want to get married too quickly.

Shania’s mother looked like she was about to say something, but she was stopped by her husband. Bruno Tenório said with a smile, “As expected of the manager who is known for his eloquence. I don’t doubt the feelings that you have for my daughter, Mr. Twain, just like how I don’t doubt the feelings that my daughter has for you. It’s just that have you ever thought about this, and I’m not cursing you, but your health is truly a worry. If one day you were to suddenly... What will happen to our daughter?”

“Dad!” Shania jumped to her feet. She was very upset that her father had said such words.

Twain tugged on her hand and got her to sit down. Then, he faced Tenório and said, “I can’t promise anything about the future. That is why I only said my feelings for Shania would not change right until the day I die. But, Mr. Tenório, have you not thought about it this way? It does not matter how healthy a person can look, there will come a day when he or she has to die. Maybe they will suffer from a heart disease like me or some other incurable disease, or maybe they will get into a car accident or some other accident... I’m no different from them. Nobody knows when they will die, and nobody knows in what way they will die. Rather than worrying about what happens after death, why not live each day to the fullest? If a fear of what happens after death keeps us from getting married, then I think nobody will

ever get married.” He shrugged. “But, please rest assured that I won’t die so easily, because I want to enjoy all the time that I can spend with Shania. This heart of mine...” he pointed at his left chest, and suddenly sounded valiant, “This heart of mine is nuclear-powered! The duration of its radioactive half-life would be the duration of my love for Shania.”

Shania hugged Twain from behind out of the blue, and buried her face in his shoulder. She suddenly remembered the words that Mr. Fasal told her that afternoon in America.

“The truth is, once you make your way into their hearts, you will receive the warmest reciprocation you can ever get. 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... I need to start racking my brains over what is the best thing to get the two of you for your marriage.”

Hearing his words, Bruno Tenório held out his hands and smiled at his wife. “What more can we say? Even I’ve never said those words to you when I was young, Giselle. The duration of its radioactive half-life would be the duration of my love for you... It seems like our daughter has found the best possible partner for herself.”

He turned to face Twain with a smile on his face. “But Mr. Twain, are you truly prepared to call me ‘dad’?”

Twain had acted like a real man just now, but his words had stunned him.

To call a man a few years older than him ‘dad’...

Shania continued to lean against his shoulder. Her mind was still preoccupied with Twain’s confession earlier, and she was not aware of the predicament that Uncle Tony was in.

Twain could not count on Shania to help him. He was in a dilemma over what he should do for a while, but he eventually decided to make the right choice in that situation.

Forget it, it’s not like we meet each other every day! Let’s just pretend I’m still 26 years old right now!

“Dad!” Twain yelled, his voice sounding stiff.

He did not stop there. He turned to Giselle Tenório next and yelled in the same tone, “Mum!”

Bruce Tenório burst out laughing and he patted Twain’s rigid body. “You are a good man, Mr. Twain. I know I can definitely leave Jordie in your hands. Enjoy the time that you have together!”

Twain broke into a stiff smile.

“Are you hungry? Let’s go eat. We shall treat it as your engagement banquet!”

As he finished his words, he helped his wife to her feet, before the two walked outside together.

Twain got up after them, but realized that Shania was still leaning against him. He turned his head to the back, and saw Shania raise her head, her cheeks visibly flushed. She looked immensely bashful, but there was still a hint of slyness in her bright irises.

“It’s good that I’ve not forgotten this piece of chemistry knowledge... The half-life of uranium 238 is 45 billion years. Uncle Tony, you have to love me for 45 billion years!”

Chapter 717: Here Comes The Wolf

Dunn felt like he was reliving the days before Twain took over his body.

Besides getting busy training the team every single day, he also has to put in time and effort into analysing data regarding their opponents with his colleagues, come up with a thorough plan to help the team win, hold tactical meetings and devise the tactics that the team would employ during the match.

Afterwards, all that was left for him was to wait for the match to commence...

He came to the miserable realization that nothing had changed about him all this while. He still has not improved as a manager...

He was only capable of thinking about all the situations that could arise during the match and prepare for them in advance. Once the match started however, he would slowly lose control over the match. He could not compare to how Tony Twain was able to adapt and alter his tactics based on what was happening on the pitch. Not in a million years.

The team's results were very, very terrible.

His only consolation was that the team did manage to get a win under him.

Both Nottingham Forest and Dunn lived through a dark and gloomy January when Twain was critically ill and his condition was at its worst.

The team kept up with their horrendous performance that they had put in throughout December and did not manage to secure a single win during the first 3 weeks of January. It was only on the very last day of January that they were able to attain a gruelling 2-1 win over Aston Villa in an away game.

That was also the day when Twain announced to the public that he was about to be discharged.

Due to their 10 consecutive losses during December and January, Nottingham Forest slipped further down the ranking table and was ranked 12th with just 36 points at the start of February.

Ribéry's departure from the team had greatly impacted the team's pre-existing tactics as well. When he was still a player for Forest, the left flank was pretty much his own personal passageway. Now that he has left to play for Real Madrid however, the Nottingham Forest whose forte was attacking down the flanks was akin to a bird that had lost half its wings.

Dunn was against the idea when Allan Adams insisted on selling Ribéry for money to help the team through its difficult times. But, who would listen to what an assistant managers says? Did he have a better relationship with the club's owners than Allan?

Moreover, he was not someone who liked getting into a dispute with others. Since the higher-ups in the club had already decided to sell Ribéry, all he could do was to tweak the team's tactics and have the team get used to playing without Ribéry on the left flank.

Perhaps no one in Forest wishes to admit it just yet, but everyone else all believe that it will be impossible for Nottingham Forest to be the champions in any competition for the remainder of this

season. In fact, it will be extremely challenging for them to even qualify for Champions League football next year.

The team finally started playing better after Twain was discharged from the hospital.

Winter was also starting to pass by slowly. It did not matter how far away Spring was... It has to come one day.

The team went undefeated in the league for the whole of February under Dunn, attaining three wins and one draw.

They went up by two rankings as a result, and was ranked 10th with 43 points.

He was also crowned 'Manager of the Month' for February in the Premier League.

It was rare for a young man from China to receive such an honor and thus, it garnered a lot of attention in China. Numerous Chinese media outlets flew over to Britain to gain an interview with the man they dubbed as 'The Rising Chinese Power Amongst International Football Managers'. Dunn's popularity in China went through the roof for a short period of time.

Amidst all the buzz surrounding Dunn, the name Tang Jing shone the most. That was because she could get access to exclusive information that no other news outlets was able to lay their hands on. She considered herself to be Dunn's sole spokesperson on many things related to Dunn.

There were many rumors involving her and Dunn in China. One particular rumor that was widely accepted by many 'gossipers' was that there was something going on between the beautiful reporter and Dunn. They believed that their relationship has gotten so intimate that it has crossed the boundaries of what is acceptable between a reporter and an interviewee. There were speculations that the two were actually a couple, and there were even posts online made by someone who claimed to be a student studying abroad in Nottingham that vividly described how he ran into Dunn and Tang Jing on the streets, and how they were hugging and kissing each other and being intimate.

Tang Jing never tried to defend herself against the speculations. She felt that it was actually beneficial to her job for the public to have such misunderstandings about her relationship with Dunn.

As for Dunn, he never cared about such baseless rumors. As long as there was nothing between him and Tang Jing, he would continue to accept Tang Jing's exclusive interviews and provide her with the information she needs.

Additionally, it was actually a big plus for him to maintain a good relationship with Tang Jing. It was certainly not because of the fact that he would be able to have intimate interactions with a beautiful woman; everyone needs to get that straight, but rather, he could avoid spending time and effort on all the other random reporters from different news bureaus, magazine publishers, tv stations, radio stations and websites from China and focus on his work instead.

However, the enthusiasm and interest that the Chinese and the Chinese media had for Dunn quickly died down soon after. Nottingham Forest suffered a crushing defeat against Mourinho's Inter Milan during the knockout stages of the Champions League.

Mourinho was finally able to clinch a victory against Nottingham Forest, but he did not look particularly pleased with the result during the press conference after the second leg of the match.

The discerning ones would definitely understand the reason behind his displeasure. The team that he won against was a Nottingham Forest led by Dunn, not a Nottingham Forest led by Twain. It was akin to the despair that one would feel after finding out that the person that they had just painstakingly defeated was not the bitter enemy they wanted to defeat.

To Mourinho, defeating Nottingham Forest was secondary. Defeating Tony Twain was his primary objective. It did not matter if Tony Twain were to manage a team that was not Nottingham Forest as long as he could defeat Twain.

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March soon arrived, and Nottingham Forest was still performing poorly. The team have not lost, but had only managed to attain 2 draws and 1 win.

It seemed as though everyone lost confidence in the team following Twain's departure. Ominous signs began to appear within the team as well. The players began to lose the fight and determination that they used to have. They would sink into a state of utter helplessness when the opposing team scores against them, even if the other team was a team that was weaker than them. They would typically give up trying to level the score if the other team continues to lead them by a goal with 10 minutes left in the match.

George Wood was infuriated at his team mates' lack of tenacity. But, he was only the captain of the team, and could never emulate the kind of influence that Tony Twain has over all the players.

