

Champions 901

Chapter 901: First Victory

When England scored a lucky goal to come from behind and lead the game, loud jeering could be heard from the stands of the Crimson Stadium which puzzled the England players. Logically speaking, the national team would never be treated this way when playing in any stadium in its home country, so why were they booed?

They were mistaken as they were not the target of the boos. The boos were targeted at Tony Twain, who was seated in the manager's seat with his legs crossed, no expressions of his face...no, he seemed to be pulling a long face.

Bill knew why Twain was indifferent to the fact that England was leading. After all, he was the fan who was closest to Twain and he knew a little about Twain's personality and how he behaved. He understood that Twain did not want to provoke the massive amount of Nottingham Forest fans and their players.

However, that was precisely why Bill was even more furious.

He was angered by Twain's acting.

You've already left us, why are you acting like a good guy in front of us? Why can't you play a real baddie for once? Let us vent all our anger and dissatisfaction to our hearts' desire? Since you're already gone, why are you afraid of offending us? Do you know how much you've offended us already? Tony! Are you hoping to come back and become Nottingham Forest's manager again one of these days? If you're coming back, why leave us in the first place? Us fans, who've been following you, what exactly are we in your eyes...nay, in your heart? A toy that you can discard and pick up again at will?

I'm very sorry, Tony. We're humans who are very much alive. We have feelings too. You've brought us joy previously, but no amount of joy can make up for the hurt that you caused us this time. Did you think about how we felt when you were enjoying yourself in Brazil after you decided not to extend your contract?

The sky collapsed on us!

Bill led his buddies on the stands as they "presented" their wildest jeers to the man whom they used to cheer and worship before.

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Amidst the jeering, Twain lowered his gaze and lost himself watching the tip of his shoes.

Des Walker looked at him with some concern beside him, as if he was afraid that Twain would not be able to take the abuse.

This man was really going against the whole world... There used to be the Nottingham Forest fans who would support him unconditionally but what about in future? If results did not go his way, Walker could imagine the media condemning him through both in speech and writing like a storm. When that happens, who would still be behind him to support him?

“Don’t worry about me, Des. I was just thinking if it’s time for me to change a new pair of shoes,” Twain said suddenly while looking down. His voice was still clear amidst the booing all around them.

Walker turn back and brought his gaze towards the pitch.

“Martin O’Neill will not allow the score to stay this way till the end of the game. He’ll make a series of changes later. Let’s wait and decide on our changes accordingly after looking at his adjustments,” Twain said. Walker nodded in agreement to his plans.

“Before that, ask the team to play on the counter.”

Twain gave the task of giving the latest instructions to the team to Walker instead of shouting it out to his team himself. Apparently, he still had some qualms regarding the booing around him.

After booing wildly for a period of time, the fans grew tired and they decided to place their attention on the match again.

Martin O’Neill was indeed unhappy with this result. He was of the opinion that even the Nottingham Forest reserves would be a stronger team than Twain’s England C team, there was no reason for him to lose to a team like this at home.

At the same time, he also knew very well that Evan Doughty at the VIP box would not want Nottingham Forest to lose in the game that commemorated the use of the new stadium, especially not to Tony Twain. This was a match that he had to win.

Even though the players on the field were better than the substitutes, O’Neill still decided to change them.

The foul by Pepe suddenly planted a thought into his head. Usually he would have laughed off a thought like this, but today, in this match, this situation, facing an opponent like this, he had to give it a serious consideration—The old players in Nottingham Forest, were they loyal to Forest or Tony Twain? If Tony Twain had accepted the invitation by Manchester United, how many of them would follow their respected teacher to Old Trafford?

This thought bit on to his sense of reasoning like a viper, and even though he knew it was absurd, he could not stop its spread.

He decided to bring off the players who were suspected to be “in cahoots with the enemy”, no matter how good they were.

Who could he rely on next?

Those substitute players who were promoted from the youth team, they hardly had any relationship with Twain, and they were hungry to play, hungry to demonstrate their abilities. They had stronger fighting spirit than the first team players, and they had the desire and reasons to fight. This was the kind of Nottingham Forest that Martin O’Neill needed.

Pepe was the first one to be brought off. He was even booed by the fans when he was leaving the pitch, but he still raised his hands to applaud the stand. Twain watched him quietly from the side as he completed his own send-off through such a method. He felt sad inside, but one could tell nothing from his expression.

He was replaced by the Cameroonian Nkoulou. Standing tall at 1.88 meters, he could play as a right-back or a center-back.

Next, Gareth Bale was brought off for Joe Mattock.

A minute later, Aaron Mitchell was brought off too. He was replaced by the Chilean striker, Nicolás Millán.

After that, Rafinha was brought off for John Bostock as O’Neil decided to change his formation from 442 to a more offensive 352 formation.

For those fans wishing to watch the performance of their favorite football players, they were definitely unhappy with these substitutions. However, O’Neill could not care less about what the fans thought at that moment. He did not want to lose to Tony Twain, especially not as the new manager of Nottingham Forest.

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Shortly after O’Neill made his changes, Twain made some changes of their own. O’Neill believed that he lacked players with the will and reasons to fight, but Tony Twain did not. He would pat every player that he brought on on the shoulder and hinted to them that they would have the chance of being included in the next call-up to the national team if they performed well. It would not be just a friendly game then, but it would be the qualifiers for the 2016 European Championship held in Spain.

These players knew what that meant of course, and they had no reasons not to do their best in this match. The league would have only started for a month when the next national squad would be decided. It would be difficult to persuade the national team manager with impressive performance in the league matches then. The fastest and convenient method would be to perform well in this game and demonstrate their capabilities to the national team manager right in front of his eyes.

There might be some players who did not think much about this manager who had many different rumours floating outside. However, as professional players, they were very clear about a fact—No matter what they thought about this manager, he was their boss now and he would decide your fate in the national team. If they wanted to play for their country, they had to make him happy.

O’Neill almost brought off his whole starting line-up, and Twain did the same.

Both sides were full of fighting spirit and they were unable to get the better of each other.

During the last five minutes of the match, O’Neill stood on the sideline and focused on what was happening in the match on the pitch with anxiety. He did not have wild hopes of them “winning” anymore, all he wished for was for his team to equalize so he “would not lose”.

However, his wish was not fulfilled. Twain parked the bus against him. The Nottingham Forest team lacked experience without the first team players, and they could do nothing against this England team. When the referee blew the whistle for full time, it almost served as an announcement of Tony Twain winning his first match in-charge of the national team.

The commentator was not very fired up when announcing the result as the result that he wanted to see the most did not happen—Tony Twain’s humiliation.

Boos rang all around the Crimson Stadium when the referee blew for full time. Amidst the sounds of such jeers, Tony Twain stood up and walked towards O'Neill, the expression of happiness for happiness continued to be absent from his face.

"It's a pity, you could have won," Twain said while shaking O'Neill's hand. If O'Neill had not brought off so many first team players at a go, Forest could really have equalized or even come from behind to win it at the death. At the very least, after Bale was substituted, Forest had no set-piece specialist anymore and England could commit tactical fouls in their danger areas at will without any worry of being pegged back by the Welshman.

O'Neill might have understood what Twain meant, or he might have not. No matter what, he did not reply and merely forced a smile, then let go of Twain's hand and turned to walk away.

Twain looked up at the stands; there were people leaving the stadium and there were also people still booing him. He did not know what these people booing him would think had they known the truth behind it, but he did not want to give them a vengeful middle finger in return, that would be pointless. A day as husband and wife meant there was a bond for a hundred days, he had been worshipped by these people for a good ten years, being booed today was nothing.

Twain realized that he was feeling more liberal after winning and he did not have to care about those boos as he was in a good mood. Besides, he knew that he had threw a spanner into the works of Evan Doughty's celebration which fulfilled that bit of vengefulness that he had, so there was no need for him to continue being harsh.

The reporters were very unhappy as Twain did not express his specialty of speaking without thinking in the press conference later. His words flowed like water and there were only good words. The return of the previous Forest manager to Nottingham was supposed to be a very newsworthy lead, but Twain's uncooperative attitude meant that they were not able to come up with anything interesting.

The reporters did their best but they were unable to trick anything of value out of Twain's tightly-shut mouth.

There was a reporter who wanted Twain to analyze the performance of his opponents in the match. This was a very normal question, but that reporter planned to make Twain talk about Nottingham Forest.

Twain did not bite, he simply said, "They are a very strong team, they were unlucky not to win." Immediately after that, he probably felt that this was unjust to the team that he was currently managing, so he added, "Of course, we performed better, and victory should logically go to the team which performed better."

This was the first time he spoke of Nottingham Forest, and even though it was just to answer a very regular question, the reporters felt encouraged. Another person stood up and asked, "George Wood was in a poor form during the World Cup period and you even defended him then. What do you think about his performance in this game?"

Twain took one look at that reporter, then glanced at Martin O'Neill next to him and laughed, "You should direct that question to Martin O'Neill. George Wood is his player in this match."

O'Neill felt a little awkward himself. He was the present Nottingham Forest manager yet those reporters would rather direct the questions to Tony Twain, the person who had already left this position.

That reporter took one look at O'Neill and sat back down. This infuriated O'Neill, but he was more cultured than Twain and he forced himself to swallow his anger.

After that, if there were reporters standing to ask Twain about Nottingham Forest, he would push them to O'Neill. O'Neill was really a cultured man and he would always reply those reporters patiently with a smile if they asked him the same question, one could not detect any unhappiness in him at all.

When the press conference ended, Twain stopped O'Neill to shake his hand again. Twain felt bad as he had been using O'Neill as a shield against the reporters throughout the day.

"I'm so sorry, Martin," Twain apologized to O'Neill.

O'Neill had a rather cordial relationship with Twain, so he could not give a snort and turned to leave like McClaren and the likes of him. He could only laugh and say, "This is you, I knew I would encounter such a situation with you so I was already mentally prepared for it."

This could be considered as a sort of ridicule.

Twain opened his mouth and laughed mockingly at himself. Then, he looked at O'Neill, his expressions gradually became more serious and said, "Please take care of...Forest... in future..."

After working with Evan Doughty, O'Neill could guess the reason why Twain decided not to renew his contract. He himself was not sure how long he would stay in this team. He laughed and said, "I'll do my best, Tony. If you can't get go of it, why don't you come back and do it yourself?"

Twain laughed heartily this time and patted O'Neill on his shoulders twice, then turned and left without saying anything else.

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Nottingham Forest's defeat to England was nothing sensational. Other than reaffirming the hatred for Twain of some of the Forest fans, the result of this friendly game was nothing to write home about. What the people were interested in was the treatment that Tony Twain received when he returned to Nottingham. Images and reports of him being jeered in the stadium continued to appear in the media for the next few days, triggering discussions about it. The people who hated Tony Twain were very happy to see that even his most ardent supporters had left him whereas people who liked him felt that he was not treated fairly. However... When even the Nottingham Forest fans turned against him, how many people would really feel aggrieved by his fate?

Twain did not care about all these. After the match, the league would start in half a month's time. The coaching team was assembled and there would not be any games for the national team for the coming month, Twain could take this chance to have a good rest. When the league begins, he would have to work as hard as a dog, running everywhere to watch the games.

At that moment, he saw a piece of news on The Sun.

Pepe admits that he's planning to leave Nottingham Forest!

“...Ever since he was brought to Nottingham Forest by Twain from Portugal in the 05-06 season, the Brazilian Pepe became the core and pillar of the team’s defence. It did not matter who his defensive partner was, he was the unmovable starting center-back under Twain. Now, after ten years, Pepe has finally grown tired of everything that’s happening in Nottingham Forest. He admitted during the interview with our reporter that he plans to leave this team... After selling Wes Morgan, Tiago Mendes, Vincent Kompany and Leighton Baines, he’s the first core player that has decided to leave Forest... We do not know what kind of impact his announcement will have on Nottingham Forest Football Club yet, please continue to read our follow-up reports...’

Twain fell silent as he looked at Pepe’s photo on the newspaper.

Players come and go, all good things come to an end...

Chapter 902: All Good Things Must Come to an End

Pepe’s statement sent shockwaves throughout Nottingham and the whole of England. No one expected the man known as Nottingham Forest’s most loyal warrior to request for a transfer on his own accord, especially after how the football club had stood behind him when he was given a match ban by UEFA.

However, those familiar with the relationship that Pepe share with Twain would understand the rationale behind Pepe’s decision. The person whom Pepe is loyal to is Tony Twain and not Evan Doughty. Now that Twain has left Forest, there was no reason for Pepe to stay any longer.

To Pepe, a football club that is unable to keep an illustrious manager is a sign of troubles within the club, and he has no need to continue working for such a club.

It is only natural for him to choose to leave.

But, the Nottingham Forest fans did not think the same way as he did.

They viewed his actions as another act of betrayal following Tony Twain’s departure.

For the next few days, Pepe saw numerous banners that had been put up around the training grounds when he went for practice.

“Get lost! Go to Real Madrid, you traitor!”

“Who was it that gave you everything that you have right now? It’s Nottingham Forest!!”

Those were some of the words printed on the banners that were held up by the fans, and they were extremely eye-catching.

Some of the players in the team found his decision incomprehensible as well.

Of course, the person who was the most upset with his decision was the man who sat at the top, Evan Doughty.

Pepe’s action of announcing his intent to leave the club before the press is akin to slapping Doughty on the face in public.

Doughty called O'Neill over to his office. On the surface, it looked like he was keen to hear what the manager had to say, but in truth, he had already made up his mind on the matter, and O'Neill was just there to hear his decision.

"Real Madrid, Milan and Manchester United... Those clubs have all put in a bid for Pepe." Doughty sat on his office chair and seemed to exude an air of arrogance as he spoke. "I'd have never considered selling Pepe in the past, but things are different now, Martin."

The Doughty now was different from the Doughty whom Twain first met back then. He has become one of the most successful chairpersons of a football club in the whole of England right now. The publicity surrounding him increased massively following Twain's departure as a manager, and now the whole world knows that he is the person who leads Nottingham Forest.

In the past week, during the period of time where the club had just begun to make use of its new stadium, Doughty made appearances on five different television programs and accepted interviews from three different magazines. Photos of him smiling were displayed all over the various media platforms. He was touted as the leader that led Nottingham Forest to glory, and he was also regarded as the key figure in leading Nottingham Forest to greater glory in the future. Doughty repeatedly exhibited his ambition to achieve greater success by speaking about his philosophy towards football as well as his methods in building a good football team before the media.