The media made the following evaluation of the current Nottingham Forest team:

"Tony Twain has an issue with his heart. Likewise, Nottingham Forest is also having an issue with their hearts. Without motivation and fight, the team is no different from a mid-table team in the Premier League. They absolutely don't look like a team that was crowned two-time champions. The word going around is that Twain is still 'shutting' football out of his life as per his doctor's instructions. I wonder if he would get so angry at the sight of Forest's current state that he would relapse and be admitted into hospital once again?"

It did not matter how skilled Dunn was at training and formulating tactics for the team. Even an outstanding assistant manager like him was at his wits' end about how to deal with the psychological issues of his players.

The bliss that he felt over the team's successes in February had all been washed away to some faraway island. Now, he has to face a team suffering from a low morale every day, and his brows have never eased up.

In April, while Tony Twain and Shania were enjoying their vacation in Brazil after professing their love for each other and becoming engaged, Dunn was all the way in Britain mulling over how to help get the team out of their predicament.

The team's results was akin to the performance of the Dow Jones Industrial Average during the financial crisis after entering April. It kept going on the decline and did not look like it would turn for the better.

On 4th April, Matchday 31, they lost to Everton in an away game 0:2.

On 11th April, Matchday 32, they lost to Wenger's Arsenal 1:3 at home.

On 18th April, Matchday 33, they lost to Ferguson's Manchester United 1:2 at home.

On 25th April, Matchday 34, they drew 1:1 with Blackburn in an away game.

To the British, the cold and damp winter had long passed. It was now spring, the season that signified the resurrection of life.

However, at the City Ground stadium in Wilford, the frigid winds of the winter continued to wreak havoc around every single person related to Nottingham Forest, and they did not look like they were going away anytime soon.

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It was the afternoon of 2nd May, and a game for Premier League's matchday 35 had just concluded.

The Forest Bar was silent despite being packed with people. The final score for the match appeared on the television screen, but no one seemed bothered by what they saw. They had all become apathetic to it. Nottingham Forest had just lost again at home to Bolton Wanderers 0-2.

In the past, the Forest fans would look down on teams like Bolton Wanderers. Forest would never lose against a team like that, even if they were the away team. But now, the tables have turned and they were getting bullied by a team they never thought highly of.

What made them feel even more disgruntled was how the players performed against Bolton Wanderers. They played as though they had no interest in the match at all. The consecutive defeats in the league have caused them to lose their fight completely.

The fans were enraged by what they saw in the players.

"This isn't Nottingham Forest!" Someone broke the silence with a holler. "I won't acknowledge such a team as one that is befitting of the name 'Nottingham Forest'!"

No one echoed his sentiments, but his words did elicit many sighs.

"Tony... How much longer till Tony comes back?" Someone asked in a soft voice.

These words prompted interest from a number a people, unlike the previous comment.

"Don't tell me they have already sacked him? It's been five months..."

"How is that possible? Don't talk nonsense! Dunn's title is still clearly 'assistant manager'."

"What's going on with Tony's condition now? The media can't seem to get hold of any precise information about the matter either..."

"Didn't they say that his condition has turned for the better?"

"Then, if it has gotten better, why isn't he back? Can he bear to watch his football team get bullied by an opponent like Bolton Wanderers?"

“Since it concerns the heart, who can say for sure what’s actually going on with him? I actually think it’s best if Tony doesn’t return to the team during this season. If not he’d probably be so upset that he has to be re-admitted into the intensive care unit.”

“You are right, with how the team is performing right now, we definitely won’t qualify for Champions League next season! Maybe we won’t even qualify for the Europa League too!”

All the discussions ended with a sigh.

Kenny Burns quietly listened to the discussions among his customers as he wiped the glasses in his bar.

The current Nottingham Forest is actually not performing that terribly right now. He has seen worse.

Few would agree with his view, but he did not mind. He believed that Twain would find a way. As a spectator all he could do was to keep waiting and see what transpires next.

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The players had finished showering and changing their clothes, and they all returned to the bus in groups of three or four.

Dunn reclined wearily against the seat in the changing room and refused to get to his feet.

He suddenly understood what Twain was feeling during the final moments of the match against Newcastle.

He must have been exhausted.

Or, to be more precise, mentally exhausted.

Kerslake returned to the changing room to see Dunn sitting in there all by himself.

“What’s wrong, Dunn?” He took a look at his complexion. “Don’t tell me you are suffering from a heart disease as well.”

Dunn forced a smile. “Close to suffering from one.”

Kerslake was well aware of the team’s current situation. There was nothing he could say to comfort Dunn after seeing the state that he was in.

“I feel like I’ve let everyone else down. If Tony was here... He would have told the players off at half-time, ‘You guys actually let a team like Bolton Wanderers take the lead?’ And after that he would have tweaked his tactics and try to get the team to do a comeback in the second half... We might be able to come up with very precise tactics for the team, but we can’t get the players to execute our tactics with zeal.” Dunn shook his head and threw his hands out as he finished his words.

“Dunn, that is not something that you are responsible for. Honestly, you are already doing a great job...” Kerslake could not find the words to console his colleague.

It was inevitable that he would be compared to Tony Twain from the very first second that he took over the job as caretaker manager. The criticisms against the man from China have never ceased now that

the team is not performing well. The acerbic British media seemed to be exceptionally harsh with their criticisms of the Chinese.

Be it charisma or his track record as a manager, Dunn could not hold a candle to Tony Twain.

“I’ve suddenly come to a complete understanding of what Grant must have felt when he was at Chelsea.” Dunn said out of the blue.

That’s right, every manager before him were ‘the special ones’. Their successor was nothing more than an average Joe.

Kerslake found their conversation to be utterly pointless. After all, the problems with the team did not lie solely on the manager, but on the entire team itself.

One particular thought had begun to manifest itself within the team, and that is that since they are not going to be able to win anything this season, why should they work so hard for? All they need to do is to avoid relegation and wait for the boss to return next season and then start all over again under him.

Additionally, rumors about how the team is going to go through a major overhaul after the season ends, and how the club intends to use the money earned from the sale of players into resuming their construction works of the new stadium have never stopped either.

Nobody knew what lies in store for them in a year that is fraught with so many issues.

The issues with the team right now are not just about how they are playing on the pitch. There are also issues with the management of the club.

He did not want to continue discussing about such a depressing topic anymore, so he decided to ask something else for a change. “Has Twain contacted you?”

Dunn nodded.

“How is his health condition right now?”

“According to him, there are no issues whatsoever.”

“Then... Does he know about the current situation of the team?”

“I think he does.”

“Did he say when he intends to come back to the team?”

Dunn shook his head. “No. I think he’d only return after the season has ended. With the team as it is now... It’s pointless for him to come back, right?”

Kerslake fell silent again. Dunn had just brought up a crucial point. Even if he was Tony Twain the ‘King’, he would only get bogged down after he returns, given how the team is in complete shambles currently. He risks tarnishing his prestige and reputation if he returns. A smart way of handling the situation would be to stay away from all the mess and come back when this disastrous season is over. He can then build a new team from scratch and display the control that he has over the team as well.

Kerslake had no doubts that the sly and intelligent man would do just that.

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Twain switched off the television, and shook his head profusely.

Shania looked at Twain nervously from the side, fearful that he would suddenly collapse to the ground as he shook his head.

Douglas was nervous as well. He was on standby as he sat near Twain.

Twain slowly sat down, and did not say a word for a while. It was as though the air in the room had solidified. The room went completely quiet, and the atmosphere felt oppressive and uncomfortable.

Shania asked cautiously after some time had passed, "Uncle Tony?"

Twain looked at her and smiled. "I've realized it, Shania."

"Huh?"

"My heart is truly fine now!"

"Huh?" Both Shania and Douglas were stupefied. What is going on?

"I was able to watch that infuriating match from start to finish. And I still feel well after it!" Twain stood out and started moving his arms and legs about to show that he was feeling well.

Shania led out a long sigh. "Can you not scare others like that, Uncle Tony?"

Twain grinned. "But I was truly very mad earlier. I was thinking that if I was on the manager's seat then, I would have given them a dressing down at halftime, and the words that would come out of my mouth would be as ugly as they can possibly get. I even thought about what I would scold them about as I sat there. I imagined myself to be extremely angry and I kept putting myself in that emotional state because I wanted to see just how far my heart could take it. From how I see it, I think my heart's ready for my comeback."

Seeing that Twain was fine, Douglas used the excuse that he wanted to rest earlier to leave the living room and return to his room. He then closed the door behind him and provided a space for Tony and Shania to speak to each other.

"Uncle Tony, do you really intend to do that?" It was rare for Shania to have such a serious and grave expression on her face as she spoke to Twain.

Twain just smiled as he nodded his head. "Yes. I've thought about it for a while and I feel like I can't escape from it any longer."

"But what difference does it make for you to go back now, Uncle Tony? The team is already in shambles, and there's only a few matches left in the league. Do you think you can lead the team back to the top of the table and become champions again by going back?"

"Ha!" Twain led out a laugh. "Don't even think about becoming champions of the league, Shania. I think it's impossible for the team to even qualify for the Europa League."

"Then why do you..."

Twain reached out and held a slightly discontented Shania in his arms. His hand caressed her lustrous brown hair while his nose sniffed at her hair. The scent of a young woman wafted into his nostrils and left him feeling bewitched.

“It’s not about what kind of results I’d obtain after going back, Shania.” Twain murmured as he closed his eyes. “It’s just that I only truly feel alive when I return to the team. It’s great to live a life with you and Douglas taking care of me, but that’s not the kind of life I want to live. Haven’t you already noticed it? That I seem like a man who has lost all his energy these few months.”

Shania buried her face in Twain’s chest and began to recall the scenes from the past few months. She then realized that what Uncle Tony said was completely right. The Uncle Tony who had left football and his managerial position did not seem like the Uncle Tony from before. She could not understand the reason behind the difference before this, but now she can.

For the past few months, Uncle Tony has been behaving like any other middle-aged man, but the Uncle Tony from before these past few months was not like any other middle-aged man.

He was unique, he was the ‘one and only’, and he was someone who ‘cannot be replaced’. Men like that possessed a distinctive charm. It felt as though blinding lights would burst out from his body at any time. It was completely different, or even the polar opposite of the Uncle Tony who would smile the whole day and listen to everything that the doctor told him, or the submissive and obedient Uncle Tony who would let himself be watched over by a nurse.

One was a fearless wolf who could roam about the wilderness freely and howl at the skies, while the other was a tame sheep who was watched by the sheepdog in the farm.

I wonder which Uncle Tony it was that made me fall so deeply in love with him, regardless of what happened to me?

I am afraid it is not the Uncle Tony that I have seen over the past few months.

She placed her ear against Twain’s left breast. “I can hear your heartbeat... And it sounds a little fast?”

Twain laughed and embraced her tightly. “That’s because I can’t help but feel excited at the thought of the life that I’m about to start living again.”

He raised his head. He felt as though he could already hear the cacophony inside the City Ground stadium: the cheers and songs for Forest, the boos against their opponents, the ear-splitting sound of the whistle going off, and the dull sounds of the football being kicked and bodies colliding with one another...

Those sounds came at him like the waves of the Atlantic Ocean and they stirred him from within. His nuclear-powered heart was starting to get restless inside his chest.

If anyone thinks that I, Tony Twain, would turn into a tame sheep after suffering from a heart disease and lying low for five months, then they are utterly mistaken!

Ladies and gentlemen! Have you all heard of the story ‘The Boy Who Cried Wolf’?

I have never lied. This time, the wolf has really come!

Chapter 718: Tony Twain's Tactical Class

"... The doctor's advice for Tony Twain was for him to wait till the season is over before considering returning to his managerial position. However, word has been going around recently that he wishes to return to the team straight away. Could it be that Nottingham Forest's terrible results have become too much for him to bear?"

"... Quite frankly, I don't think there's much truth behind that hearsay. If Tony Twain is a man of intellect, he will not choose such an awkward time for his return. There are only 3 matches remaining in the league, and the team is destined to finish the season empty-handed. He can't change anything even if he returns. In fact, he could even be made the scapegoat for the team's failures. Is Tony Twain a man of intellect? Surely he is..."

"What I find the strangest is not that he intends to return to his managerial position in advance. Rather, it's that he actually intends to return to the position. Honestly, I don't think he is suited to be a manager any longer given his health condition. He might be a manager who has achieved brilliant things with his team in the past, but I think it would be better for him if he were to end his career here. Given his fiery temper and personality, I'm very worried that his heart would not be able to handle it..."

Most people did not view the news of Twain's premature return to Nottingham Forest favorably when they began to surface in the media.

Carl Spicer, the leading figure when it comes to making anti-Twain comments, wrote the following in his column:

"Tony Twain is done for! His heart will never be able to tolerate the ups and downs of the Premier League! His heart disease has taken away most of his spirit! I heard that he was actually docile when he was watched over by a nurse! That is the most hilarious thing I've heard this year! Look at the results that Gérard Houllier attained when he returned as Liverpool's manager after his hospitalisation... I think the best thing Tony Twain should do right now is to announce his retirement, then work on developing a career at Hollywood with his supermodel girlfriend. It's fine if he can't make a lot of money from it, his young girlfriend is very rich after all... Do you all think I'm making these comments because I'm anti-Twain? That's a shame, because I'm truly concerned about him this time round. To be honest, every single comment I've made so far has been for his own good. I think no matter how much a person might hate him, they wouldn't wish to see him die on the manager's seat right?"

Unlike the other Premier League managers who hope that Twain can make a comeback and triumph over his heart disease, the media did not think Tony Twain would be successful if he were to return to Nottingham Forest.

There were some who felt that he had chosen the wrong timing, and there were others who believed that his heart would not be able to tolerate the stimulations of professional football. Others simply joined in the criticisms against Twain because they felt that the Twain right now was a pushover.

Twain did not publish a single article in any of the newspaper columns for the past five months, and he never accepted an interview as well. There were occasional news about Twain published by Pierce Brosnan about how 'Tony Twain is making a good recovery', or 'Tony Twain is actively training his body',

or 'Tony Twain is in good spirits', or 'Tony Twain and his girlfriend Shania are having a vacation in Brazil', but other than those 'small news', there was nothing about what Twain said in response to the criticisms. He did make any form of rebuttal at all. It was very unlike Twain's personality...

His odd behavior inevitably led people to think that he must have lost his temper as a result of being tormented by his heart disease.

There were even smaller publications that spun a yarn about his treatment process. They wrote that he was forced to undergo a heart transplant, and how he could not let his heart experience the slightest stimulation, or it would result in a relapse of his heart disease...

They were all lies that those media outlets fabricated, but there were people who believed in them. One cannot help but lament at how anything is possible in this world, and how there will always be people who keep breaking the record of possessing the lowest I.Q in the world.

The news that Twain was about to return sent some of the media outlets into a frenzy...

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Today's weather was good by Britain's standards. It was clear throughout the country.

The sun was shining brightly and the sky was cloudless.

The yells of the coaches and the sounds of the whistle going off could be picked up incessantly as the players practised on the training grounds.

The most hardcore Forest fans from all over the world had turned up to watch the team's practice. They continued to show support for the team despite the bad run of results lately. However, they were not just here to watch and support the team. They were also hoping to be able to obtain signatures from the players after the practice was over. It would be even better if they could get a photo with them as well.

There was nothing different about this day in Wilford from any other.

Evan Doughty and Allan Adams were seated in an office that was located within the administrative building at the training grounds. They were looking at a man standing across of them.

The three of them exchanged greetings. The atmosphere felt as though it was about to freeze up afterwards.

The man smiled first. "Why are the two of you being so serious? Allan, did you think I was back to denounce you?"

Allan Adams had made the decision to sell Ribéry when Twain was not around. Twain only learned of the news months later. He was a little mad when he first learned that Ribéry had been sold, but he tried his best to calm himself down, thanks to the doctor's instructions.

He then thought about it once more after he was calm, and he realized that Allan Adams did the right thing. The club needs money and Ribéry was the only player who would fetch a high price in the team. Moreover, Ribéry has made it clear for a while that he wanted to leave. Nothing good happens when you use force...

Truth be told, ever since the day Twain personally went to persuade Ribéry to join Nottingham Forest during the summer, he has always been mentally prepared that there will come a day when he leaves him and the club.

You can't keep Ribéry without money. That guy is afraid to be poor.

What has happened has happened. Let bygones be bygones. There was no need to jeopardise his relationship with his colleague over a player who has left. This was why he did not grab Allan Adams by the collar, and let him see for himself why he is sometimes called 'the hairdryer'.

Evan smiled. "Tony, there you go again with your jokes."

The first thing Twain did upon his return to the club was not to meet with his colleagues and players immediately. He made his way to the Chairman's office instead.

"I just dropped by to tell the two of you that I'm back for work."

"You could have just called if it was for something like that."

Twain raised an eyebrow. "How could I possibly? It's better to say it face-to-face."

"Is your health... Really fine? I've also only just learned of your return from the newspapers recently. I thought it was just a rumor." Evan asked out of concern.

Deep in his heart, Evan longed for Twain to return to the club as soon as possible, but out of considerations for Twain's safety, he never made a call to ask Twain about the date of his return.

It was great that Twain was back... But he still had to say the words that he did out of courtesy.

Twain felt his left breast. "Now I have something extra over here. I can actually feel it with my hands, but most of the time I can't feel its existence. As for my health... I watched the last match that we competed in."

Evan had a slightly awkward expression on his face when Twain brought up the match in which the team lost to Bolton Wanderers at home. It was certainly an utterly humiliating match.

Never mind the fact that the team lost the game. The way that they played without a twinge of fighting spirit was intolerable, even to a chairman of the club who knew nothing about football like him. He could not bear to watch the team play in such a way any longer, and he even discussed with Allan Adams about the players they needed to get rid of in the summer as they sat in their private room.

"I was very mad after watching it, but nothing happened to my heart!" Twain started to laugh. "I think I can start working again. I actually can't wait to start!" He rubbed his hands together excitedly.

He was similar to George Patton who got dismissed after slapping his soldiers in Sicily, in that they both felt deprived of something when they are not working. One would feel dead if you did not let him fight in the war, while the other would not feel alive if you did not let him command a team in a match.