"I hope that Nottingham Forest can truly become a powerful, world-class team in the next five years. We have plans to build a new training grounds following the opening of our new stadium. Our current training grounds at Wilford is too old and small. We have plans to use our current training grounds as the site for the Nottingham Forest Football Academy..."

Those were the words that Doughty said before the press. The feasibility of his plans remains a question, but those plans have certainly shocked numerous people. Wilford is a training grounds that was first built and used in the early 1990s, and it has barely been 20 years since then. For Doughty to call a training grounds that has barely been around for long as 'old' definitely highlighted his character and ambition.

Evan Doughty is now a successful chairperson who regularly attends luxurious dinners and meetings with the upper-class people. He is no longer able to get chummy with the manager like he did in the past as a novice chairperson. He had to maintain a distance between himself and the people who work beneath him.

A second Tony Twain would never work for him ever again.

O'Neill was slightly horrified by Doughty's words. "We cannot sell Pepe. He's the most important element of the team's defense..."

Doughty shook his head. He did not mind that the manager was protesting against his decision. "Right now, it's not that about whether or not we want to sell him. The player is the one who came out saying he wants to leave. Nothing good will come out of keeping him at the club against his wishes. Besides, let me remind you that Pepe is already 31 years old this year. If we don't sell a center-back at his age right now, we probably won't be able to fetch a good price for him in the future."

He sounded as though he was talking about oil prices or gold futures.

O'Neill did not back down because of Doughty's words. The players that the club sold previously were all substitutes and players who were not so important to the team, which is why he did not particularly care about those sales. However, the club has already sold two of the team's center-backs. If they were to sell Pepe as well, where would he be able to find another suitable center-back to replace him? If the team's defense is unstable, how would he be able to maintain their results this year? The task that has been given to him by Evan Doughty himself is to maintain top four position and to ensure qualification into next year's Champions League.

"I can speak to him again. I believe he is just influenced by Tony Twain's decision to resign. He just can't come to terms with it just yet. He's just throwing a temper..."

"A 31-year-old kid throwing a temper?" Evan's sneer cut O'Neill short.

O'Neill did not mind that the chairperson was mocking him. He continued to voice his opinions. "Pepe is the core of our defense. If he leaves, then the entire defense needs to be built from scratch once again. Now's not the time for us to do that, Mr. Chairperson. The team is unstable after a change of managers, and it will only lose cohesion if we continue to sell players repeatedly... The new season is about to start soon. I think it'd be better if we can maintain stability in the team."

"It's the complete opposite, Mr. O'Neill." Evan was starting to get irritated by the manager who keeps going against him. He stopped referring to O'Neill as 'Martin' and had instead changed to the address of 'Mr. O'Neill' that would make people feel like they were distant.

"I know exactly who Pepe listens to, and it's not you. Keeping someone like him in the locker room would be the biggest threat to the stability of the team."

Evan was right. He might not have stepped foot into the locker room before, but there were some things that he understood without even having to step foot into the locker room. Pepe was certainly not very pleased with the new manager, despite the latter being an accomplished manager just like Twain. There was only one person whom he would willingly serve in the whole wide world. It did not matter how brilliant the other managers were. Those managers would never replace the position that Twain has in his heart.

O'Neill kept silent for a moment, but continued to struggle. "I still think things would change for the better if I were to speak to him face-to-face once..."

Evan Doughty laughed. "It doesn't matter how many times you speak to him, Pepe is hell-bent on leaving. You should just listen to me, Mr. O'Neill. Give up on him. We'd go and find another top-class center-back for you right now. There's still time. You still have time to bring the team together. We can't afford to drag this out for too long. It'd be too late once the season starts."

"I still want to speak to him once. I'm the manager of this team. It's my responsibility." O'Neill stood up and left without saying another word.

Behind him, Evan Doughty smiled in disdain.

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The outcome of O'Neill's talk with Pepe was just as Evan Doughty had expected. Martin O'Neill was left feeling exhausted at the end of it all.

No matter how O'Neill tried to persuade Pepe, Pepe was just unwilling to remain in the team.

Pepe was forthcoming with his thoughts during their talk. He told O'Neill that he was not upset with him as a manager and that he was just utterly disappointed with the club right now. Tony Twain's Nottingham Forest used to be a team brimming with warmth, but now that warmth has vanished without a trace. He did not like playing football in such an environment. His decision has nothing to do with the higher salary offered by other clubs. He has the right to choose to play football in a place that he enjoyed playing in. In the past, he enjoyed playing football in Forest, but he no longer enjoy it now, and that was all there was to it.

The player does not want to stay, and the club's chairperson insists on selling. Martin O'Neill was sandwiched between both parties and there was little that he could do. He felt like the entire season he spent at Manchester United was not as exhausting as the two months that he spent at Nottingham Forest thus far.

In the end, O'Neill was left with no other choice but to nod his head and agree to Pepe's departure.

It was just one day. Only one day had passed since he agreed to sell Pepe and news about a completed deal were published in Milan, Italy.

AC Milan spent 30 million pounds to buy the 31 year-old world-class center-back Pepe from Nottingham Forest. This deal was officially confirmed by both clubs shortly after.

O'Neill realized one thing after seeing the news. It did not matter if he agreed to Pepe's sale or not. Pepe was bound to be sold from the start. Allan Adams, who is nowhere to be seen right now, must have already flown over to Milan some time back to finish all the required paperwork for Pepe's transfer. It was only a matter of time before Pepe was sold, and even if O'Neill threatened to resign as a manager before Evan Doughty, the outcome would not change.

The higher-ups in the club had finished all that was needed for Pepe's transfer by the time he met Doughty. He was the only one who did not know what was going on. O'Neill felt like Pepe must have known the outcome of their talk from the start as well. He was just like a fool trying to convince Pepe to stay behind in Forest...

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Pepe's departure was not well-received among the fans. However, none of the fans went over to Birmingham Airport to throw rotten eggs at him, and that alone was considered a blessing.

The media, on the other hand, saw something interesting that they could write about regarding the whole situation...

Martin O'Neill sounded deflated when he spoke in an interview, "Pepe is a talented center-back. His departure means I have to come up with a new plan to rebuild Forest..."

Clearly, Pepe's transfer to another club was not something that the manager desired. That could only mean that the management had forcefully stepped in and sold Pepe against the manager's wishes.

It seemed like the once impregnable Nottingham Forest warship was starting to crumble from the inside. This was something that caught the media's attention.

The media then began to publish numerous articles about Pepe's transfer, and the coverage led to growing unease within the Nottingham Forest players. No one knew who was the next one to be forcefully sold to another club.

After escaping the vortex that is Nottingham Forest, Pepe made an appearance at a press conference in Milan, where he held up AC Milan's red and black striped jersey before the press. However, the smile he had on his face was not as bright as before. He looked like a kid who had run away from home and was reminiscing about the happy times that he spent with his family during the wee hours of the night.

The memories of those happy times would probably flood him when AC Milan faces off with Nottingham Forest in a Champions League match in the coming months. Of course, he might not reminisce about anything either.

A professional footballer has to learn to get used to separations, be it from their previous club or their previous team mates.

"I... Hope that I can... Help AC Milan clinch a Champions League trophy..." Pepe stuttered as he tried to speak in poor Italian.

AC Milan's manager, Marco van Basten, was elated about Pepe's transfer, because AC Milan had finally welcomed a qualified center-back into their feeble defense, and he could start thinking about how he was going to lead his team to dominate the whole of Europe.

"We now have the most talented center-back on this planet in our team!" The manager was so excited that he immediately commended Pepe as being the best in the world.

Conversely, his words also meant that Nottingham Forest had lost the best center-back in the world...

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Pepe's transfer was not like any other transfer. His sale sparked interest from other clubs towards Nottingham Forest's other talented players.

If the club is willing to sell the core player of its defense, then will they sell Gareth Bale? What about Aaron Mitchell, or perhaps even George Wood?

Is there a player that Nottingham Forest would not sell?

All the football clubs throughout Europe went into a frenzy. In the eyes of the astute or perhaps even the not-so-astute football managers, Nottingham Forest was just like a big supermarket that had numerous items of excellent quality up for sale at reasonable prices. Things looked promising for Nottingham Forest after they won the Treble and moved into a brand new stadium, but clearly those things did not cause Forest to refuse to sell its players.

The players whom Tony Twain spent 11 years to groom all had their own respective values. The starting players were sought after by big clubs in Europe, whereas the substitutes were well thought of by mid-table clubs. If Evan Doughty sold all the players, he would easily rake in a profit of at least 500 million pounds.

George Wood alone was worth at least 60 million pounds. If he was an attacking player, he might be able to fetch a price of 90 million pounds.

The fact that he just signed a contract with the club did not cause his suitors to look away.

Signing a new contract with the club is nothing more than an attempt to mask his selling price! Don't worry, we have the money!

"George Wood is the best midfielder in the world. He's better than Gerrard." Mourinho was being friendly towards Wood. His words also attacked his bitter rival Liverpool.

He wished that the steely midfielder from Forest would join Manchester United and help the team go against other strong teams.

Besides Wood, Mourinho also expressed an interest in Forest's goalkeeper. "I hope that the team can bring in a world-class goalkeeper. A good goalkeeper is the key to becoming champions. Akinfeev is brilliant and I've always been keeping an eye on him. He has received a lot of experience and training during his time at Nottingham Forest, but I think it's time for him to consider switching to another club..."

"Mitchell is the second Ibrahimović. He should come over to a big club like Inter Milan to play football." Zola, the new head coach of Inter Milan, also expressed goodwill towards the player known as the 'Little Giant of Forest'.

"Ribéry is brilliant, but he has gotten on with age. Perhaps this is the best time for Míchel González to rectify the mistake that Real Madrid made previously." Diario AS published an article discussing Real Madrid's failed attempt at bringing Pepe over to the club, and how they had switched targets and is focusing on Gago now.

"Barcelona's tradition is to attack. We need a left back who is good at moving forward to attack. Bale fits what we need. That's all there is to it." Guardiola said those words when asked about the players he would buy in the summer.

"Agbonlahor is very quick. The past few years that he spent in Forest has nurtured him into an even better player. His shooting abilities have improved significantly. He's the type of player that we need..." Manchester City was also keen on joining the battle for Forest's players.

"Şahin is an immensely gifted player. If Bayern Munich wishes to prove that it is still a strong and powerful club in Europe, then he is the kind of player that they need to get." According to the German media, Bayern Munich was getting closer to sealing a deal for the Germany-born Turkish footballer.

Other players such as Chris Cohen, Adriano Moke, Nicolás Millán, Joe Mattock and Rafinha also received invitations from other clubs as well. The whole of Europe interpreted Pepe's sale as a message sent out by Nottingham Forest:

Our supermarket is always open for business. As long as you have the money, all players are up for sale. We hope you have a pleasant shopping experience here.

A wave of bids for its players assaulted Nottingham Forest Football Club. Martin O'Neill went to bed each night fearing that he would wake up the next morning and see that all his starting players had been sold by Allan Adams. He had no doubt that Allan Adams was capable of doing something like that, because the latter was a man who only had money in sight. He might have only known Adams for two months, but he was already starting to despise the businessman.

Right as O'Neill was being agonized by all the news of other clubs wanting to buy his players, he received a phone call from Pierce Brosnan.

"Mr. O'Neill, I am Pierce Brosnan from Nottingham Evening Post. You promised me last week that you'd let me interview you tomorrow. Do you remember?" Brosnan knew that O'Neill was going through a rough time lately, and he was worried that O'Neill would reject giving him an interview.

It was only then that O'Neill remembered that he did promise Brosnan to give him an interview. If he had not promised him earlier, he definitely would have rejected the interview since he has not been in a good mood recently.

Then again...

O'Neill suddenly felt an urge to rant to someone the moment he thought about all the things that had happened to him these couple of days. He did not care if the listener was the press or his own wife and children. He just felt like ranting to someone.

There were some words that he needed to get off his chest, and as for what would happen after he said those words, he did not particularly care.

"Yes, I've not forgotten about it, Mr. Brosnan. Come over to my office tomorrow at 10:30 in the morning. I'd be waiting for you there."

Chapter 903: A Well-Behaved Man Strikes Back

Martin O'Neill's nightmare did not come true. When he laid in bed and opened his eyes the next day, he was not woken by the phone ringing off the hook, which gave him a little peace of mind. Because that meant the club did not put up a massive sale of the main players. Otherwise his phone would be bombarded with calls from the news media and the players' agents.

The Northern Irishman, who had been left exhausted by the recent transfer rumors as well as beleaguered by the team's top brass which always liked to intervene in the team's affairs, laid in bed for a while before getting up to wash up and enjoy the breakfast his wife made for him.

While picking up the jug of milk, he stared blankly as he took the sports edition of The Sun from his wife next to him which she had folded properly for him.

The most striking thing in the newspaper was four photographs put together to form a square. It was clear that the photograph was taken in secret. The image resolution was not high, and the image was not clear, but O'Neill recognized Allan Adams's baby face. It was taken in a restaurant where Allan was in discussion with someone. The cameraman tried several angles and could not get a full shot of the face of the man whom Allan Adams was talking to. In the final shot, when the man exited the hotel, the camera finally caught his face – it was Michael Dawson!

O'Neill hurriedly turned the page with the photographs to read the article.

"... Our reporter took the photographs yesterday at the Delimar restaurant in north London. The image showed Allan Adams, Nottingham Forest's commercial director, secretly meeting with Tottenham Hotspur's center back Michael Dawson. The pair's meeting confirmed the newspaper's earlier

speculation that Nottingham Forest was interested in getting Dawson to return. And that Dawson himself wanted to leave Tottenham Hotspur to join his hometown team. He has been plagued by injuries in recent seasons. Not only has he lost his position in the England national team, his position in Tottenham Hotspur is also in jeopardy. He is about to turn thirty-one years old and he hopes to start over in a different environment. It is reported that the amount involved in this transfer should not be too high..."

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With a "pop!" sound, a newspaper was thrown on the table in front of Evan Doughty.

Evan looked at the photograph secretly taken of Allan in the newspaper and looked up at an angry-looking Martin O'Neill.