Allan Adams, who had remained silent the entire time, stood to his feet and retrieved a letter off the table before handing it to Twain.

Twain did not understand the meaning behind his actions. Allan pointed at the letter and explained, "Franck Ribéry passed it to me before he left. He told me to pass it to you, if you came back."

Twain looked down at the words 'To: Boss' written on the envelope. He then pinched the envelope lightly. There was only a thin sheet of paper inside.

He slid the envelope into his shirt's pocket.

"You are not going to read it?" Allan was a little surprised.

"Not now." Twain shrugged. "I should get started with my work."

Evan held him back. "Does the team know you are coming back today?"

Twain shook his head and smiled proudly. "They don't. I didn't tell anyone. I want to give them a big 'surprise'!"

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The sun was bright. The grass on the training grounds emitted a musky scent under the sun.

Dunn did not feel warm despite being basked in the sunlight. It was still winter around him.

The assistant manager was distracted and so were the players, who seemed as if they had their heads in their clouds as well.

The season was approaching its end. There has been word going around that the club is in need of funds and would undergo a major overhaul after the season has drawn to a close. Many of the players themselves are also seeking better opportunities elsewhere.

Who would have thought that a team that lifted numerous trophies together last season would be falling apart soon?

Nottingham Forest was destined to become the most dazzling shooting star in the history of British football. Its blinding light lit up half the night sky when it flashed by twice, but it vanished without a trace after making those two appearances.

The season has yet to end, but many of the first team players have received offers from other teams.

As the captain of the team, George Wood was also a player that many big clubs thought highly of. However, his manager, Billy Woxx, was clearly not as fast at dealing with these transfer offers as opposed to clinching endorsements for him. Wood has not given a response to any club that wishes to buy him during the summer transfer window.

It felt as though there was a centrifugal force within the team that was tearing everyone apart. It was sad to see such things happen to the team simply because they had lost their manager.

Kerslake blew the whistle in his mouth. "This concludes our outdoor training. Go for tactical class next!"

A group of people slowly made their way over to the their tactical classroom with their heads hung low.

Their 'tactical class' on the day after a match day would always involve watching a video of the match that they had just played in.

A match like yesterday's... Is there really a need to watch it? Everyone mumbled in their hearts.

Two thick curtains were pulled over the windows in the tactical classroom. It was pitch black inside, almost like the interior of a cinema. The environment was just right for everyone to watch what was being shown on the big screen.

A crowd thronged the classroom after the door was opened. Sounds of people bumping into chairs and crying out in pain ensued. It was only then that someone remembered to switch on the lights.

As the lights lit up the room, a voice rang out by all the players' ears. "Have you all lost your souls? Why wasn't the first thing that you guys did upon entering such a dark room to switch on the lights? To swarm in straight away... What is on your minds?"

When everyone finally snapped to their senses, they realised that there was already a man sitting in the room.

The man, who was seated on the chair next to the computer, had a strong presence about him. His brows were furrowed and he looked a little impatient.

Who else could that be besides their boss, Tony Twain?

The room went muted in an instant...

Dunn noticed that the people before him had stopped moving.

He found it odd. Did they see a ghost?

He froze as well after squeezing his way into the room.

"Hey! Everyone at the front! What are you all doing? Why aren't you moving? Why are you blocking the entrance?" Kerslake's characteristic booming voice rang out from the back of the crowd. He could not squeeze his way through like Dunn, and could only jump about at the back and shout.

Twain did not stand to his feet. He just waved his hands and gestured for the people at the front to enter the room. It was only then that they began to swarm into the room and made way for those behind them.

Only Dunn stood unmoving by the side and did not join the rest in moving forward. Kerslake behaved in the same way as Dunn did after stepping into the room and seeing Twain inside.

A group of people stood wordlessly in the room. Twain was the only one seated.

Twain did not open his mouth to speak. All he did was to scan through the room and look at everyone.

This is his football team...

He stood to his feet shortly after. "I'm here to conduct today's tactical class. Sit down, everyone."

The players took a seat obediently.

Upon hearing Twain's words, Kerslake went forward and intended to put the disc containing the footage from yesterday's match into the computer, but he was stopped by Twain.

"I don't need this. I still remember everything about that match. I also believe that none of you has forgotten about it so quickly right?"

Everyone's hearts fell to the pits of their stomachs after hearing Twain's words. It looks like the boss is very upset and is about to give everyone a dressing down. But, can his heart handle such intense emotional changes?

Dunn wanted to stop Twain from continuing. "Tony, you..."

Twain looked at him. "I watched the entire match from start to finish on the tv and my heart was fine throughout. I decided to come back earlier after ascertaining that it was able to rise up to the challenge. Do you want to know why?" He turned his head to face the players.

"Because I did not want to watch an even poorer and more infuriating match than yesterday's for the rest of my life!"

He raised his voice suddenly, and everyone had their hearts in their mouths.

David Beckham looked at Twain worriedly. He was afraid that Twain would not catch his breath after yelling, and would faint to the ground once again.

To his relief, his fears did not materialise. Twain continued to stand firmly on his two legs and had a solemn look on him.

"Look at what you guys just did... You actually lost at home to Bolton Wanderers! Bolton Wanderers, everyone! You dare to lose against a team like that? What else can you lot not do in this world? Take over Mars or land on the moon?"

It has been five months. All the unhappiness, resentment and passions that he had suppressed within him began to gush out. That meek little lamb who obediently listened to everything that the nurse Douglas said had transformed into a savage wolf who had opened its ferocious mouth that smelled of death and bared its sharp fangs.

"I know the team's results are poor, and I know how difficult it has been. I have nothing to say about our elimination from the Champions League. It is only natural for us to give up on one of the competitions given our current situation. Do you all know this? During December of last year, when the team was going through our toughest times, I prepared myself for the worst, but even then I thought we would only throw away the Champions League. I thought we would be able to stay within the top four... But look at where we are now! 12th in the league! All the media out there has been saying that 'Nottingham Forest can't play football anymore after they lost Tony Twain'. Do you all think I should be happy and proud to hear those comments? Bullsh*t! I feel utterly humiliated! You guys are the f*cking 'Nottingham Forest football team', not some son of a b*tch 'Tony Twain football team'!"

His emotions had run high, and everyone were expecting him to raise his voice once again. However, Twain suddenly stopped and began deeply inhaling a few times. He felt the pressure on his heart after chastising the players. He had no choice but to rest for the moment.

Kerslake hurriedly went in front to support Twain after seeing him in that state, but he was pushed away by Twain. Twain pressed a hand on the table for support instead. "This is nothing. Yours truly has a nuclear-powered heart right here!" He pointed at his chest and told Kerslake in a fierce tone.

“I’ve always looked down on Grant and Chelsea. We’ve always won over them, which was why I always said that we had the psychological advantage over their team. But, in these five months, I’ve been very impressed with Grant’s Chelsea team. Do you guys know why? That’s because just like us, they changed managers mid-season, but they managed to make their way into the Champions League finals! What about you guys?”

“No Champions League’s trophy, no Premier League’s trophy, we are going into next season with nothing! It’s like we are a team that just got promoted into the Premier League! Have any of you gotten sick of being champions? That’s good, we can start all over again next season as a team that has not been crowned champions before! But, I’m not going to hide anything from all of you. Our poor results will lead to financial difficulties. We will need pay for our mistakes this season! Yes, all of us here, including me. Why did I choose this time to come back? It’s because I want to show that I’m a part of the mess that this team is currently in. I have to bear responsibility for what has happened. But!” He raised his voice and pointed at the players before him.

“You guys are not going anywhere next season! You have to atone for what you did! I don’t expect any of you to suddenly go into overdrive and bring the team to the sixth spot. None of our opponents are idiots. But, I don’t wish to see any more of that revolting performance against Bolton Wanderers anymore! How do you think Nottingham Forest managed to reign as champions in Europe for the past two years? If it’s just strength, there are many teams that are stronger than us. What made us champions was our spirit and vigor! Those were what separated us from the other teams. It was something uniquely Nottingham Forest! There are so many teams in Europe, but we are the only team that ‘never gives up’! We can lose, but we cannot surrender! That is a trait of our team that I’m proud about, and it is just like our team’s unique flag. I don’t want any of you to throw that flag away. If you have thrown it away, you better go and retrieve it from now on and stick it right here!” He pointed at the sole of his foot.

Twain became very tired and could not hold on much longer after scolding so much at one go. However, he still straightened his back and waved his hands. “The tactical class ends here. You are all dismissed!”

No one moved. He walked straight out the door.

Dunn chased after him. He was scared that Twain would collapse to the ground once he was out of the door. The scenes of what happened at the end of the match against Newcastle still lingered in his mind, and they would surface from time to time. When he knelt by Twain’s side and watched as his body went into a spasm, he truly believed that the fearless man was going to die that day. It did not matter how much time has passed since then. The fear was still there every time he recalled the scenes.

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“Tony!”

Twain was walking very fast and Dunn had no choice but to jog to catch up with him. When he finally caught up, he was already panting slightly.