"When Pepe was sold by you guys, you had promised to sign on a center back of good quality. I only have one request – that he's young enough! Michael Dawson is about to turn thirty-one and he's been having injuries throughout this season. I don't know why you've decided to buy him!" Without any apprehension, O'Neill asked loudly in the chairman's office.

"Michael is really a high-quality center back..." Evan glanced at Allan, who sat on the couch wordlessly and explained to O'Neill.

Truthfully speaking, he was not mentally prepared to face O'Neill's bald-faced question directed at him all of a sudden. His mind was still dazed till now – how did O'Neill who was always easy to talk to, suddenly become a violent warrior?

"I want a young and high-quality center back, not a center back who was almost thirty-one years old and has just recovered from an injury too. Moreover, a center back who has been seriously injured thrice in four seasons!" O'Neill vowed not to give in this time. He must make the other party be accountable to him.

"More importantly, did anyone ask me for my opinion when you decided to contact Dawson?" That was what made O'Neill most angry. To be honest, Michael Dawson could still be used. At least he still had the ability. It would not be a problem for him to play once he recovered from his injury.

O'Neill thought of Pepe's transfer again. With new and old hate intertwined, he felt that his position as the manager was completely a puppet tole. He decided that everything in the team was decided the other two men in the room. One sat behind the chairman's table looking at him in shock and the other man was nestled on the couch quietly as if he was watching the show.

"I'm the manager of this team. Gentlemen, in England, a head coach is called 'a manager.' His title is different from the title of 'a coach' in La Liga and Serie A. He also has different responsibilities." O'Neill ambiguously criticized that the two Americans did not understand the British customs. "It is my power and duty to decide which player the team buys. You pay me to come here to work, so I'm going to exercise all the authority I ought to have." O'Neill looked at his immediate boss and the boss above him. His eyes were full of uncompromising determination.

As expected, he was a man of completely temperament to that of Tony Twain. Even when he was angry, he was not going to be as foul-mouthed and hysterically lost his mind like Twain. He was still very calm,

spoke reasonably and well-organized in his thoughts. But it was also due to this that every word he said made Evan Doughty particularly uncomfortable – he thought that when he had sent away Tony Twain, demon personifying pestilence, O’Neill who came was easy to talk to and a pushover. He did not expect the well-behaved man more difficult to deal with when he flipped out.

He was silent for a short few seconds, thinking about how to deal with this in his mind.

“Don’t get worked up, Martin... Of course, we know you’re the manager of this team. But what Allan does can be considered as paving the way for you ahead of time. If everything has to be done personally by the manager, then you will be exhausted to death, won’t you?” Evan laughed as he tried to alleviate the tense atmosphere. However, he found that the other two men in the room did not laugh except himself. So, after barking out a couple of laughs, he somewhat awkwardly shut his mouth.

But O’Neill did not give the chairman face this time. He responded with a serious look, “Yeah, you only inform me until you have privately reached an agreement with the other club, as well as the players themselves. Just like Pepe, isn’t it?”

Allan looked up and looked at the two men confronting each other across the desk.

While the expression on Evan’s changed, he glanced sideways at Allan, and turned back to look at O’Neill. He found O’Neill looking at him too... No, it might be more appropriate to say he was staring at him.

What O’Neill said was right. He was the manager of this team and he should be responsible for all transfers and be able to exercise his power. But Evan Doughty had been suppressed by Twain for so many years. He had long been unable to contain his desire for the control of the team. In his opinion, he was the owner of the club so he should be able to express his opinions about the team’s affairs and even directly have a hand in decisions... it could not be said that he had gone too far. So many club chairmen around the world liked to get involved in the team’s affairs, even if it was the English Premier League. So why could he not make a move?

No matter how good the manager is, he still works for me. I am the real boss here. Have you guys not figure this out by now?

Suddenly he did not want to face an employee with a smiling face. Sometimes he also had to show the dignity that a club chairman had.

“Very well. Consider it that you have been informed of this matter, Mr. O’Neill.”

Evan Doughty adopted the stance of showing the visitor out.

O’Neill stood in front of him and stared at him for a moment before he turned to walk away. He did not say another word to Evan Doughty again because he did not think it needed to be said.

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The speculation and hype as to why Tony Twain wanted to leave Nottingham Forest at the height of his career had already declined. Some people even sanguinely thought that he ought to be like Shankly who suddenly quit the Liverpool team when he was supposed to make a big splash. Nottingham Forest would

have a better future after a brief period of turmoil, like what happened in Paisley's Liverpool team. After all, Twain had firmly established the foundation.

It was pointless to continue to speculate about a man who had already quit. It was better to put the focus on the new manager, Martin O'Neill.

But one person had an opposing view toward this idea.

When it was first known that Twain had not renewed his contract with the club, Pierce Brosnan, like everyone else, was enveloped by feelings of shock, anger, disappointment, and confusion. As a reporter, his curiosity gradually transcended several other emotions which settled in the days that followed. Since last week's friendly match between the Forest team and the England national team, the accumulated doubts he had deep inside had surfaced. He had a growing interest in why Tony Twain did not renew the contract. Even if there were no other media investigating this matter, he still decided to get to the bottom of this matter.

However, he had no clue where to start when he wanted to check. Although he had followed the Forest team for interviews many times, he still did not know much about the senior management of the Forest team. On the one hand, he always mixed with Tony Twain. On the other hand, Evan Doughty also really kept a low profile at the time. Whenever Twain and Evan were together, they always looked like they had a joyous and harmonious relationship, which was enviable to others. He collected information all around, but he could not obtain any information in the two most critical areas.

Tony Twain kept his mouth shut and Nottingham Forest seemed to forget that they ever had such a manager. No news about Twain was disseminated.

Nottingham Forest was now solely Evan Doughty's club. It was much easier for him to control the club than the board of directors.

These days Brosnan was busy collecting relevant information everywhere. Fortunately, his boss supported him, because they all knew that Twain's departure was not a simple matter. There must be some inside information that others should not know. Otherwise the parties involved would not have sealed their lips.

And once the truth was revealed, it could be a piece of big news that would shake the world of English football. Therefore, it had to be done.

Brosnan was so busy day and night that he almost forgot that he still had to interview O'Neill. It was the first interview Martin O'Neill had accepted as the Nottingham Forest manager. His team-building policies and his goals in leading the team would be discussed in the interview, which could also be considered as an important interview.

It was only when a colleague in the office who saw him so obsessed with Tony Twain's game of hide-and-seek reminded him that he suddenly remembered to call O'Neill to confirm the interview.

Regardless of why Tony Twain had left his job, regardless of what Evan Doughty who was in charge of the club had done behind the scenes, Pierce Brosnan must now put away his curiosity about these things. He neatly adjusted his clothes and knocked on the Forest manager's door.

Martin O'Neill was waiting in his seat for the visit from the local reporter who was influential in Nottingham.

"Hello, Mr. O'Neill. I hope I'm not interrupting your work." Brosnan put down his interview materials, got up and shook O'Neill's hand.

"Not at all, Mr. Brosnan. My work is done for the day." O'Neill smiled evenly.

Brosnan sat down and began to interview the new manager, who had always been considered to be in Twain's shadow. But the interview did not follow the steps Brosnan had planned. He first asked the question, "How does it feel to be the manager of Nottingham Forest after two months, Mr. O'Neill?"

Under normal circumstances, O'Neill would have nodded and said, "It feels good. Everyone is very supportive of my work and I have received a lot of assistance..."

But O'Neill hesitated for a moment and shook his head as he said, "It's harder than I'd imagined."

With the sharp acumen of his profession, Brosnan immediately caught the important point. He followed up with a question to that remark and changed the question he had prepared before, "Is it because Tony Twain's influence is too great?"

O'Neill continued shaking his head to say, "That's not the case." He seemed to be in the mood to talk today, so Brosnan did not interject. He just indicated for him to continue talking.

"Sometimes when you were on the outside, you couldn't see clearly, and you thought everything was nice. But when you walked in, you found what you had thought was wrong." O'Neill said mysteriously, "I used to think I was mentally prepared and had abundant experience. But now I feel like I've made an error of judgment at the time."

Brosnan's mind was spinning fast as he listened to these inexplicable words and was trying to work out what O'Neill meant. Then he tentatively asked a question, "Are you referring to Pepe's transfer?"

He had guessed right.

O'Neill shrugged and said, "What were your thoughts when you first found out that Pepe had already decided to be transferred to AC Milan during the time when you still thought he might be leaving?"

Brosnan's heart leapt. He seemed to have caught hold of something. The fog that had been bothering him was slowly dissipating.

"I'm sorry, Mr. O'Neill. I recall that you are the manager of the team. How could you only be the last to be informed of this matter?" Brosnan continued to take advantage to pursue and attack.

"I don't know why, either. But that was what happened. I was kept in the dark and everyone knew Pepe had already made a deal with AC Milan. Only I did not know. I also went to Pepe to have a talk once and was rightly turned down. I couldn't turn the situation around. Now that the season is almost starting, we've lost the most important center back. I don't even know who else we're going to lose." Full of resentment, O'Neill had finally found an outlet for him to vent. "Look at all the transfer rumors in the media right now about the Forest players. I'm really thankful that they're still here."

"Did you read the article on the meeting between Mr. Allan Adams and Michael Dawson, Mr. Brosnan?"

Brosnan nodded. As a sports reporter, he certainly had to pay attention to the sports news that happened every day.

“Did you find out through that report?”

Brosnan paused and shook his head after a moment. He said, “I have my own reporter friends, Mr. O’Neill. You know, we scratch each other’s back for information...”

Martin O’Neill bared his teeth and chuckled when he heard the answer, “That’s great. Even a reporter knows the target which our team is signing on before me, the manager. Maybe I should hire some reporters to be football scouts?”

This is a big problem.

Brosnan thought so in his heart. The problem was big if a manager was the last person to know what kind of player the team wanted to bring in. It was a big issue. He was completely bypassed. In that case, who was the one to find a way around him...

He suddenly thought of last summer, which was almost around this time. The Forest team’s right back, Aaron Lennon was sold to Inter Milan. At the time, Tony Twain was furious. All of England could hear his rants and foul words. He was admonishing Allan Adams for signing a deal with Inter Milan to surrender Lennon so readily, without asking for his consent,. Due to this, he even suspended the contract renewal talks with the team. At that time, there was a huge uproar. But then it quieted down later. The three men appeared to be the same together on the outside.

“Football is a sport that requires detailed planning. I have signed a four-year contract with the club, and I have a long-term plan, so everyone has to seek my consent before being able to buy and sell players. But now the situation is that my demands before signing the contract are not even met...”

While Brosnan was still in shock over this, O’Neill continued to speak and Brosnan’s recording equipment was faithfully recording.

“I wanted to stabilize the defense, but they sold Pepe in the end. I wanted a young and promising center back. Instead, they got in touch with Dawson. They didn’t even look at the players I recommended...”

Brosnan had to interrupt O’Neill and said, “I’m sorry, Mr. O’Neill. Who are ‘they’ you are referring to?”

“Who else can they be? The club chairman and the business director? Perhaps I now know why Tony left at the most glorious period at the time...”

The last fog in his mind finally cleared. Brosnan confirmed that he had grasped the key to all the problems.

“I chose Nottingham Forest because I started my career from here. I hope to continue the glory of the Forest team. But now from the looks of it, I was mistaken to think that everything would be great.”

There was a deep sense of exhaustion in the words. Although it had only been two months, Martin O’Neill was already tormented till he was bone weary.

The follow-up questions no longer needed to be asked and those questions that were prepared in advance were worthless in the face of such an explosive topic. Pierce Brosnan was so shocked by the

thoughts in his mind that he was in no state to continue the interview. He got up to say goodbye to O'Neill and was ready to hurry back to write up this interview which would definitely cause a sensation.

"The Nottingham Forest manager blasted the club's top brass!"

"Martin O'Neill: I'm excluded!"

"The dark secrets behind Pepe's deal!"

There was still a lot of information he needed to gather from everywhere. But this time it was different. With the direction pointed, he knew where to look.

"Goodbye. I'm glad you accepted my interview, Mr. O'Neill. Good luck with that."

O'Neill got up to see the reporter out. He also said, "Good day, Mr. Brosnan. Good luck to you as well."

Chapter 904: Unable to Be Interdependent Forever

Tottenham Hotspur's fax on their acceptance of the offer from Nottingham Forest for Michael Dawson, the just published copy of the Nottingham Evening Post this morning, still with a whiff of the fresh ink smell, as well as Martin O'Neill's handwritten resignation letter, all three of which were placed together on Evan Doughty's desk. His brain did not respond for a while.

The fax was sent to him by his secretary, Miss Lucy, along with a good morning kiss. It was a very close interaction that transcended the relationship between a club chairman and a secretary. The Evening Post was brought to him later by his old friend, Allan Adams while the resignation letter was personally delivered by Martin O'Neill himself. The man who wanted to resign was still standing in the room waiting for the club chairman's approval.

Two days had now passed since the day O'Neill flew into a terrible rage in front of Evan Doughty.

The deal with Tottenham Hotspur to buy Dawson was in Doughty's plan, and they bought a center back at the peak of his playing career at a low price. Evan Doughty thought it was a good deal and was feeling happy about the matter. While he was being naughty with his hands on Miss Lucy's body, Allan knocked on his office door with the newspaper which startled him. If the affair between him and Lucy was exposed to his wife, his family would be torn apart.

Lucy opened the door for Allan after she had tidied her blouse. Allan even watched with interest at the figure of swaying hips as she walked away. Then he handed the newspaper to Evan without saying a word.

Evan saw a picture of O'Neill on it, as well as an interview. The headline was striking and also explained why Allan risked interrupting the couple's clandestine love affair to knock on his door.

Before Evan could figure out what he meant by being unhappy, O'Neill knocked on his office door.

When Evan was about to ask O'Neill what the interview was about, the other party had already placed something on Evan's desk.

"A resignation?"

Evan thought he had misread. He picked it up and glanced at it again. Then he looked up at the Northern Irishman standing in front of him.

Standing in front of Evan, O'Neill said earnestly, "I don't think I can carry out my plans and ambitions here at all. I don't get enough respect here, and you guys don't seem to need a manager. So, I think breaking up is the best solution."

"You can't do this!" Evan yelled out. He had no idea O'Neill would do this and resign? How dare he! He had only been in the position for two months, and now he was going to quit... What do you take me, the club chairman for?