Twain stopped and turned his head to look at Dunn. He then smiled at him. “You look even more tired than my heart is. It’s been tough on you for the past five months.”

Dunn shook his head.

“When are you planning to move back into the house?” For the past five months, Twain has been living at Shania’s luxury residence near the Lace Market, and that was also how he evaded most of the reporters. Dunn was the one who looked over and took care of his house at No. 13 Branford Garden Lane for the past few months.

“I guess I will go back tomorrow... Why, did you miss me?” Twain grinned as he teased Dunn.

Dunn was emotionless and made no reaction to his words. Twain’s tease had fallen on deaf ears. Twain pouted in response and said, “I’d go back with Shania tomorrow. If you are free tonight, let’s have a meal together at the house. I need to introduce Shania to you once again.”

“When are the two of you getting married?” Dunn asked. He already knew about Twain and Shania’s engagement in Brazil.

“The summer of this year.”

“So early!” Dunn was taken aback.

“I’m already 40, is it still early?” Twain smiled. “Be my best man for my wedding, Dunn. The wedding ceremony will be held in Brazil. Call dad and mum over. As their... son, I still have not given them anything good so far. This will count as an overseas trip.”

The two chatted as they continued to walk away from the classroom. Neither of them brought up the team’s troubles. All they talked about were the trifles that happened in the five months that they were separated from each other, such as how the house would be cleaned twice every day or how Toto was about to become Dunn’s pet...

They walked all the way to the office. Right before Twain pushed open the door to walk inside, Dunn suddenly remembered something. “That’s right, Chen Jian visited me once during March. He wanted to thank you, but was afraid to meet you, so he only came to find me when he was about to leave. He wants to thank you for scolding him that day. He said your words have allowed him to persevere...”

Twain interrupted him. “I almost forgot about him... You said he persevered?”

Dunn nodded his head. “Greenwood followed your words and picked on his problems every day. He amplified every single problem of his, and used Wood’s training plan to train him meticulously. He corrected every mistake that Chen Jian made, and was even stricter on him than before. But Chen Jian managed to persevere till the end.” Dunn’s face suddenly turned solemn. “But, since the club had to deal with a load of problems, from your illness to the team’s poor results, nobody had time to spare for the youth player who was selected from a talent show. So he returned to China after his one year’s contract was up.”

Twain fell silent for a while after hearing Dunn’s words.

Then, he let go of the handle on the door and turned around to face Dunn before saying, “Let’s go. Follow me over to North Wilford.”

Chapter 719: Little Red Riding Hood and Her Uncle Wolf

Twain and Dunn sat in Greenwood's office, looking at what was in front of them. Both men had very serious expressions.

Greenwood pointed to what they were looking at and said, "This is his training log. Records are made every day as per your instruction."

They were two thick B5 sized notebooks made out of photocopier paper.

Twain certainly could not finish reading the contents of these two books here. He turned to the beginning, then flipped over to the middle, and finally flicked to the back. It was enough for him to draw a conclusion.

"He persisted and completed George Wood's training program at the youth team. To tell you the truth, I'm very surprised by it." Greenwood said beside him, "I could tell George was very strong just by his physique but Chen ... where did the strength come from such a thin figure?"

Twain did not make a sound and continued to look down to flip through the training log.

Greenwood looked to Dunn, who was Chinese, and Dunn answered with a smile, "I don't know. Maybe it was the power of his dreams."

"Dreams?" Greenwood stroked his chin and smacked his lips, "Wasn't it his dream to become a professional footballer? But in the end it didn't come true. And I think he should have known long ago that this was impossible. No club wanted a young man who had only trained for one year, not to mention he was already eighteen years old. Why was he insistent on doing so? Where did his strength come from?"

Dunn pointed his finger at Twain reading the log next to him, "Isn't there a guy here who accepted a seventeen-year-old who only just started his formal football training and developed him to become the youngest captain in Nottingham Forest's history?"

"Stuart Pearce also only started playing professional football at the age of twenty-one." Twain said without looking up. "This kid did a good job... he completed everything well. I thought you lied to me at first."

Greenwood cleared his throat, "Why would I lie to you? To be honest, Chen's drive was amazing. If he had started training here from the age of ten, he would have been able to become a qualified professional football player. But as for now..." He gave a shrug.

Twain closed the notebook and said to Greenwood, "Can I take these back to read?"

"They were prepared for you, Tony. If it wasn't for your illness... You should have read them in February."

"Well..." Twain put away the thick books and said, "It looks like I've missed a lot of wonderful things in the last five months..."

"Is your health all right, Tony?" Greenwood asked.

"You've already asked, Ian. Of course, there's no problem. Otherwise I wouldn't have come back to work... You know how many beautiful Brazilian women there are, heh heh."

Both Dunn and Greenwood ignored his joke.

Twain glanced at the two training logs again and said, “He even gave himself additional training? Dribbled the ball back and forth between here and home every day to participate in the training?”

Greenwood nodded, “Yes, he even did it when he went to the University of Nottingham for his cultural studies classes. John also told me that he saw Chen ran in the street with the football when he got home. His classmates also said he was a ‘weirdo.’ You know, the sidewalks were uneven, and the football always bounced around...”

Twain interrupted his account to ask, “How long did he do it for?”

“Until the last day of his training here.”

Twain stared at the cover of the training log and did not say a thing.

He thought of that muddy face in the wind and rain, the miserable appearance and how it was somewhat in line with the image of the football of that country...

With the terrible defeat of China Olympic team at the Olympic Games, “football” was already a word that almost everyone abhorred in China. The mention of football would inevitably provoke a burst of ridicule, which was almost always the case in both popular and state media. Nowadays if someone announced that he wanted to be a professional footballer, he would be jeered at. As long as a person was playing football, some people would think that he was related to the Chinese Football Association. As long as he did not hate Chinese football, he would be looked down upon ... The wave of fanatical antipathy currently remained in China and was not expected to cool down for years to come.

Twain did not have any special views on this. The Chinese Football Association did this to itself and cannot escape. It’s better to let them die early. Maybe there will be another new lease of life.

But Chen Jian has nothing to do with the Chinese Football Association and it’s not his fault that Chinese football was so dire. He’s not even a product of the system. He’s just a stubborn kid with a head full of dreams.

He gave his best and was exhausted. Had he broken down the wall?

What was his mood like when he left Wilford? Did he regret it? Disappointed? Unwilling to resign to his fate?

I really want to see his face with my own eyes.

When I laid in the hospital bed, I really missed out on a lot.

“Tony?” Dunn saw Twain in a daze for a little too long and called out to rouse him.

“Ah... Ian. I’ll ask you one more thing. How did he perform in the internal game after that incident?” Twain looked up at Greenwood.

“He was a lot better than before, and in the end I could hardly pick out any faults ... If I had to pick on something, it would be an innate factor, such as the gap between his level and that of his teammates who had been training here for a decade. But I couldn’t say that his ability was terrible. For example, in

terms of progress, he was the fastest in the team. But after all, he was nearly a decade behind the average player.”

Twain smiled, “Yeah, he thought it was just a wall blocking the way to his dream. But what is blocking in front of him is not a wall, but a mountain.... Ah, the fool.”

He stood up and said goodbye to Greenwood before he left North Wilford with Dunn.

“What do you have in mind, Tony?” Dunn asked after they left.

“Nothing. I’m going to go back and take a good look at these...” Twain waved the two training logs and said, “I’ll leave the afternoon training to you, David and the others.”

Dunn nodded and said nothing. Twain could not tire himself on the first day back to work. No one would want him to stay here and endure. He needed to resume his work day by day. Anyway, the team’s terrible situation could not worsen anymore. No one would urge Twain to get back to work quickly and guide the team to get back on track.

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Twain had been sitting at the desk since he got home from noon. He carefully finished reading the two training logs. Other than grabbing a meal in the middle, he had not moved from the spot and did not even play provocative little games with Shania. Shania also found that Twain looked serious and focused. She knew it must be an important matter, so she did not go up to him and bother him. She only persuaded Twain to go to bed when it was time to rest. Douglas’ contract expired the day Twain decided to return to the team. Now Shania needed to take care of her beloved Uncle Tony herself. But it was nothing for she had learned a lot of professional medical knowledge and skills from Douglas. She could take care of Uncle Tony alone.

She did not have a job for the time being these days. As Uncle Tony had to be in England, she did not go to Hollywood. Her Hollywood career also seemed to become insignificant. She did not care about what celebrity parties to go, which famous stars to get to know and meet, and all kinds of necessary social interactions.

Twain once asked her the question, and her answer was fairly simple—“Movies have always been my passion. It’s good if it can become my work. But if I have to choose between my passion and Uncle Tony, I certainly won’t choose to go to America.”

“Don’t tell me you have given up on your situation after a year-long struggle in the United States?” Twain felt sorry in his heart for Shania. He knew that once she was far away from Hollywood, she could only get farther and farther away from the land of her dream, even if she had many friends to support her.

“Although I have let Mr. Cruise down a little, for me, nothing is more important than you, Uncle Tony.”

Hearing Shania say so, Twain gave a long sigh, “You’re going to make me feel guilty, Shania. Because I deprive you of the right to pursue your dreams...”