"Of course, I can." As a "senior manager" who had been in English football for more than two decades, O'Neill was not stupid. He said, "In the contract we signed at the time, you did not state how much money you would pay me if I were to be fired. So, I do not have to pay you money when I quit, Mr. Chairman. That's fair."

Since there was no need of compensation for default in the contract, O'Neill had no qualms left.

In fact, he made the decision to resign that day after he had the big blowout with Evan Doughty. That was why he came out with the big explosive news during the interview – since I'm going to leave, who cares what you think of me? I have said everything that should and shouldn't be said. At least I have aired my grievances and vented my frustration!

"It's ... It's not about the money, Mr. O'Neill. You're the manager of the team, the league tournament is about to start and you're resigning now..."

"I'm resigning now for the sake of the team. You still have time to find a manager at this point. It's going to be hard if you wait until after the start of the league tournament, Mr. Chairman." O'Neill addressed him using "Mr. Chairman" each time but it sounded more like he was giving a slap to the club chairman, Evan Doughty's face.

Evan Doughty was completely stunned by Martin O'Neill's show of determination. He had the letter of resignation in his hand as he looked at O'Neill with his mouth agape. He did not know what to say while Allan Adams sat on the couch without saying a word, as if he were a spectator.

"I hope the club agrees to my resignation." O'Neill reiterated his intention in his meeting with Evan. "It is not possible for us to continue working together."

Under the current circumstances, what could Evan do if he did not agree? He finally paid the price for his own arbitrary actions – the manager, whom he spent lots of effort hiring, had now resigned voluntarily, which was like a loud slap to his face. Having lost two managers in a row in two months, perhaps he should think about whether the managers were too fond of power or was he being too foolish?

After a moment's silence, Evan stood up and put his hand out to O'Neill to say, "Thank you for everything you have done for the club, Mr. O'Neill. I'll agree to your resignation."

O'Neill smiled and said, "Goodbye, Mr. Chairman." With that, he turned and walked out of the office without even giving a glance at Allan Adams sitting at the side.

After watching O'Neill go out, Evan Doughty slowly sat down and looked at Allan Adams, who had been sitting on the couch in silence.

"Who should we look for now to be the manager?" Allan spread his hands and asked.

"Lord only knows." Evan mumbled weakly. Too much had hit him this morning.

"There are not many successful managers idling at home at this time. It is not a good time to find a manager..."

"Then we have to poach someone!" Evan suddenly got excited, "Poach a manager from the other clubs!" He ballled up O'Neill's resignation letter and threw it in the trash can.

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The players and coaches were even more taken aback than Evan Doughty. Everyone could not believe it when O'Neill stood in front of them with a smile on his face and announced that he had resigned. They thought he was joking, but the problem was that Mr. O'Neill was someone who liked to joke. He and Tony Twain were different.

"Thank you for your support over the past two months." O'Neill smiled and said goodbye to the players, "Although I did not have a good relationship with the club's top brass, I had a great time with you. You've all been lovely and I'm proud to have once coached such a team, even though it was only for a short two months."

"I'm sorry I can't continue to lead you. I wish you all good luck."

He then hugged and said goodbye to the assistant managers, fitness coach, goalkeeper coach and First Team coaches one by one.

Kerslake was still in shock. Tony's gone and now Martin is leaving too. What's happening? With them gone, what are we going to do? What about Nottingham Forest? Is such a team that has just won the Treble going to disappear from now on?

As he hugged O'Neill, he asked a question, "Are you resigning because of Tony, Mr. O'Neill?"

He was worried that Tony's influence was too great to allow O'Neill to have free rein in his job here.

O'Neill shook his head and washed away "the unjust treatment" Twain received. He said, "It has nothing to do with him. I don't have a good relationship with the club chairman and the business director, David. They have their standpoint and I have mine. It is a pity that our standpoints are not in line. You're a good assistant manager and you'll be a great manager in the future. Thank you for your help, David. When the new manager arrives, help him like you've helped me and Tony. Hopefully he can make it here... for longer." He looked into the distance and sighed softly.

After he waved his last goodbye, O'Neill turned and walked away from the stupefied team.

The reporters who came when they caught wind of the news, had already blocked the gate of the Wilford training base till it was impenetrable. The bunch of dogs had a real nose for news. He just had a showdown with the club and they already knew. It was as if no secrets could be hidden from them.

When the reporters saw O'Neill emerge from the inside, they struggled to get away from the security guards and rushed up.

Countless microphones were extended right under O'Neill's nose, and the cameras were pointed at him.

"Mr. O'Neill, we've heard that you have resigned? Is it true?"

"Manager O'Neill, can you tell me the reason for your sudden resignation? It's completely unexpected... You've only been here for two months!"

"Hey, Martin! Martin! Is it true that you have a conflict with the club's top management? Can you tell us what kind of contradiction?"

"Did Pepe's transfer lead to your resignation?"

"Can it be due to Michael Dawson... Don't you like Dawson?"

"Tony Twain also left suddenly. Have you two been in touch? Does your resignation have anything to do with him?"

"Can you tell me where your next stop is?"

"Is Nottingham Forest club's top brass really interfering too much with the manager's job to sign players, like what you said in the interview?"

"Care to comment on Evan Doughty?"

"Has your resignation been approved by the club?"

Nothing else could be heard at the scene except for the reporters asking their questions loudly and the pressing of the camera shutters. Everyone was shouting at the top of their lungs, afraid that O'Neill could not hear him in the crowd.

However, O'Neill was not in the mood to answer their questions. He stood in front of his car door and turned to the enthusiastic reporters to say, "I've received approval to resign. I have nothing else to say about the matter. I'm grateful to the people who helped me during the two months of coaching at the Forest team. In addition, I want to clarify that this has nothing to do with Tony Twain. The resignation is my own decision, nothing to do with anyone. If you want to ask anything else, please save those questions for the club. I'm sure they'll announce a press conference very soon."

He pulled the car door open and went in. He closed the car window and started the car. He slowly drove out of the main gate surrounded by the crowd of reporters trying to chase and intercept him.

The reporters stopped after chasing for a few steps. As O'Neill said, the club was bound to hold a press conference and their questions would be left till then.

Pierce Brosnan did not expect O'Neill's decision to resign to so firm and decisive. He watched the black car driving to the distance behind the crowd of people, wondering what Nottingham Forest's future hold.

How did this happen? A dominant team that lorded over Europe and famous for its playing prowess in the world, had a massive turnover of people within these two months and was changed till it was unrecognizable.

If he had to trace the root of the cause... it looked like he could not avoid this one person.

He pulled out his cell phone and dialed Tony Twain's number.

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When the cell phone which Twain left in the downstairs dining room rang, he was just going over the list of England registered players from all the teams in the English Premier League in his upstairs study. One of the two twenty-four-inch monitors connected to the computer was playing the video of a game. He needed to use the computer to cut and edit those video clips to make them into a collection for his own needs. Then he would burn it into a CD-ROM, label it and place it in its category in the cabinet. In that way, he would not be lost like a headless fly when he needed to check.

Staring at the television screen to study the game videos or reading notes and journals for a long term had caused Twain to be slightly myopic. He wore a pair of black-rimmed glasses and looked up with a concentration to observe the performances of several targeted players. When he needed to pay special attention, he would press the pause button, and then looked down to record the time in the notebook, which made it convenient for subsequent editing.

He was so engrossed in watching the video that the first time the phone rang downstairs, he did not hear it.

When the sound disappeared, he suddenly realized if something was ringing...

He listened with his head cocked but heard nothing. Just when he was shaking his head and thinking that he must have been hearing things from being too busy lately, the telephone rang again the moment he was going to continue working.

When Twain shuffled along in his slippers to go through the long second-floor corridor, around the circular staircase, and then through the eighty square meters of living room, the ringing stopped again the moment he finally came to the dining room.

"Really impatient." Twain mumbled as he picked up his cell phone, wanting to see who called.

The caller's name that showed up in the missed calls on the screen was 007.

Twain did not bother to key in some people's names. To him, English names were still not as easy as Chinese names, so he would give a lot of people codenames. 007 referred to Pierce Brosnan, because his name sounded the same as that of the famous actor, Pierce Brosnan who played 007.

So, it was the Nottingham Evening Post reporter. Twain did not know why he called him. Just as he was hesitating whether to call back to inquire, the cell phone in his hand rang and vibrated again.

He finally pressed the answer button.

"Hey, Mr. Bond, why are you calling me at this time?" Twain leaned against the couch in the living room and asked languidly.

“I want to know the real reason why you suddenly decided to leave Nottingham Forest.” Brosnan got straight to the point and asked.

The question made Twain’s face fall. He never answered such questions, not even from Brosnan. “I’m sorry, Mr. Reporter. I don’t want to answer your question. If you want to interview me, please make an appointment in advance...” With that, he was about to hang up.

That was when he heard Pierce Brosnan roared, “When are you going to stop hiding like a coward, Tony!”

Twain’s hand was stopped short by the sudden roar and did not hang up.

“Have you seen the news? Do you have a newspaper there? Is the TV on?” Brosnan continued to ask loudly after he finished yelling.

“No.” Twain looked around. The table was clear and had nothing on it. The television set was not turned on and the screen was dark.

“Then I’ll give you a live coverage now!” Brosnan said fiercely. This might be the first time he had spoken to the king of Nottingham Forest using this tone since he became a reporter. “Martin O’Neill has just tendered his resignation to the club, and I believe the club has agreed to his application to resign!”

Twain was stunned by the news. He thought he was dreaming, and the dream did not feel real.

Martin O’Neill had only joined the team for two months. Why did he quit?

“If you still care about Nottingham Forest, you must know why! Evan Doughty and Allan Adams kept O’Neill in the dark and reached an agreement to sell Pepe to AC Milan. Now they had hidden the fact that they were signing Michael Dawson from him again. Even though the media had called Dawson’s arrival as ‘homecoming’, it violated O’Neill’s authority. So, he quit! It’s as straightforward as that... Now, tell me why you decided not to renew your contract at the time? Did you lose faith in the club’s top brass, just like O’Neill did? Tell me, Tony!”

Twain was silent for a moment and did not answer.

“Very well, I know what’s on your mind. You’re worried about causing an upheaval in the team when you say it, aren’t you? You’re really stupid, Tony. All clubs are like this. Turmoil is not something that can entirely be foreseeable. Martin O’Neill has resigned and Şahin is transferring to Bayern Munich. Do you think the team you’ve built up with so much effort can still be kept intact? The players have already lost faith in the top echelons of this kind of club. Did Pepe’s departure not clarify the issue? He was the most loyal player!”

“Do you still love this team? Do you still miss every day and night of the past eleven years? Don’t you feel hurt that they treated you like that in the Crimson Stadium? Don’t stay silent, Tony.”

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Pierce Brosnan leaned against his car outside the gate of the Wilford training ground and called Twain. The reporters around him were almost gone. There was no one to bother him no matter how loud he shouted at the phone. He was treated as just another regular reporter asking for enough space from the bureau.

“Don’t stay silent, Tony! Tony? Tony... Hello? Hello!”

After vehemently spouting so many words for a long time, Brosnan found that the person on the other end of the line had cut off the call.

“What the damn hell!” He was so angry that he kicked the wheel of his own car, and the car alarm sounded, which startled him.

“Asshole!” Brosnan touched his car key to turn off the car alarm in a hurry. He felt that it was a truly lousy day.

It was reasonable to say that since he was a reporter, he should not have thought so. What happened today should fire him up and make him want to rush back to start writing the article so that he could post the news before everyone.

But now he felt terrible about this matter as a huge Nottingham Forest fan.

He leaned back on the car and looked at the Nottingham Forest emblem on the facade of the Wilford training base’s entrance in a daze.

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Twain walked back to his study and stared blankly at the video of the game, which had been paused on the computer screen. Coincidentally, he was watching a video of Nottingham Forest’s game last season. The man in the video was Aaron Mitchell.

He found himself completely not in the mood to sit down and work. He suddenly wanted to listen to some music. Perhaps only music could soothe his fidgety heart at this moment.

He turned on the stereo and returned to the computer amid the sound of the music. The wonderful music still could not let him settle down his heart. Something was stuck in the chest and wanted to rush out.

He sat down and turned off the video of the game. Then he opened up a Word document. He recalled he should write a column for the Evening Post. Since the World Cup, his column had gone quiet.

But today, he was going to write. He had a lot of things to write about. He was going to rebuke some people. He wanted to ridicule, vent and destroy some things. It was the only way that the future could be rebuilt.

Amidst the sound of continuous tapping on the keyboard, the voice of James Blunt sang:

“... You’re beautiful, you’re beautiful, you’re beautiful, it’s true... But it’s time to face the truth, I will never be with you...” (An excerpt from James Blunt’s song, “You’re beautiful”).

Chapter 905: Two Atomic Bombs

Martin O’Neill resigned and stayed with the Forest team for only two months. I am not surprised at all. I even thought he would have left a little earlier.

Poor results are not the biggest enemy for an English Premier League manager, but flagrant interference from the club's top brass. When you are the last person in the team to know the facts, what is the point of staying there? To the club owner, the manager may be just an employee, and he can be hired for money. Well, I am very happy to look forward to what kind of manager the chairman of Nottingham Forest can get to be their puppet.

It was the first two paragraphs of Twain's column for the Evening Post. This was his open letter.

After almost a month of silence, Twain's column had opened fire again. This time it was aimed at his former employer, Nottingham Forest.

He exploded with energy as soon as he opened his mouth. It was not merely a rebuke of people. He had also revealed for the first time the real reason why he initially chose not to renew his contract in the column:

"... When Pepe transferred to AC Milan, I could empathize with how Martin O'Neill felt. Because a year ago, when Lennon went to Inter Milan, I met with the exact same situation as he did. If it weren't for the fact that I had stopped drinking a long time ago, I think I'd have called him and invited him to have a drink together – look at us, the two poor managers.

In fact, since leaving the position, I have a lot of things that I wanted to say. But at the time, Martin O'Neill had just taken over. I did not want to talk too much about a team that I was no longer coaching. It would have affected the new manager and the team if I had done that. I do not doubt my influence on the team at all. Yes, I am very confident on that point.

I chose to shut up as I thought it was for the good of the team that way.

But now that things have changed, and O'Neill has resigned too. I do not think the Forest team's situation can get any worse, so I am choosing to let you hear the words that are buried deep in my heart.