“Come on, Uncle Tony.” Shania pouted, “Don’t forget, four and a half billion years. I already feel that it’s a bargain for four and a half billion years of love in exchange for a movie career.”

What else could Twain say? He could only tightly embraced his young girlfriend.

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Before helping Twain to bed, Shania casually asked, “What were you engrossed in reading? I’ve never seen you so focused on a... book?”

“A dream journal.” Twain rubbed his temples. Although his eyes and mind were a little tired, he was in a good mood. “I was very pleased reading it. I wanted to stop but couldn’t. I just wanted to finish reading in one breath ...Unfortunately, it was cut off before the writing was done. The author was just horrible...”

“A dream journal? Is it a novel?”

“No, a reality TV show.”

Shania shrugged. Her Uncle Tony sometimes liked to say inexplicable things. She was used to it, but it was safe to say that it was something to do with his job. Because that kind of focus only appeared when Uncle Tony was working. It was charming just to look at his silhouette.

After she covered the thin blanket over Twain and kissed him on the lips, Shania got up and turned to walk away.

Although the two people were engaged, they tacitly maintained their way of living at No. 13 Branford Garden Lane—they slept in separate bedrooms. It was such an arrangement even while they were on holiday in Brazil. It started out because Uncle Tony was physically weak, and his heart could not withstand the stimulation. Making love, getting orgasm which would lead to his heart beating overly fast and putting his heart in extreme danger were naturally forbidden. Later on, because the lifestyle became a habit... Shania would not take off her clothes and come onto Twain to initiate sex. As for Twain..... he was accustomed to a bachelor’s life and neglected this area. Coupled with the hope to start work as soon as possible, he had not been in the mood.

But today, after he returned to the team and read Chen Jian’s training logs, he suddenly felt he was in a good mood.

Twain grabbed hold of Shania.

He laid in bed and looked at Shania, who was still dressed like a little girl. The dim bedside lamp shone and penetrated the layer of gauze-like material, fully showed off her fine body curves as a model. Except for a pair of panties, she did not seem to be wearing any underwear. Her youthful naked body exuded a seductive fragrance through the thin top. It suddenly stirred his appetites and he was feeling amorous ...

Shania did not move and leave. But she did not turn her face around and look down at Twain with a smile to say, “What’s the matter, Uncle Tony?” She just stood on the spot with her back to Twain.

“Would you like to hear a story, Shania?” Twain’s hoarse voice came from behind.

“Okay, Uncle Tony. But what’s the story?” Shania still had not turned her head back.

Twain’s hands suddenly exerted force and pulled Shania down in his arms, “Little Red Riding Hood and Uncle Wolf.”

Shania did not play along with him and make a whining sound to act coquettishly as she pounced on Twain's arms. Instead, she screamed, "The pacemaker..." She was afraid that she would fall down and hit the pacemaker in Twain's chest.

Twain made a face and said, "Don't need to worry about that little thing...You're not playing along, Shania. The mood is gone!"

Shania laid on Twain's chest and glanced sideways at Uncle Tony, who had a straight face. Her lips slowly curled up at the corners as she said, "Isn't it supposed to be Little Red Riding Hood and Granny Wolf?"

"Now it's Little Red Riding Hood and Uncle Wolf!" Twain tried hard to look serious and widened his eyes to act as the fiendish Uncle Wolf.

"Is Uncle Wolf hungry?"

"Yes, hungry!" Twain said gruffly. In fact, even if he did not intentionally do so, his voice was hoarse enough ...

"Then in that case, Little Red Riding Hood will go make you a late-night snack!"

Twain did not let go and said, "No, you will run out to call the huntsman. I am not stupid!"

"Oh, what should I do..." Shania said in distress with her head cocked to the side, "Uncle Wolf is hungry and won't let me go..." She thought about it. "There's only one way!"

She suddenly unbuttoned her shirt with one hand and winked at Twain, "Feed Little Red Riding Hood to Uncle Wolf!"

Twain did not stop her too. He just let go of her other hand and put both his hands behind his head. He quietly watched Shania lower her head as she carefully undid each button and gently unfastened. As her top was peeled off, that flawless milky white alluring body unveiled in front of Twain's eyes bit by bit.

He watched her in a daze, and suddenly there was a surreal feeling that he was dreaming.

The beauty standing undressed in front of him, was she really the long-legged Lolita who had annoyed him so much that he wanted to call the police? When he carried and rushed her to the hospital because she was unconscious from a fever, and disturbed Constantine's happy occasion, did he think that there would be a day like this between him and her? When the young cute girl constantly addressed him as "Uncle Tony", was he ever moved to love her from the deepest corners of his heart and wish that she would become his wife?

These past events and his feelings of the time were slowly blurring. Only the bashful body was clear in the dim light.

She opened her arms and leaned down slowly. With her cheeks flushed, rosy lips slightly parted, sweet-smelling breath, her voice spoke from the depths of her throat, as if through a layer of hazy water vapor, "Dear Uncle Wolf, please ... don't hold back..."

An abundance of love flowed within the bedroom as if the two people's intense passion could not be melted.

Chapter 720: The Original Dream

After a night in the throes of passion, he was spent. Twain expended all the energy that he had bottled up for more than half a year. He and Shania did not know how many times they did it. Anyway, it was wild. For a forty-year-old middle-aged uncle who had a heart disease, it could be rated as amazing to have this kind of performance.

Until the mid-morning sun shone through the small crack in the curtains into the room, Shania still laid supine on the bed and was unwilling to get up. When Twain patted her small buttocks and called her a lazy worm, she pouted and groaned, "Who was the one who turned Little Red Riding Hood into a lazy worm?"

After she finally got up and lifted the blanket, Twain found some red spots on the bedsheets. He also understood why Shania lazed in bed and did not get up.

But he was not surprised.

It was not because he thought that Shania should remain chaste and innocent. He was not surprised because he simply did not care if Shania was a virgin or not. He was clear-eyed about the world today and he also knew how the girls of the world were mostly like.

But it had nothing to do with his love. If he loved a woman, he would just love her. It could be he loved her beauty, character, heart, or even her talent, voice, eyes, lips, breasts ... But he would never love a woman for the thin membrane inside her vagina.

Even if he were to get married, he wanted to marry this woman, and not with a "cling wrap."

Therefore, it was fine that Shania was a virgin and it did not matter if she was not a virgin. It would not affect his feelings for this girl. He also never cared about such a meaningless as to whether Shania had tasted the forbidden fruit with another boy before him.

At the thought of how he finally had his fill of the Little Red Riding Hood last night, he felt fantastic. He even could not help licking and smacking his lips as he wanted to say, "Very good, very good, the taste is really good!"

Shania wore only a pair of lace-edged white panties. She came out of the bathroom with her upper body completely naked. Seeing Twain's expression, she wondered and asked, "What are you doing, Uncle Tony?"

Twain laughed mischievously when he saw her perfect body curves and seductive breasts, as well as the faintly discernible scenery behind her lace panties, "Little Red Riding Hood is delicious..."

When Shania heard him said so, she walked directly over and straddled between Twain's legs on the bed. Her waist sank slowly as she looked at Twain with her dark eyes, "Do you want to have breakfast, Uncle Tony? Look, it's hungry again..." She gently held Twain's naughty little brother with one hand.

Twain remembered that he still had to go to work today. If he really let Shania sit down like this, he was not certain if he had the willpower to make sure he would not spend the whole morning in the bed.

“Eh... better forget it. I still have to go to Wilford...” He raised his hands in surrender, “And you to have to get ready for the move... Another thing, is it really okay to move over and be seen by the media?”

Little Red Riding Hood leaned down to give her Uncle Wolf a good morning kiss and let him go.

“You and I are both public figures, Uncle Tony. We are long used to the media’s attention on us. As long as they don’t rush into the bedroom and film our lovemaking, they can pay follow whatever they want.” Shania was more at ease than Twain in her attitude toward the media. “And...” At this point, she smiled slyly, “I’m kind of looking forward to the media’s reactions when they find out about our engagement... That must be fun!”

Twain gave a light affectionate pat on her smooth back. Shania sensibly let go to allow him to slowly sit up from the bed and get dressed. Being together with such a lively and lovely girl, he would not find his days boring. He could not ask for more in love.

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After breakfast, Shania drove Twain to Wilford and returned to prepare for the move—in fact, there was nothing to prepare for. There were just two suitcases of clothes, which could be just put in the trunk of the car for the move.

Twain walked alone into the still-empty training ground. The team would start the training at ten o’clock and he came slightly early.

The three standard football stadium-sized training grounds were connected together. At a glance, it was an unobstructed view of green, which made him feel carefree and relaxed. He could not help but take a deep breath as he avidly sniffed the familiar smells of this place.

It was only when he came back here that he felt that his body strength had not vanished. A voice beckoned to him, telling him that this was the home of his soul.

Stepping on the turf carefully cared for by the workers, Twain did a little warm-up exercise and then put his hands into his pants’ pockets. He touched on a piece of paper—an envelope, to be exact.

He then recalled that Allan Adams gave him a letter yesterday and said that Ribéry had given it to him to pass it over to him when he left.

Although he had already left and yesterday’s time was gone, they had interacted with each other for four years after all. Twain was still curious about the lad who left in pursuit of money and what he wrote in the letter.