Life and work are made up of many details. And these details are often overlooked. But I am a person who cares about details. With regards to Lennon's transfer, I saw something that I was most unwilling to see – the club's senior management becoming used to getting involved with the team. It was supposed to be absolutely forbidden in the verbal agreement between Evan Doughty and I. But for the last eleven years, the original verbal agreement was no longer binding. Following which, I realized that such a situation would only increase over time, plaguing me till I was completely exhausted. Just like what Martin O'Neill did today, I chose to leave at the most glorious time. Perhaps that would also give everyone a beautiful view of my departing figure. But now it seems, perhaps a silent departure did not achieve that effect, I tried to be clever and it ended up backfiring...

I have to apologize to the fans who still deeply love Nottingham Forest and have been hurt by my attitude. I am sorry I am unable to continue to coach Nottingham Forest. If I could, I had always wanted to end my coaching career there. However, the current environment is not good for me. But wherever I am, my love for Nottingham Forest, my love for you all has never changed..."

The Nottingham Evening Post cleverly placed the image of Martin O'Neill who had resigned and the contents guide to Twain's open letter together on the front page of the special edition for a comparative

reference. It also reminded all the readers who buy the copy of the special edition on what was discussed in the issue.

The story of the two men who left Nottingham Forest.

The headline on the front page was also full of meaning:

They came one after another and they left here one after another.

The subtext pointed directly to the club. It was what Pierce Brosnan wanted to imply.

That open letter Twain wrote was very long. It occupied half a page. Twain did not know how many words he wrote. Anyway, he kept writing what he wanted to express from his heart. When he finished typing what was on his mind in front of the computer, his arms were so sore that he could not straighten them.

For the Nottingham Forest fans, the article was explosive as if the United States military had dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan at that time. Putting it next to the news of Martin O'Neill's resignation, it was even more shocking – it was like there were two atomic bombs with the other one to Nagasaki.

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“Martin O'Neill announced earlier this morning that he had already applied to step down as the Nottingham Forest manager. There has been no response from the club's senior management to his application at this time. Our reporter has found O'Neill, who is about to leave, at the gate of Wilford...”

In the noisy and shaky image shown from the camera footage, O'Neill was standing by his car door to answer questions from the reporters:

“My resignation has been approved ... This has nothing to do with Tony Twain... I believe they'll soon announce a press conference...”

The scene was noisy, and his voice could not be heard clearly, but the key meaning was still being expressed.

A group of people drinking at the Forest Bar stared dumbstruck at the big-screen LCD television set hanging on the wall. More than two months ago, they watched the news of Tony Twain's sudden departure in the same spot and now they saw that Martin O'Neill had suddenly resigned again today.... Their brains had lost the ability to think. They did not know what opinion to express about the matter.

Perhaps Bill's first reaction was the truest. He just swore a curse word “F**K.” It was now known who he cursed about. Was it Martin O'Neill who resigned? Or the chairman of the club? Or the reporter who reported the news that had spoiled his day? Or... was it himself?

The news continued and the front door was slammed open by someone.

Fat John crashed through the door and entered with his hands carrying a pile of newspapers.

Seeing Bill standing in a daze in front of the television set and watching the news, he laughed and then walked over. He put a newspaper on the table where he was, and then he went to the next table to

issue the newspaper. After he put a newspaper on every table in the bar, he had just one copy left on his hands, which was his own.

Someone noticed his unusual behavior and asked, "What are you going, Fat John? I'll take a drink if you're buying. But I'm not reading the newspaper you bought."

John leaned against the bar, asked for a drink, and then said to the man, "Aren't you always demanding for the truth about Tony's resignation? That's all in there." He pointed to the newspaper placed in front of the other man, which had the word "special edition" on it. It was a special issue that was rushed out specifically for everything that happened to the Forest team today.

He had just stopped talking when the group of people who were stupefied like a block of wood just now, suddenly scrambled for the newspapers in front of them.

Only Bill did not move. He moved his gaze from the television screen and turned his attention toward John.

John smiled at him, sipped his drink, and began to read the newspaper.

The tone in Twain's column was more moderate than when he went to war with other columnists. But the force of his innate sarcasm was no less.

He was in a good mood today, which seemed very contradictory against such a news backdrop. His delight had nothing to do with Nottingham Forest. Anyway, Nottingham Forest was already in this state. It would no longer be surprising if something worse were to happen. What made him happy was that the real Tony Twain was back. There was another reason, and that was Tony Twain was precisely as he thought. He had never betrayed them. He had always loved the team and this group of fans.

His mood was like knowing an old friend, whom he had lost contact with for many years, had been thinking about him. It warmed him from the bottom of his heart.

This is enough. Tony. Do a good job with the national team. I may be a Nottingham Forest fan, but I'm also an Englishman.

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It had only been half a day, but Martin O'Neill's resignation and Tony Twain's open letter had already spread throughout the whole of England. Major and minor media outlets had reprinted the report, which could be considered a "grand occasion."

As the team which had just won the Treble, even if they fired a groundsman, it would appear in the media. Not to mention the major news of changing two managers within two months.

It was clear that Nottingham Forest was caught up in some kind of internal strife... And many people were now clear on the cause of the internal strife – too much interference from the club's senior management in the affairs of the team which caused the two former managers' dissatisfaction. Therefore, they did not renew the contract and resign as a protest.

It was just unfortunate for the players and the fans who adored Nottingham Forest...

The afternoon training of that day was completed under the guidance of the assistant manager, and everyone was distracted. Kerslake had wanted to continue the afternoon training schedule, but he changed the training schedule at the last minute when he saw the team looking like this and then thought about the reporters who were crowded outside. He announced a half-day off in the afternoon.

He was now worried that how many of these players would still remain in the team in the end.

At this moment, he suddenly felt that how fortunate he would be if there were a strong man standing next to him, who could make him feel safe, and when he encountered difficulties, he would come up to him and say, "Don't worry, David. I'm here." Or he would grin and said to him with a smile, "I have an idea, David. Do you want to hear it?"

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Wood received a call from Billy Wox on his way home..

"Martin O'Neill has resigned, too. Do you still plan on staying in such a team? Real Madrid has offer you an annual salary of fifteen million euros before tax. All you need is to sign it. That's what you're going to earn for the next four years."

Surprisingly, the Forest captain did not hesitate this time, and firmly rebuffed his agent.

"No, I'm going to stay here."

"I can predict the fate of this team in the next few years – a decline in results and damage to its reputation. Furthermore, due to the enmity with the other teams over the past decade, everyone will want to beat the previously arrogant and domineering Treble winner. Your games are going to be tough. It is possible that you won't win a championship, George." Wox calmly analyzed the downsides of staying on in the Forest team for him.

"I don't care. I've won enough titles."

Wox smiled and said, "That's true. You've obtained all the honor you can win as a club player. But I still don't want you to stay here. Evan Doughty is a big idiot and that old friend of his is the lesser idiot. Such a team does not deserve your loyalty. You're the best player in the world, George. You should play for the best team and show the world your ability."

"Do you feel that your income will be reduced if I continue to stay here all the time?"

Wox laughed heartily. He thought Wood was so cute about it. He laughed till he coughed. He said, "Ha... ahem ahem! I don't mind how much money I make, George. I care about you."

"I think I have enough money now."

"But do you feel happy playing in a team like this?"

"I'm happy." George Wood replied.

"You're lying, George. Tell me the real reason, or I'm not done with you. I will call you in the middle of the night every day to tell you which club has taken a fancy to my dear George." The old man was really like a naughty boy.

Wood was silent for a moment. He was almost home. If he were to continue to be entangled with the old man, it would not be good if his mother asked about it. Because it was easy to deal with his agent, but it was hard to deal with his own mother.

“I want to remind you not to make up any excuse to fool me. I’ve crossed more bridges than the number of roads you’ve walked on, darling.”

“Because I’m the team captain.” Wood said.

Woox thought Wood would say a few words to explain, but Wood only spoke one sentence and said nothing else, which gave him a feeling that he was left hanging. He paused and asked, “That’s it? Nothing else?”

“That’s it.”

“Why do you have this idea? A team captain can be changed when the new manager comes. It doesn’t mean anything. If they can draw in your loyalty by giving you a captain’s armband, then your loyalty is not worth much money ... What happened to you? Are you affected by today’s events, dear?”

“Nothing is going on with me. I’m telling the truth. I’m the captain and I can’t leave my team. I don’t want to abandon a bunch of people and leave on my own like he did!” Wood rarely raised his voice and spoke seriously.

This time it was Woox’s turn to be silent. He knew who the “he” was that came out of Wood’s mouth.

“Very well, George... You do what you want, as long as you think this is for the best. But it is such a terrible excuse!” Woox hung up the phone.

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As the night wore on, the last afterglow of the setting sun lingering at the border of the western sky and horizon, was clearly visible outside the window due to the flat terrain in Wilford and the lack of any tall buildings in the surroundings within the field of view.

Surrounded by the dense forest, Wilford exuded sections of ink-like darkness against the backdrop of the afterglow. At this time, even the turf maintenance workers were gone. Only the club chairman’s office had a light peeking through in the whole of Wilford.

Evan Doughty stood in front of the huge floor-to-ceiling window, looking out of the window at the twilight. On the table behind him was a copy of the Nottingham Evening Post, which was published only this afternoon.

There were only four pages in the special edition, two of which belonged to Martin O’Neill and two pages belonged to Tony Twain.

He had read all the pages, with a kind of calmness that exceeded Allan’s expectations. The so-called “calmness” was observed by Allan, which meant that the club chairman did not swear angrily while he read, or stopped reading and then balled up the newspaper to toss it in a trash can, or tore it to pieces and lit it on fire with a lighter, or something like that. He read all the articles quietly and sat there without saying a word.

Allan knew that he would be facing more rights and wrongs from today onward. It was not wise to disturb him at this time. So, he quietly took his leave.

In fact, Evan had long snapped out of his contemplation. He was currently hiding from the media. He knew that there would be a lot of media out there hoping to interview him, even if the club had already announced a press conference tomorrow afternoon. Those hungry paparazzi were still not satisfied. They wanted to know more, and they wanted to know more inside information. Or... they just wanted to capture a photograph with Evan Doughty's panicked expression on his face.

When the last glimmer of light disappeared under the heavy night, Evan Doughty emerged like a thief from the dark three-story building and slipped into the parking lot by staying close to the wall. His driver, waiting in the car for him, had fallen asleep from waiting. He had to knock on the car window to wake the driver who had tilted his head against the driver's seat and was drooling from his wide-open mouth.

"Ah? I'm sorry, sir... I fell asleep... Sorry..." The groggy driver opened the car window and wiped off the sticky drool on his chin with his other hand as he stammered his apology to Evan.

However, Evan impatiently tapped the car door and interrupted him, "Open the door and drive home!"

When the dark red Audi appeared at the gate, the security guard had the illusion that the hood of the car was alive. It moved to the left and right, as if to observe the situation ahead.

The driver honked at the guard to signal to open the closed gate but was scolded by the chairman.

"Don't press the horn!"

He was afraid that the sound would be heard by the reporters hiding in unknown places. But it was reasonable to say that at this time there should not be any more reporters around here... Or was it merely his "guilty conscience?"

The beautiful modern electric gate in moved slowly before Evan Doughty's eyes to give way to the car. But in his eyes, it moved more slowly than a snail. He somewhat missed the arabesque iron gate that was torn down before. Ian MacDonald would open the gate with his hands with strength as if he were a young man. The speed was much faster than this modern gizmo controlled by the computer program!

When the gate was only opened half-way through amid the rumbling sound, Evan urged his driver to drive the car through. For him, it was becoming more dangerous every second they waited here.

But he still miscalculated. When his car had just pulled out of the gate at its slowest pace, a group of reporters came out of nowhere and suddenly appeared on both sides and in front of the car.

The driver was startled and hit the brakes.

Now he could not escape at all.

The reporters swarmed up when they saw the car stopped. They carried their video cameras, cameras and microphones to the rear window.

"Mr. Doughty! Can you share your thoughts on O'Neill's resignation?"

“Tony Twain claims that his departure is entirely your responsibility. Do you have any response to that, Mr. Doughty?”

“How do you feel about losing two managers in a row in two months?”

“Mr. Doughty, can you answer a few questions? Just a few!”

“Nottingham Forest has lost the manager less than half a month before the start of the league tournament. Do you have a new manager lined up?”

“What’s the future of the team? Real Madrid is said to have made an offer for George Wood once again. Will he leave?”

Countless questions accompanied by camera flashes, battered Evan Doughty. His face was ghastly white lit by the flash bulbs.

He tried to arrange his expression to look better and then ignored the reporters. He only urged the driver to drive the car to get out of here.

When the car started again, the reporters blocking in the front retreated and snapped photos at the same time. When they were certain that they could not take any newer shots, they gave way to the car.

The dark red Audi engine made a booming sound of being suppressed for too long and rushed out in front of the reporters like it was fleeing.

A photojournalist pressed the shutter to capture the tail of the car which stirred up a cloud of dust.

“This photo is awesome. The pathetic-looking club chairman speeding away. Let’s hope he can have a good dream tonight.”

Chapter 906: The Two Buddies’ Troubles

Evan Doughty would definitely begin to miss the days when Tony Twain was still around from now on.

Because he realized that facing the media all the time was not an enjoyable thing.

When his car drove to the gate of the Wilford training base, a large group of reporters completely blocked the area, and his car could not move at all. Just like what happened last night, a large group of reporters pounced when they saw the dark red Audi A6, as if they were sharks which got a whiff of blood. Those bright white flashes were like the sharks’ giant teeth, which radiated cold light in the early morning sun.

They asked the same questions as yesterday, but they were even more aggressive. Evan believed that if he could not give them a reply, he would not be able to enter the gate of Wilford.

He opened the car window and the microphones immediately slithered in like snakes.

If he had just put his face in front of the car window, he would have been poked in the face by these stick-like objects....

“There will be a press conference in the afternoon, gentlemen. If you have any questions, please save them till then!” Evan raised his voice and shouted with none of the club chairman’s bluster. He was completely overwhelmed by the bloodthirsty paparazzi.

“And can we ask any questions?” A reporter inquired.

In order to get rid of these people, Evan Doughty had to nod and agree,, “Any question is fine!”

“Well, how about Tony Twain’s open letter... Can I ask about that?” The reporter did not want to let go of such an opportunity.

Evan Doughty did not answer the question. He pushed the microphones out and then closed the car window.

The Audi made a grueling drive through the crowd, inching forward bit by bit. The dissatisfied reporters were still filming around the car. People even hit the car windows and doors and shouted, hoping to get the people inside to come out and answer questions.

Security guards from the entire Wilford training base gathered here to escort their boss. Even so, he still appeared hassled under the impact of the reporters.

When Evan finally arrived at his office after much difficulty, Allan Adams was already waiting for him inside.

“Those reporters are really crazy!” Evan complained bitterly. A reporter appeared near his home last night. It seemed unlikely that he would have a peaceful day.

“You have to be thankful that they’re just reporters, and not crazy football fans. Or else you’re going to be flipped over with the car.” Allan said with a laugh.

Speaking of the football fans, Evan became wary and asked, “What?”

“Protesting fans have already appeared outside the training base. They’re holding a banner. The words on it are ... all curses at you, Evan.” Allan gave him the latest update. In fact, he came to him this time for this matter.

Evan was taken aback for a moment. It had finally happened. And there would be more violent storms in the future.

“The fans need to be appeased.” Allan said.

“How to appease them?”

“We need to find a new manager as soon as possible, get the team back to normal, and let the fans turn their attention to the transfer market ... Then hurry up to buy a superstar player with enough weight.” This was Allan’s plan.

“Here’s the problem, Allan. Do you have a candidate for the new manager in mind?”

Allan was stumped by his question. At this time, there were too few good managers left on the market and they were not interested in the managers who were not good enough. The goal that the club set for

the team was to continue to reach next season's Champions League and at least guarantee one championship title. They could not casually find a manager and be expected to fulfill such a demand.

Both men did not make a sound and the office fell into an awkward silence.

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The Nottingham Forest players were training on the training ground under Kerlake's guidance, but they all appeared to be preoccupied. Everyone's eyes would unknowingly glance outside.

A large number of fans gathered there, but they did not come here today to watch the team train and then look for the opportunity to ask some of their favorite players to sign autographs. They hung the banners which they brought on the wire fence, in which the following words were written:

"Who's the culprit who made the team a joke? Evan Doughty!"

"Evan Doughty needs to go! Give us back Tony Twain!"

"The perpetrator must be punished. Evan Doughty must step down!"

"We have a right to know the truth about Tony's departure!"

"Die, Evan Doughty, die!"

There were no less than ten such banners, densely packed as they hung on the wire fence. They fluttered in the wind and were attention-grabbing.

If the reporters could come in, they would be filming and snapping away in a frenzy around the area.

It could be the best news material –

Chapter 907: Rather Forget About the Past

More than 80 reporters from different media sources crowded the big conference hall of the Crimson Stadium as they attended the press conference in the afternoon.

Evan Doughty and Allan Adams attended this press conference.

The reporters were still rather reserved at the start, asking questions about O'Neill's resignation, or asking about the identity of the next Nottingham Forest manager. However, after a few questions in, the reporters could hold back no longer and they started to stand up and ask about Tony Twain.

"Is the public letter from Tony Twain true?"

"Did you force a meritorious manager out just because you were unable to agree to his request of having absolute control over the club's transfer matters?"

"Would you agree that the club's biggest failure was not to extend Tony Twain's contract?"

"There was supposedly a big group of fans protesting outside the Wilford gates this morning, care to talk about it?"

“Mr Allan Adams, you said that the club will give the fans an explanation about Twain’s resignation. Can you reveal a little bit about this explanation?”

...

The two of them were embattled by the questions that were coming in like a violent storm. They were obviously not adept at handling reporters and now they realized how dumb their decision to attend this press conference was—They could have just sent any media officer as their spokesperson.

At the end, they had no choice but to use their trump card—

“We’re sorry, but today’s press conference is held to give an official response to Martin O’Neill’s resignation request. We’ll not answer any question that is not related to this matter,” Allan Adams stood out to shield Evan from the questions, but how long could he last?

The reporters came up with an idea and changed the phrasing of the questions.

“Is the reason for Martin O’Neill’s resignation the same as Tony Twain’s reason to resign?”

“It is said that after the friendly match between Forest and England, O’Neill and Twain had another private talk after the press conference. Does it have anything to do with his resignation?”

“It is rumored that the Nottingham Forest team is not united, and Martin O’Neill did not have the trust of all the players. Does this have to do with the fact that Twain’s influence is still strong within the team?”

“Does the club have any countermeasures in place after losing two managers in the span of two months?”

...

The reporters were bent on forcing these two to say what they thought about Tony Twain.

Allan Adams had no choice but to keep beating around the bush and answering off topic. The reporters were not happy with his attitude and their questions became even more blistering.

“There’s a rumor that you received a commission from Inter Milan in Lennon’s transfer, is this true?”

“Nonsense!” Allan was finally angered, “Rumors like these are equivalent to slander, I have the rights to sue!” He stood up and waved his hands in an agitated manner.

Evan Doughty, who was next to him, took one look at him and then gave the media officer a look.

The media officer stepped forward to “rescue the emperor”, “Everybody, this will be the end of today’s press conference...”

Before he could finish, Allan and Evan had already turned around and left.

The reporters were not willing to let them go and they chased after them, asking questions until the two of them completely disappeared out of sight.

“Bastards...they’re not cooperative at all!” The reporters complained as they did not get any news that were of value.

“Don’t worry, didn’t Allan say that the club will give the fans a satisfactory reply in four days’ time? Let’s wait and see,” The older counterparts laughed very happily, “This is a wonderful summer. If only every summer is like this...”

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When scenes of this press conference were shown on television, many Forest fans laughed happily at the flustered looks of Allan Adams and Evan Doughty.

At first, they might still be doubtful about it as they did not believe that the club’s management would do something that self-destructive.

However, as the media reports pile up and more and more inside information was dug out, nobody had any other doubts that these two are the culprits behind the club forcing Tony Twain out.

They used the phrase “forced out”. Even though Twain was the one who chose not to extend his contract, nobody thought that Twain was responsible for it after knowing the truth. If not for the fact that the club’s management was unwilling to give up power and wanted to restrict Twain, it was impossible that Twain chose not to extend his contract. This was the result of 11 years of his hard work and there were countless fans who supported him, there was really no reason for him to leave.

So, the club’s management forced Twain out, that was indubitable.

There was laughter coming from the Forest bar too.

The fragmented bar was slowly recovering. The people were no longer arguing about whether Twain treated them unfairly, on the other hand, they felt guilty for how they treated him. Football fans in England are like this, they dare to love as much as they dare to hate.

Bill was the only one who seemed conflicted still.

He had not been there much recently, and even if he did go, he would drink alone at a corner and not pay any mind to anyone who came forward to talk to him.

Today was the same. Nobody noticed him when he arrived as everyone was busy watching and laughing at the club’s chairman and business executive on the television. He preferred it as well as he sat at a corner and made a hand signal asking for beer to Burns behind the bar table.

Burns asked a waiter to bring beer over to him while telling John, “He’s here again.”

John took one look at Bill, “I see him.”

“Aren’t you going to say something? You two are good friends you know.”

“He’s still feeling very confused, I should leave him alone for now. Let’s wait a few days... If he can think it through himself, there will be nothing to worry about, if he can’t, then there’s no use for anyone else to say anything. He’s already almost 50 and he’s still acting like a kid...” John rambled on.

Burns laughed when he heard the last time, “To me, all football fans are like kids. You did a good job leading the guys at Wilford this morning... Did you think about the kind of response that you’ll get? To

be honest, I don't think the club will possibly openly admit that it was a mistake letting Twain go. At least not during this period of time anyway..."

John shook his head and said, "I just want to make things difficult for them, let them know that there are still people in this world who dare to defy them. Even though that man is the club's chairman, us fans can still give him our middle finger! If they do not give us a satisfactory answer, then we'll show our displeasure towards the club with our actions in every home game. And..." He stopped for a while, "...it's also to apologize to Tony. After all, we booed him mercilessly in the Crimson Stadium before. Those jeers must have hurt him. If... I'm saying if, Tony ever returns to the Crimson Stadium, I want to lead everyone to apologize to him."

"I don't think there's much chance of that happening," Burns dampened John's enthusiasm.

"I thought so..." John muttered softly after taking a sip of beer.

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"Damn it! Those damned reporters!" Even though Allan Adams was the shield during the press conference, Evan Doughty was the one who was fuming in private.

Allan followed behind Evan without saying anything.

The two of them were walking towards Evan's mansion from the carpark, a manor that looked like an ancient castle.

"They want to watch us embarrass ourselves, we must not let them get what they want. We'll shut up after publishing an official statement on our website regarding O'Neill's resignation. We'll wait a few days..."

When he talked about what would happen in a few days, Evan stopped and stayed silent, rooted to the spot.

Allan was also curious about the reply that the club was going to give the fans to stop them from creating trouble.

"How are you going to answer them, Evan?" Allan asked.

Evan looked like he made a very tough decision. He let out a deep breath and told Allan, "Aren't we lacking a manager now that O'Neill's gone?"

Allan nodded. He did not know what has that got to do with his question.

"I've decided to approach Tony."

Allan was shocked and he suddenly understood what Evan meant, "You're planning to ask Tony to replace O'Neill? Are you crazy?"

"I'm not crazy, Allan. The best solution now is for Tony to return. He's the only one who can manage that team and he's the only one who can calm our fans down. I've been thinking about it for one full day and this is the only solution."

Allan stared at Evan in bewilderment for a long while before giving a wry smile, "After one big round, we're back at the starting point."

Evan did not say anything. He knew that it was very humiliating to do that, but to safeguard Nottingham Forest's future, he had to do so.

"I don't think he'll agree to it. He's someone who'll seek revenge for the smallest grievance. We've offended him and he'll never come back," Allan felt that this plan was ridiculous.

"I can apologize to him and I can give him the power and freedom that he wants, give him the highest pay..." If Evan said this two months back, all these would not have happened. Too bad not everyone can predict the future.

"What about his contract with the English Football Association?"

"I plan to go pull some strings in London and fight to allow him to hold the post of the national team's manager at the same time..."

Allan sighed deeply this time and shook his head, "You're crazy." Then he left Evan behind alone and walked on.

Evan was not sure himself if what he was doing was suitable. But this was indeed the only perfect solution that he could think of. If Tony would return and manage the team, all the problems would not be problems. He would lose a bit of pride but in the long run, what he would get far outweighs what he would lose.

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Twain was very surprised that he would still receive a call from Evan Doughty. That was why he was stunned for a few seconds when he saw the name on the display of his mobile phone before picking up the call.

"I thought that you have already deleted my number and destroyed everything that proved that I ever existed, Mr Evan Doughty," Twain became very sarcastic after picking up the phone.

The person on the other side of the line forced a chuckle. He knew he would be receiving this kind of "welcome speech".

Evan did not pay heed to Twain's sarcasm and he told Twain his intention for calling.

Twain's reaction was not unlike Allan's, he asked loudly, "Are you crazy?"

"I know this idea might sound a little crazy..."

"A little? Looks like those reporters gave you a tough time." Twain mocked.

"But I'm here to apologize to you, Tony..."

"Apologize for what?"

"There might have been some misunderstanding between us..."

“There’s no misunderstanding, Mr Doughty. No misunderstandings at all. Me leaving only showed that our ideas towards football, towards Nottingham Forest, were different. Therefore, there’s no need for me to forcefully stay there and of course, since it’s impossible for you to leave, I had to be the one to leave. That’s all there is to that, what’s there to apologize for?”

Evan started to think that his method might not work after hearing Twain say that.

“I still hope that you’re reconsider the possibility of returning to Nottingham Forest...”

“There’s no need to reconsider, Mr Doughty. I have a two-years contract with the English Football Association. During this period, I’ll be going nowhere. I won’t go back to managing Nottingham Forest,” Twain said firmly. It seemed like he was really not going to return to Nottingham Forest.

“Your players need you, Tony...”

Twain laughed, and he laughed out loud, “You’re the king of this team, aren’t you? You were arrogant and you thought you could control everything. Now that you realize you can’t, you want me to help you wipe your ass? So sorry, Mr Doughty. I’m tired of it. Good luck to you and good luck to your Nottingham Forest.

With that, he hung up without waiting for Evan to say anything else.

He could still feel the anger burning within his chest after hanging up and the flames were looking for an avenue to exit his body. So, he threw his phone and it smashed onto the wall and broke into countless pieces.

He only managed to calm himself down after drinking two glasses of water.

You decided to abandon me when you’re successful and content, yet you have the cheeks to ask for my assistance when you’re in trouble? Evan, Evan, is your head filled with shit? If I agreed to your request, what would I become? A tool that you can abandon at will? A slut who’ll sleep with you for money?

I’m very sorry but to me, there are indeed many things that we can put a monetary value to, but not dignity.

This is the shit that you created, lick it up yourself!

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After Evan was hung up upon so rudely, he found out that the call could not longer go through when he tried again.

He sat back in his chair and held his phone in his hands, lost in thoughts as he looked at the Wilford training ground outside his window.

The scene of the three of them drawing up the blueprint of Nottingham Forest’s magnificence inside an Indian restaurant ten years ago had become a yellow, faded photograph.

The shared target of G14 was also dismissed by a deal made by the UEFA six years ago.

The blueprint that they envisioned was already tattered and torn. If that was the case, why did they have to stick together? They could just go their separate ways from now.

I've apologized to you, but you wouldn't accept it. I've tried to approach you with a soft approach, but you rejected me too. From now on, we don't owe each other anything. What happens to you is none of my business, what happens to Nottingham Forest is none of your business either.

You're England's manager while I'm Nottingham Forest Football Club's chairman. We have no relations with one another anymore.

Chapter 908: This is an Unsatisfactory Answer

Evan Doughty's "satisfactory answer" was to get Twain back and bring everything back to what it was. Everyone could ignore what happened during the past two months and Nottingham Forest could continue to dominate in England and Europe.

But Twain refused to cooperate with him. Naturally, this meant that this answer would no longer be that satisfactory...

Evan and Allan did not sit idly by in the days following Twain's refusal. They contacted managers everywhere and it did not matter if they were out of a job or already managing a team, they were all on their list. The two of them had to find a new manager for the team as the team's transfer activities and pre-season preparations were all in a standstill state. If this situation went on, Nottingham Forest's glorious plans for the new season would be all for naught.