He pulled it out and opened it.

A thin piece of paper was shaken out.

“Dear Boss,

I’m really sorry to have chosen to leave Nottingham Forest at this time. I don’t care that they reproached me as a deserter. It also doesn’t matter to me what others think of me. I just want to apologize to you... You may despise my actions. I can only say that for the sake of my family, Spain is more suitable than here.

Of course, I write so much not to justify what I've done. Has any player ever written to the manager to explain the reasons he left a team? So, this is not an explanation. I just want to thank you. Franck Ribéry is not a fool. Who gave him the chance at the lowest ebb of his life? I remember very well. I've learned a lot and gained a lot in the four and a half seasons at Nottingham Forest. It will be a valuable asset in my life experience. Now I have to say sorry to say that I'm embarking on a new journey. I don't know if I'll have a chance to play under you, boss. But it had been a fantastic four-and-a-half years.

I've always been reluctant to say this. But objectively, my departure has helped the team solve a little bit of the financial problem—fifty-five million euros. If it wasn't for the economic crisis, I might have fetched a better price. Sixty million, eighty million? I do not know. We all knew what the second offer entailed before Piqué left. Perhaps in your mind, a person like me is different from Piqué. But in fact, it was the last goal I could bring to the Forest team. If you still watch La Liga, take a good look at our performance in El Clásico. I hope it doesn't disappoint you.

Finally, after I finish writing this letter, I will completely be a Real Madrid player. In the future, if we do meet on the pitch, I may very well do my best with the goal of beating your team like Bendtner. Don't get me wrong—I know you can be a little paranoid—I just want to prove that the players who come out of Nottingham Forest are the best anywhere! If I say I am going to score two goals against the Forest team by myself, will you say, 'I believe he will, because he has that ability.'?

Yours Sincerely, Franck Ribéry, whom you picked up from Ligue 2.”

Twain stood on the training ground in a daze and let the cool breeze blowing in from the Trent River to sweep past him, fluttering the letter in his hand.

After a long time, he gave a sigh and came out of his reverie. He wanted to take out a lighter to burn the letter. But when he reached into an empty pocket, he recalled that he had long quit smoking, so he naturally did not have to carry a lighter.

He folded the letter back into the envelope and slowly tore it into two halves, four pieces, eight pieces...until it finally became countless pieces of debris. With a toss from his hand, it was swept away by the wind.

Score two goals alone?

If you dare say that, I'll teach you the same lesson as I gave Bendtner, Franck!

You want to run away like this? Not so easy. The next time we meet, be prepared to take my anger! You bastard!

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Twain stood on the sidelines with his sunglasses on for the morning training again, just like he did before he fell ill. The team's morale also seemed to recover all of a sudden like it was before. George Wood was even more energetic. The team was slowly improving, and Twain thought of another thing. People here might have heard about the matter, but they were more likely to treat it as meaningless speculation from the media.

Just before the training began, Allan Adams came looking for him and told him that because of the team's poor results in the season, their revenue had plummeted after they ended up empty-handed.

The budget was tight in all areas for next season. Therefore, the team had to sell some players in the summer in exchange for money. Twain could go to the transfer market to buy new players, but there was a severe restriction on the price.

Allan hoped Twain could draw up a purge list for him to help him determine the budget estimates for the new season.

Currently, the players who could stay or go in the team in front of his eyes could all fit on an A4-sized sheet.

This time, Twain did not make a big scene with Allan in the office and vehemently against the club selling people. He just nodded and agreed. He did not say anything else.

He understood that this was the reality.

What was the reality? It was that people had to eat, live their lives, survive, and to live on. The same went for the club...

Who among these people could eventually stay in Wilford?

Twain began to plan in his mind.

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After the training ended, Twain took Dunn and went to North Wilford. Dunn was not surprised by it—him thought Twain was going to dig up talent himself for next season.

But what Twain's actions firmly took him by surprise.

"Ian, I've finished reading these two records." Twain was in Greenwood's office, putting two thick training logs on the table and said, "I went through them in one shot and I'm still not satisfied yet."

"It's nice that you like it, Tony." Greenwood took this as Twain's affirmation of his work. He replied with a chuckle. But Twain's next words stopped his laughter.

"Why are there not a third and fourth book? His story is not over, and I haven't seen the ending yet. I've made up mind." Twain's finger stabbed at the training log, "You're going to take him back to training soon, Ian."

The other two men in the room were baffled and did not understand what Twain said.

Looking at their puzzled expressions, Twain continued to say, "I mean, I'm going to give this kid an apprenticeship. The club will handle the transfer procedures and apply for a student visa for him to register with the Chinese Football Association as a player ... Then let him come here and write an ending!"

"Tony!" Dunn exclaimed. His behavior could be considered a gaffe based on his usual conduct. But he did not care about these details. "Do you know what you're doing?"

"I'm very clear, Dunn. I want him to come and train under me."

“Tony... Why would you do that? He has already left. Surely there’s no need to get him back, is there? Although I also admire Chen’s efforts and spirit, he is not an amazing young talent for us... I don’t think we will reap any rewards from putting our energies on him.” Even Greenwood, who had watched Chen Jian trained all year, disagreed.

“It’s up to him to get something in return, and it’s our business whether to give him the chance or not. I think I found a piece of rough stone in those two thick logs, a rough stone in which a brilliant diamond might be enclosed within.”

“Maybe there’s nothing, and it’s a just stone.” Dunn finally calmed down.

“There has never been a one hundred per cent talent in the world. A genius may become mediocre, and a good-for-nothing may become a talent. I believe my foresight, Dunn. I believe more in this boy’s efforts. Maybe it’s going to take longer, but I think we’ll always get something out of it. For a lad who could persist for a year based on George Wood’s training standards without giving up and done a good job, I think he can succeed.” At this point, he looked at the two men and said seriously, “This is the final decision, Ian, Dunn. I’m going to give him a chance. Just like when I gave George Wood a chance outside the ghetto.”

Dunn frowned and said, “Do you know what kind of media attacks you’re going to provoke by doing this? They’ll say you must be crazy to actually have high hopes for a Chinese kid chosen from a talent show. Others will also think that you’re just keen on the market of the country he represents...”

Twain interrupted him, “I don’t need the media’s validation in order to do what I want to do. They can admonish all they want. I’ll just do what I need to do. They have no right to interfere with my freedom. That’s it, Ian. When the boy comes, please give him George’s training plan and let him continue to do so. Let’s see what he can do for us as he perseveres.”

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In Tianjin, China.

At the Tianjin Justice Jingtuan School.

Chen Jian had just come out of the school building, holding a pile of books and wearing a navy-blue uniform, which looked no different from the standardized Type 99 police uniform, except that he did not have a collar badge, police rank and shoulder emblem.

His companion greeted him, “Ah Jian, let’s play football later! You’re the core, you must be there!”

“Okay, I’ll come after I go to the dorm and put my stuff.” Chen Jian did not refuse.

In fact, he had things on his mind just now.

Having been back for more than three months from England, he found himself completely unable to forget every single day and night he spent there, and even felt that it was no longer important to continue to study here.

Even though the name of the school was flashy, in fact, the standards was rather average and a vocational academy. Everyone would either go out to earn a living after graduation, or they would

continue their studies at a university. If anyone thought that he could be police officer of the People's Republic of China once he entered, then the reality might disappoint him.

He had not found where his future laid in reality at the moment.

As for his dream future...

Had it already bade him farewell?

Although he still tenaciously carried out his personal training with whatever available time he had every day, a habit which he had developed in Nottingham, he was willing to admit that it was nothing more than a habit. A year of training life bore too deep an impression on him, that it was almost imprinted in his bones. It was rather difficult to forget in a few months.

What's the point of this foolish behavior? Knowing that I'm not destined to realize the dream, what's the use of such persistence? What else can I do if I can't be a professional player? Apply to become a security guard after graduation? Or to rely on connections and use money to enter by the back door and get an assignment? Or continue to sit for the examinations to enter the university, go for tests in the academies directly under the Ministry of Public Security, and become a real policeman after graduation...

But with my own academic performance, plus the delay for this due to my trip to Britain, will I still have a chance if I sit for the test from that kind of university?

Chen Jian felt very lost.

When he went to England, it was the three of them, and it was still three people when he returned to China. Unsurprisingly, no one received the "reward" of staying on the professional team. Even so, Chen Jian was quite popular among the students who liked football in the school. His good friends always liked to pester him, hoping to hear him talk about what real professional football was really like.

He did not turn down these curious classmates. But whenever he talked about the past events, the floodgates of his memory could not be shut. He felt unwilling to resign to his fate.

He recalled again the scene where it was raining that day when Tony Twain yelled at him. Every remark and each single word rang in his ears and he was unable to forget.

"... When you return to China, are you honestly going to go back to your studies, graduate and look for a job? And then will you be satisfied with occasionally playing amateur football with a pot belly? When you're old, you're going to brag to your grandson and tell him about how his grandfather once trained for a year in the UEFA Champions League champion's youth team, Nottingham Forest! What if your grandson asks you what happened after that year? What are you going to say? You say— ah, your grandfather was so bad at a team game that he gave up and left crying back to China...."