Hiddink insisted on taking on a dual role as the Netherlands national team manager too, otherwise there was no room for discussion.

McClaren was not interested in being the manager of this team.

Scolari was not willing to manage in England again.

Ancelotti did not want to manage a club that his rival once managed as he did not want people to keep discussing about the rivalry he had with Tony Twain. Besides, people would introduce him as the successor to Tony Twain, that would be a massive humiliation.

Schuster was doing very well in Spain and he did not want to manage in England.

...

They even went looking for a manager in South America, Luxemburgo, Bielsa... Beggars cannot be choosers. They did not care if their targets' playing style would suit their team, as long as he was a manager, they approached him and asked, "Are you willing to manage the best team in Europe?"

Even though they kept offering an olive branch to everyone, nobody was willing to take it. All the news reports in recent days might have damaged the reputation of the club and many of the managers had to take one thing into consideration when they received the invitation. How long would they be able to last in a club where the management kept interfering with the club's affairs?

The only appeal they had then was money. Evan had no choice but to increase their offer, hoping to attract a manager of a certain caliber.

Eventually, they finally managed to decide on a manager before the agreed day with the fans.

Ex-Valencia manager, Quique Sánchez Flores accepted the offer from Nottingham Forest and signed a three-year contract, officially becoming the manager of the team.

But the people were not interested in news like this. They were more interested in the manner that the club was going to give the furious fans a “satisfactory answer”.

Media from all over England attended the press conference announcing Flores’ appointment, however, they were not here for the new manager, but they were here to ask about that “answer” instead.

That was a very awkward situation for Flores. He was the second person after Martin O’Neill to have a taste of Tony Twain’s influence. This opening to his managerial life in Nottingham Forest was not a sweet memory.

There were only a few reporters who came all the way from his home country, Spain, who asked Flores a few questions, ensuring that he was not totally humiliated. The rest of the reporters from England directed all their questions at Evan Doughty who attended the press conference with Flores.

At the same time, a group of policemen surrounded another group of people outside the Crimson Stadium. The group that was surrounded were the radical fans of Nottingham Forest and they were standing outside the entrance of the stadium with posters that ridiculed Evan Doughty and Allan Adams as well as slogans insulting them. They were protesting against the club under the searing sun.

The reporters were still squeezed in the media hall, asking...or rather, “bombarding” Evan Doughty with questions.

Doughty could not take it much longer and in the end, he could only say, “My answer is for the fans, not for you reporters.” If not for the fact that he had to stay with Flores to the end of the press conference, he really wanted to just leave then. At that moment, he also realized how annoying the media could be and why Tony loved to go against them. This was something that he did not realize when the media was still praising him.

This press conference was a torment to Flores. However, it was a good thing that he was not very fluent in English as it meant that he did not understand some of the more sarcastic and mean questions. Otherwise, he would most definitely be angered if he knew that the English reporters were questioning his ability to control the stars in the Nottingham Forest changing room and he might even just leave there and then—If he did it, he would have much more experience than Evan. After all, he was famous for being a “manager with an attitude” in Spain.

Due to the troubles caused by the reporters and the fans, this press conference ended very hastily.

Evan Doughty and Flores both left the Crimson Stadium with many things on their minds.

When Evan was driving his car out of the carpark, he saw the protesting fans under the “protection” of the police.

The slogan on the signs that they were holding read, “Go back Americans! Return Tony to us!!”

If these people knew that he had indeed offered Tony the job but got rejected, what would they think about that? At that moment, Evan felt that he loved Forest more than Tony did.

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Allan had hoped to sign a star player for the team before giving an answer to the fans but they were out of time.

On the next day, Nottingham Forest published a public letter that was handwritten by Evan Doughty on their official website.

In the letter, the club chairman did not admit that it was a mistake letting Twain go, nor did he give any explanations about O'Neill's resignation. He merely told the fans who loved Forest that 11 years was an epoch, it was time for a new dynasty.

"... As the chairman of the club, I'm very thankful for everything that Tony Twain had done for the team and the club. I also miss the days when we were colleagues, but we must move forward, ten years per cycle. It might be time for us to start anew. I'm still very thankful to Tony for winning us the treble in his final season, that was the greatest parting gift. Perhaps, this gift made us lose our judgement, to continue the glory or to mold a new age of glory? I pick the latter."

"I hope that you'll continue to support the team. Many managers come and go in the history of the club. When Brian Clough left, weren't there also people who said that nobody could do better? After him, we welcomed Tony Twain. It's the same cycle now, why can't there be a third person?"

"I hope that today will be the beginning of another glorious cycle..."

"That's bullshit! Tony cannot be surpassed! For real this time!" In the Forest bar, the fans who had a few drinks too many were discussing about the answer that Evan Doughty gave the fans as the chairman of the club, "I bet he must have had too much to drink when he wrote this. He's brain must be muddled; does he even know what he's saying?"

"Winning the treble, the double, winning three UEFA Champions League trophies, the only manager who won back-to-back Champions League after the revamp, 12 trophies in 11 years. Winning at least one trophy every year has become a culture and there is even someone who became the host of a television show by insulting him with his writing... To be honest, a manager like this is hard to be surpassed," Pierce Brosnan wrote this reply to Evan Doughty's public letter in his column.

"Logically speaking, what Evan Doughty said was not wrong. The footballing world is more and more materialistic nowadays. Managers who can last more than ten years in the same team are rare, so it was normal for Tony to leave. To the Nottingham Forest fans, it might be time to forget about Tony Twain... However, I think that Mr Doughty is wrong about something—Even though Forest welcomed the Tony Twain era after the Clough era, but Flores, who has never managed outside Spain, is definitely not that third person," Lineker had this to say during BBC's special regarding the series of events happening to Nottingham Forest.

Carl Spicer, the person that became the host of a television show by insulting Twain with his writing according to Pierce Brosnan, might be the only one who openly supported Evan Doughty's letter in his show, "This is why I think it's not very good for a manager to be too charismatic—Not just a manager, a player too. When a person's influence and existence surpass the club and the team, many things will change. Why so? They'll change a lot of things that are generally very common... For example, it should be a normal thing for Nottingham Forest to have a change in dynasty, it happens to every team.

However, due to Tony Twain's existence, an usually common move became a traitorous act of forcing out the meritorious... I'm kidding! Even the club chairman can be replaced, why can't we replace the manager?" Since Twain was also the manager of England, he did not care if he was not the manager of Nottingham Forest.

The media had mixed reactions to this public letter. The fans, however, would not accept it.

Changing of dynasties, the third glorious age, all these were excuses in the eyes of the clever fans, lousy excuses to hide the mistakes they made in their jobs.

It would be strange if they were to be satisfied with an answer like this.

What should they do if they were not satisfied?

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"The protests of the fans against the Nottingham Forest management seems to have reached a climax, normal protests can no longer express the disappointment and anger they felt towards the club. Just today, the club chairman Evan Doughty received a 'death threat' in his office..."

The reporter was standing in front of the Wilford gate in the screen and there were many other reporters around him. What was more striking than the reporters were the five police cars with their red and blue siren lights on and the policemen guarding the grounds as though they were facing an enemy.

"The police believes that this was the doing of a radical Nottingham Forest fan..."

The police officer coming out from Wilford was showing the media the evidence of the "death threat" inside the plastic bag—A white envelope and a single bullet.

The crowd in the bar who were watching the television had mixed reactions to it. Some people cheered that radical fan and thought that he spoke for all of them. Some were against it as they believed that no matter how much they hated Evan Doughty, they should not resort to "death threats".

Fat John did not participate in the discussion. He was concerned about something else.

He searched amongst the crowd for a while before asking Burns at the side, "Have you seen Bill recently, Kenny?"

Burns thought seriously for a moment, then shook his head, "I haven't seen him here in two days."

John did not say anything. He closed his mouth and his expression indicated that he was worried.

Burns looked at the television screen and knew what John was worried about. He consoled him, "Don't imagine things. Bill isn't that kind of person, honestly, he's the most timid one amongst all of you..."

"I have a feeling that Bill's not normal these days, I hope what you're saying is right..."

Skinny Bill entered with a white envelope in his hands just when he was saying that.

When Fatty saw that envelope, he stared at Bill all the way until he reached his side and passed the letter to Burns.

“Kenny, I’m not educated, help me see whether there are any problems with this letter. Also, get me a beer, I’m so thirsty...”

John was still staring at him with an expression that seemed to suggest that Bill was not holding a letter but a gun instead.

Burns opened the envelope and shook what was inside out—It was neither a bullet nor a knife. It was a piece of folded paper.

Opening it, Burns took one look at it then looked at Bill in surprise, “A confession letter?”

“I feel that I should apologize to Tony, that’s why I wrote this... But you know that I did not receive much education and I’ve already forgotten those things that I learnt in school. I only managed to write so little after two days...” Bill pointed to the piece of paper in Burns’ hands sheepishly, “I don’t think that Tony will ever have the chance to come here anymore and the odds of us meeting is too small. So, I think I should just write a letter to him... If you have the way to do so, please give it to him.”

Burns did not say anything and started reading the letter.

John pushed a mug of golden beer to Bill from the side.

There were droplets of water on the thick glass of the mug and there were white foam overflowing from the side of the opening, very tempting.

“It’s iced, it’s good,” John laughed heartily with Bill.

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A few days later, the case of the “death threat” was solved. The police were able to identify the culprit very easily from the fingerprint on the bullet. It was indeed a radical Nottingham Forest fan who did not have any prior experience, otherwise, he would not have left his fingerprints all over the bullet and the envelope. He was unhappy with the club’s management for forcing Tony Twain out as well as selling Pepe, that was why he sent this letter to teach Evan Doughty a “lesson”.

When he was arrested, the media was following him to interview him. This culprit had no feelings of remorse at all as he shouted towards the camera, “Away with the Americans! We want Tony! We want Tony! Nottingham Forest will be destroyed by this idiot, destroyed...”

He was still in the midst of shouting when the police pushed him into the police car. With the door closed, he was still shouting wildly at the camera, although nobody could hear him anymore.

Even though it was just a false alarm, Evan Doughty was very nervous. He sent his wife and kids to America and firmly condemned this kind of behavior when interviewed.

He was the King of the club and nobody could threaten his rule. He had complete power there. The fans who only knew how to protest on the streets were unimportant to him. However, this event taught him one thing—Even the smallest man can make the King feel fear.

Do not underestimate the fans. Indeed, they might not be able to threaten his position as the chairman of the club no matter how they protest as long as he did not resign, but they could ensure that he could not have a good night’s sleep...

Chapter 909: Nothing to Do with Forest

After the case of the “death threat”, the Nottingham police increased the security around Evan Doughty and Allan Adams under Evan’s request. He became the laughingstock of the whole European footballing world—There were not many club chairmen who received “death threats” from their own fans through the history of European football.

He did not receive any strange envelopes with bullets, blades or white powder after that. However, both his and Allan’s offices were already flooded by condemnation letters from the furious fans.

Evan Doughty’s public letter had completely infuriated the fans.

What did he mean by “it’s time to forget about Tony Twain? What did he mean by “It’s time for a new glorious chapter”?

This guy knows nothing. Tony’s the one who brought us all the glory. More importantly, can we just forget about all the good times just like this? It has only been two months and you’re saying that we should begin on a new journey, do you think everyone is as heartless as you? After more than a decade, there are still people who are thinking about Brian Clough. We have reasons to believe that more than two decades later, Tony Twain will still be in our minds!

And you, Mr Evan Doughty. When you leave your post as chairman, how many people will still think of you? No... There may be many who’ll still be thinking about you, but it won’t be because of any “good times”.

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To distract the fans and to allow the fans to vent their anger through another channel, Nottingham Forest Football Club quickened their forays in the transfer market. Because of the turmoil previously, they have already wasted too much time. They were in the last place of the preparation battle between them and their main competitors for the title.

If their target for this season was really the league title, then they had to make full use of the following ten days—The English Premier League would begin on August 19th and Nottingham Forest had to play in the Community Shield before that. As Forest won the treble in the last season, they would be playing Arsenal, who was second in the league, in the Community Shield.

Just when Forest was still searching for suitable new blood, they lost another important player.

Nuri Şahin’s agent had come to an agreement with Bayern Munich and Nottingham Forest had agreed to the transfer. This transfer would give Forest eighteen million pounds in transfer fee.

Pepe and Şahin left one after another as though the Forest fans were watching a live rendition of “Dynasties”. They had reasons to believe that they would be witnessing departures like these very frequently in future.

On August 5th, Victor Moses transferred to Middlesbrough for a transfer fee of eight million pounds. He did not have many chances to play during his five seasons with Nottingham Forest, instead, he spent

most of his time on loan for his development. His original plan was to stay and fight for his place in the team, but he lost confidence in the club during the past two months and decided to leave.

On the next day, Nottingham Forest made the announcement of an “inspiring” transfer.

After an exceptionally difficult negotiation, Nottingham Forest finally had an agreement with Inter Milan for the transfer of their star striker to England’s treble winners. The transfer fee was thirty-five million pounds!

Mario Balotelli, also known as “Super Mario” in Italy, was the most talented young player in Inter Milan in recent years and were touted to be the Inter Milan’s hope for the next decade. However, his relationship with the new manager, Zola, had always been rocky after the departure of Mourinho and he had been asking for a transfer.

He had intended to move to Manchester United, where Mourinho went, and Manchester United did make an offer for Balotelli as well.

But Evan Doughty, with an urgent need to salvage some reputation amongst the fans, intercepted and made this “willing” transfer complicated. Eventually, Nottingham Forest beat Manchester United through the power of money as Manchester United was unwilling to pay the massive transfer fee of thirty-five million pounds. Inter Milan rejected Manchester United’s offer of twenty-four million pounds and accepted the offer from Nottingham Forest. Therefore, Balotelli could only accept this result that was akin to “breaking up an affectionate couple” and “submit” to Nottingham Forest which did not have a good reputation recently.

However, he did not show any such emotions during the press conference. He still praised the team for winning the treble and declared that it had always been a dream of his to join such a great team.

The anger that the fans had for the club were reduced a little with the joining of Italy’s golden boy and there were obviously lesser letters greeting the mothers and wives of Evan Doughty and Allan Adams that were delivered to them.