I did not give up. I also did not cry and run back to China. But that doesn't change anything, Manager Twain. I am still me, in this vocational academy, feeling lost about my own future.

Do you understand, Manager Twain? Can you understand my situation and mood?

I fully appreciated the cruelty of professional football, experienced my own gap between them. But it's only a year ... One year was not enough for anything! I had worked very hard. I wished I could be doing

header shot drills instead of sleeping. Why did you only give me a year? Why couldn't I have started regular training from the age of ten like the players in the youth team...

Ah, I want to play professional football, I want to be those star players who can only be seen on the television. I even believe that given a few years, I will be just as good as them. I can stick it out no matter how hard, exhausting, and brutal the training can be. This time, I promise absolutely not to give up. I'll persevere and be strong, like my name.

But why was it only one year...

I had just stepped on the threshold and the door was closed. What can I do? If I had a lot of money, I would have emptied my pockets to buy Nottingham Forest and changed nothing. It would be just to give me a chance and give me more time...

A year ago, I thought a year was enough, and many people could have dreamed and would not necessarily have the time and opportunity of a year. But a year later, I now realized that a year was only enough for me to get superficial knowledge.

What's the use of understanding this?

Chen Jian laughed at himself and entered the dormitory.

"Ah Jian, are you back? Just in time!" His dormitory roommate jumped out of the bed and said, "Someone called you just now. I said you were out and hadn't returned from your class. He said he would call again later."

Chen Jian was surprised. Who would call him? "Did he say who he was?"

"He did not say, and I forgot to ask too... Do you still want to play football? Or are you going to wait here for the call?" His roommate picked up the grubby football and headed the ball in the dormitory. "Hey, catch the ball!"

He headed the football toward Chen Jian's head. Chen Jian lifted his leg instead and firmly stopped the falling football at his feet. The entire routine was deftly executed at will, as if it was unintentional.

"Well done, Ah Jian! You've gained a lot in a year in Britain!" His roommate complimented him, and yet it upset Chen Jian. "I'll say, real professional football is definitely different! I guess if their youth team were to play directly in the Chinese Super League, they would definitely be a Double Winner? But if Arsenal's youth team were to come, I think they can still be the runner-up! Well, well, I want to go to England too... Although it's only one year, I will die without regrets if I were to be able to experience the world's leading level!"

Chen Jian returned the football to him and said, "Aren't we playing football? Let's go."

"You're not waiting for the call?" His roommate pointed to the telephone.

"Not going to wait. It's probably to ask me to play football." Chen Jian put his books on his bed and began to take off his school uniform to change into his sports gear.

"Hey, you're popular since you came back from your studies in England... Then I'll go first!" His roommate called out and rushed out the door with the football.

While Chen Jian was wearing his boots, the telephone on the table suddenly rang.

Chen Jian stared blankly for a moment before he went over to answer the phone. "Hello, 705, who are you looking for?"

"Is Chen Jian here?" A man's voice came on.

"This is he. May I ask who you are?" It was probably the person who called him just now.

"I'm Dunn. Hello, Chen Jian. Fortunately, when you signed up for that event, you left your dormitory phone number. Otherwise we really don't know how to contact you ..."

When the man gave his name, Chen Jian thought something was wrong with his ears.

"Someone here wants to talk to you..." Dunn did not wait for Chen Jian to say anything, and just handed the phone to another man.

"Chen Jian, I'm Tony Twain!" A man with a voice full of energy sounded in the earpiece, and he spoke in Mandarin.

Chen Jian was jolted into awareness by the voice, but still could not accept the reality for a while—why did Nottingham Forest's manager and assistant manager called him?

"I have a question for you now, Chen Jian." Twain spoke as if he was talking to himself on the phone and completely ignored how Chen Jian would feel after hearing his name. "Do you still remember... your original dream?"

The original dream? How can I forget? To play football! To play professional football, like the star footballers on TV!

"To play football and play professional football." Chen Jian stood straight and replied.

"Very good." Twain smiled and said, "Remember what I said to you? Professional football is definitely not as simple as you think, and a dream is not..."

"... something that can be achieved just by talking." Chen Jian and Twain said the latter half of the sentence together.

"Ha, it looks like you haven't forgotten. That's good. I don't want to get back a good-for-nothing loser that have long since given up and can't remember that year."

"I haven't forgotten every single day of that year, Mr. Twain."

"Well, Chen Jian. Then listen carefully next... To you, the road to your dream had come to a dead end. What do you think is blocking in front of you? A wall? No, no, no, I want to tell you now that it is not a wall, but a mountain that is blocking your way forward! If you have to realize that original dream, what are you going to do, Chen Jian? Answer me."

Chen Jian thought about it, and then replied in the tone reserved for answering the instructor, "Dig through it, sir!"

He heard a burst of laughter from the receiver, in which Twain's voice came on intermittently amid the laughter, "Dunn, did you hear what he said? Dig through it! Dig through it! Hahaha! Do you still doubt my vision? Have you heard how many people would answer this question? Dig through it, dig through it... That's the best answer I've ever heard!"

Then Twain's voice became clear again, "Very well, student of The Foolish Old Man Who Removes the Mountains. I'm giving you the chance to dig through the mountain! I don't care how long you're going to take. In short, I want you to dig through the mountain! Do you understand? It's to dig through, not go around it... You can't get around it at all. The mountain props up the sky and is grounded. It stretches continuously from left to right around the earth. You can't get around it. It's either you turn and walk back, or you'll dig through it for me! This is the last chance given to you to choose, A, you can continue to stay in that school and accept the facts; B, leave the place and come here to be the foolish old man who removes the mountains! I must remind you that once you choose B, there is no turning back. You cannot go back to the school to continue your studies. Your life may change dramatically. Please carefully consider before you give me an answer. I'll leave you the contact details..."

Before Twain could finish, he was interrupted by Chen Jian's determined voice.

"B. I choose B, Mr. Twain."

Twain did not expect Chen Jian to give the answer so soon. He was somewhat taken aback and asked in return, "You don't think things over? Are you really not going to think about it? Is it okay? This concerns a big turning point in your life. Are you really not going to seriously think it over or discuss it with your parents?"

Chen Jian raised his fist on the other end of the line and said, "Mr Twain. This is the only path for me. In order to realize my original dream, I am willing to pay the price."

All of a sudden, he was not lost. The problem that had perplexed him while he walked all the way from the school building just now was easily resolved!

The reality of his future of and the future of his dream were at a confluence here, and then merged into one road, where it was paved under his feet. When he looked up ahead, it was the dark and black mountain which stretched from the sky to the ground and spanned for thousands of miles till he could not see the edges. It coldly overlooked him.

Was there not a way?

No. Once he dug through the mountain, the road would be waiting for him on the other side.

At that time, he would see a whole new world, which was completely different from the prospects here. There would be nothing to stop him. Even if the path was dangerous and difficult with high mountains to climb and rivers and oceans to cross, he would not let them stop the pace of him running forward.

With the original dream tightly grasped in his hands, how could he give up halfway on the road to the place where he wanted to go the most?

He would definitely arrive at his original dream. He! Would! Absolutely! Arrive!

“Very good! Twain’s voice became serious too, “I’ll remind you for the last time. You’re not an official Nottingham Forest player even when you come here. You’re just an apprentice. I will not give you any guarantees. I make no promises that you will certainly become a professional player and definitely achieve your original dream. Don’t even get any ideas now about the opportunity to represent the First Team to play! The club can’t promise you anything. Wages, package, contract guarantees... nothing cannot be promised. We’ll give you nothing except this chance. Maybe you’ll train till you’re twenty-six years old and can only be in the reserve team, or simply be eliminated and can only go to those semi-professional teams to get by. Feel free to imagine worse scenarios ... so, do you still want to come?”

“Yes!”

“Do you want to come even if you bet on the future and destiny of your life?” Twain raised his voice for the question.

And Chen Jian almost roared to him,

“Yes!!”

“Very well, kid! I’ll be waiting for you, in Wilford, Nottingham, I’ll wait for you!”

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Twain was suddenly stirred by Chen Jian’s tone. He felt his body burning with fervor, and even used force when he hung up the phone.

Dunn was a little surprised, “You just hung up like that? I wanted to talk to him about some specific things...”

“You can just call back again.” Twain waved his hands, “It takes little effort. Ah, Dunn, I’m suddenly not interested in Chen Jian’s dream... I just want to see his performance on this road. As far as the goal is concerned... it has become complimentary.”

“Do you really believe he can do it? I’m afraid more people will just laugh at him for overestimating his capabilities.”

Twain gave a snort, and returned to the cold manner from before, “Everyone in this world who feels “more clear-headed” than others, has reached the point where the so-called wise man is dime a dozen, and wise men are everywhere. But I think it’s better to have more foolish old men. Because whatever difficulties the wise men encounter, they will always shake their heads and say that it is impossible, that it will not work. But the foolish men will be willing to do the hard work to try till the end. Taking the road into the dark can perhaps lead to the dawn? If he, Chen Jian dares to bet on the future of his life to come here to dig through the mountains, I’ll dare to accompany him to the end! If someone wants to mock, then let them ridicule and see who has the last laugh!”