As time went by, the amount of such letters would only get lesser. When the new season begins, the fans would focus their attention on the matches and not many of them would be interested in spending their time to go against a coward. However, Evan Doughty had better pray that the results under Flores would continue on from the high bar set by Tony Twain, otherwise what awaited him would be an even more intense storm.

If the results were good, there would be no problems even if there were one. If the results were bad, there would be a problem even if there weren’t one.

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Twain was still paying attention to Nottingham Forest. He had no choice but to do so. In the planned name list for England, Nottingham Forest’s players played an important part in it.

He would be watching the Community Shield match at the new Wembley Stadium to examine the performances of the English players of both teams.

When paying attention to this team, he did his best to not criticize Evan Doughty in the newspapers for his wastrel behavior. If he had done so, he would have been acting beyond his authority and it would not be fair to the new manager of the team. He did not want to interfere with the actions of the club and he reminded himself that he had nothing to do with this team anymore ever since he rejected the second offer from Evan Doughty.

The new season was about to begin, and he had to devote himself into his work, there was no time for other thoughts.

There would be people from Nottingham who would pay attention to the fate of Nottingham Forest.

He had a problem then—How to face George Wood when the next match for the national team came.

He heard from that old codger Billy Woxx from the phone that Wood was very unhappy with him. If he did not handle it well, it would be the fuse that might separate the national team. In Twain's plans, George Wood was definitely an integral part. Just like in Forest, he was going to build everything around Wood.

If Wood did not cooperate because he was unhappy with him, then Twain would be in big trouble...

Twain wanted to meet with Wood to have a chat before the Community Shield but Wood rejected him as he needed to "focus on preparing for the Community Shield for now".

Twain frowned—Was this a terrible premonition?

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The Community Shield was a test for the new manager, Flores. He had to submit a satisfactory test paper, or he would not be able to have a good life in his future managerial career. He was facing a bunch of picky Nottingham Forest fans who had been spoiled by that Tony Twain guy for the past decade.

Being the champion and victories were their tradition.

But Flores was still not the leading character in this game.

When Twain appeared on the stands, the cameras kept going towards him and the commentator as well as guest pundits kept bringing the topic to him.

"Watching a Nottingham Forest match from the stands, this is probably Tony Twain's first time, isn't it?"

"No, no. This is nothing foreign to him. You just have to check how many times he had been sent to the stands during his reign as the Forest manager... Ha!"

"George Wood is giving a solid performance, let's take a look at Twain's expression... Hmm, he is not showing anything on his face at all..."

"Arsenal has scored! A beautiful goal and it only took four one-touch passes to completely dismantle the Forest defensive line! The camera is back on Twain and he's talking to the England assistant manager, Des Walker beside him. Ah, I apologize, I was just thinking of his reaction if he was down at the sideline..."

“Nottingham Forest has equalized! A header from Mitchell! This is an attack that had a very typical Tony Twain style... Ha, the camera is back on Twain again and he does not look particularly happy... Ah, he’s now the England manager and he has nothing to do with Nottingham Forest anymore. Looks like Flores continued to use Twain’s tactics to ensure the stability of the team...”

“This is very normal. He had only taken over the team for a few days after all. There are many things that he’s not familiar with, and the safest method for him was to use the tactics that the team was most familiar with. Kerslake must have been a big help to Flores... He’s an impressive assistant manager and I heard that Tony Twain approached him when he was constructing his coaching team but he rejected it... Ah, the camera is giving Twain another close-up!”

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There was someone who made a useless piece of statistics after the game. During the match that lasted 94 minutes, the camera gave Tony Twain in the stands 11 close-up shots and four other shots that swept past him.

The match eventually ended with a victory to Arsenal. Nottingham Forest, which had just endured a massive personnel change, was still able to give Arsenal a run for their money in the first half, demonstrating their treble-winning capacities of last season. The score after the first half was 1:1 and Forest showed their strength by equalizing less than five minutes after Arsenal scored. At that moment, it was as if Tony Twain’s Forest team was still there—The unyielding spirit was still going strong.

However, the team felt like they were sleepwalking in the second half as they lost their will. It might be because the players were unable to maintain their form due to a lack of regular training recently, or it might be because the players lost their will to fight after thinking about the doings of the club in recent months. No matter what, Forest’s performance was boring against Arsenal’s attack.

Arsenal eventually scored two more goals in the second half, winning the match by a 3:1 margin and getting the first trophy of the new season.

The Forest players who lost the game seemed to not care about the results either. Their minds were wandering as they shook hands with their opponents, exchanged jerseys, then walked off the pitch.

And on the stands, there were many Nottingham Forest fans who were unhappy with this result. They gathered around and started to bombard Evan Doughty and his “lackey”, Allan Adams, with vulgarities.

In the VIP box, Evan Doughty was shaking hands with Arsenal Football Club’s chairman, Peter Hill-Wood with an awkward look on his face. The old Hill-Wood gave him a light pat on the shoulder while saying something, probably something to console him...

In fact, Hill-Wood was indeed consoling Doughty, “It’s okay, it’s just a Community Shield.”

When he was leaving the VIP box, he told people next to him, “Nottingham Forest is done. This calls for a celebration, we’ve lost our most competitive opponent.”

Then he laughed and left the VIP box.

Evan Doughty remained rooted to the spot as he stared at the field down below, nobody knew what he was thinking then.

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Tony Twain and Des Walker walked out from the stands and they were stopped by many reporters at the hall. The reporters wanted Twain to tell them what he thought about the match.

And Twain's reply was very official——

“It was a good match, Arsenal deserved to be champions. Walcott had a very good performance and he deserved to be the man of the match. Of course, Wood had a decent performance as well, unfortunately the team was not on form and it brought him down...”

The reporters were not happy with an answer like this as they did not come to listen to such bullshit.

“Nottingham Forest was hit by a scandal some time back, what do you think about that?”

“I'm not the manager of Nottingham Forest, I'll not give any opinion about this,” Twain replied with a straight face.

However, the reporters did not care about Twain's declaration. They continued to bombard Twain with questions about Nottingham Forest and they did not believe that he would keep quiet.

Honestly speaking, Twain had quite a lot to say about the things happening to Forest deep in his heart. As for comments, he had a lot of them, but they were all personal comments, it would not be nice to let the others know about them.

Pierce Brosnan was still the one who helped him get out of this situation, “Can you give your comment about Flores?”

Twain made use of this question to get out, “Flores is a very impressive manager. He proved his capabilities when managing Valencia. I wish him good luck and I also hope that he can last longer in Forest...”

What he said had double meanings.

Twain and Des Walker made their way out of the crowd and left hastily after answering this question.

The media would probably not continue to ask him such questions after some time. Everyone had to accept this fact——No matter what became of Nottingham Forest in future, it had nothing to do with Tony Twain anymore. Twain had begun a new journey after contributing the most precious 11 years of his life to this team.

Good luck to him.

Chapter 910: Here Lies My Legend

Nottingham Forest was undergoing a transformation not seen in a decade. The next person to leave was reportedly Ibišević. It was a request brought forth by Flores. After all, the Forest team now had the more mature Mitchell. As Ibišević became older, his form would inevitably decline. They could still make money if they took advantage of the present to sell him.

But none of these matters had anything to do with Twain.

In the past, Twain felt that being the manager of the national team must be easier than being the manager of a football club, because the national team played very few games every year. But it was only when he took the position that he realized the error in his thinking.

Having just taken over the England team, he was still not familiar with the players on the national team's waiting list. So, he had to spend a lot of time doing his homework every day, which was to watch the players' game videos, getting to know each of their strengths and weaknesses and establishing their positions in his mind.

Even though he had competed with the teams that these players played for when he used to coach the Forest team, doing the research for his players in his team was not the same as studying the opponents. He also needed to get reacquainted with these players. This type of understanding was very detailed. It even included what everyone liked to eat.

Twain's eyes were a little strained from spending ten hours a day looking at the computer screen. When he was tired, he would give Shania a call and Shania would talk to him no matter how late the time was.

Their time apart was slightly longer, so there seemed to be a lot to talk about between them. In fact, they chatted about the trivia stuff in life such as what he ate this morning and she ate this morning etc. The two people would chatter on for a long time, during the period they would also laugh heartily for a while.

Chatting with Shania was also a way for Twain to relieve his stress, so he never talked about work. He would even try not to talk about football.

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The days passed like this and the new season of the English Premier League had finally begun.

As the defending champion, Nottingham Forest's home game with the newly promoted team, Charlton was set as the opening match which was to be broadcasted live around the world.

The day before the game, Nottingham Forest's official website published a slogan for the new season:

New stadium, new season, new glory!

It was also Evan Doughty's heartfelt wish. After Tony Twain's departure, the best way to make people forget about the meritorious manager was to re-create a new period of glory. It was as if the best solution after a breakup was not to drown one's sorrows in drink, but to quickly start a new relationship.

Evan hoped that Flores could get the team back into the phase of passion again. Flores was capable of it. He had once led Valencia to be the domestic powerhouse of Spain, and Evan had high hopes for him.

Ibišević had already left the team and Aaron Mitchell had completely secured the position as the team's top striker. However, he was not happy playing for the Forest team, because his most trusted manager had left, and a lot of things had happened in the team. If it were not for the fact that he was the most hardcore Forest fan from an early age, it was possible that he would also follow the example of those players who left and quit the Forest team.

Twain would once again head to the stadium to watch the game for this opening match. For him to choose to watch Nottingham Forest play twice in a row, some media thought it was the signal that Twain would form the new national team with the Forest players as the core. Some people also thought it was just that Twain could not let go the team he had once coached for eleven years deep down.

Perhaps only Twain himself knew what he was thinking. Having actually watched Nottingham Forest play twice in a row within a week's time, it was bound to cause displeasure in other clubs which felt that he had ignored the other nineteen clubs in the English Premier League. But Twain had always been a man who marched to his own beat and the English Football Association did not influence the rules against watching the games of the same team continuously.

"I don't deny that I intend to build a team with the Nottingham Forest players as its core, Des." On the way to the stadium, Twain said to the assistant manager next to him. He needed to make the assistant managers understand his own thinking so that they could work well together.

Walker did not say anything. He knew his partner's temper. The media's comments basically could not affect this person at all. He just needed to worry about whether the Forest players could withstand the pressure.

By the time the two men arrive at the Crimson Stadium, a lot of people were already seated in the stands. The players from both sides were warming up on the pitch. They did not meet anyone on their way to the VIP box, and they were naturally not recognized by the avid fans.

Walker even made fun of Twain, "You're not wearing your sunglasses today?"

Twain glanced at him and said, "It's a cloudy day."

Walker grinned and smiled silently.

The last time Twain came here, the scene of being booed by more than fifty thousand fans was still vivid in his mind, and it was not a pleasant experience. Coming back here more than half a month later, dramatic changes had happened here.

Pepe was gone, Şahin had left, Ibišević was gone and Martin O'Neill had also left.

The Nottingham Forest team, which was in the midst of its warmup, was becoming unfamiliar to him and would soon have nothing to do with Twain.

Twain and Walker sat down in their seats and waited quietly for the game to begin.

With five minutes to go before kick-off, the club chairman, Evan Doughty, appeared on the podium. The live broadcast also cut the camera footage to him. When the fans saw him appeared on the big screen, the crowd, which had been idle before, began to boo him in unison.

Then a striking sign appeared in the grandstand opposite the podium, with the wording written on it in black paint:

Fuck you, Mr. Doughty!!!

One sentence was enough to convey all of what the Forest fans had wanted to express.

Twain could not help but laugh when he saw the sign in the VIP box. It looked like these fans already knew exactly who the cause of these problems at the moment was. He did not have to be made a scapegoat anymore.

The director in charge of the live broadcast of the game was a smart man. The fifteen cameras throughout the stadium captured every corner of the stadium. With fifteen monitor screens in front of him, the fifth camera captured the shot of Evan Doughty. As a director who already knew what had happened recently at Nottingham Forest, he purposely broadcasted the footage.

He was very pleased with the reaction of the fans in the stadium. The first attention grabber of the game had already been produced.

At this time, the fifteenth camera scanned the area of the VIP box and the eagle-eyed director felt something was up.

He motioned to his men to cut to the footage that had just swept past the area. Then he saw a familiar face on it.

He laughed and said, "Ah ha! I got you, baby.... zoom in for a close-up! Prepare to hold for at least ten seconds!"

The man in the frame was Tony Twain.

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When Tony Twain and Des Walker appeared on the big screen in the stadium, the fans who were booing Evan Doughty in the stands, stopped booing the club chairman and began to stand up to applaud the man on the big screen.

Some people even blew their whistles, but it was not to hiss at him.

On the screen, Twain was seen talking to Walker but did not notice the figure on the big screen had been switched to him. Instead, Walker, who had been listening to him talk, saw it and hurriedly gestured to Twain.

As a result, Twain also looked up at the big screen.

When he looked up, the applause in the stadium kept going. Loud cheers also erupted. Many fans blew their whistles and waved their red scarves at him, while other people opened their mouths and shouted something. But the voices were fragmented and could not be heard clearly amid the ruckus.

Walker smiled and said to a surprised Twain, "It's a very different treatment than last time, Tony. How do you feel?"

To be honest, Twain was really taken aback by the fans' conduct. Although he thought that after the truth was revealed, he would not have to suffer the fans' hissing anymore. He did not expect that he could still receive such a welcome ...

After regaining his composure, he was a little moved.

No matter which corner the fans were in the stands, everyone stood up and turned to the VIP box on the left side of the podium. Then they waved their scarves or anything that could be waved in their hands at him.

The shouts of these people grew louder and louder. Eventually a torrent of voices washed over the podium and surged toward the VIP box.

Now the voices could be heard clearly without having to cock his ear to the side to listen carefully. The voices were clearly transmitted to Twain's ears. Even the thick double-layered soundproof glass did not do the trick at all.

More than fifty thousand fans were chanting a person's name.

"Tony! Tony! Tony!!"

The voices swept through the stadium, and they barreled on without any constraints.

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"Zoom in closer! Another close-up! I want a close-up of his face!" The director in charge of broadcasting the game directed the camera. It was the best show before the game.

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In the zoomed-in close-up shot of his face, people could clearly see that Twain's eyes glistened with tears as he stood up and looked at the grandstand.

He was sitting before. When the fans' voices grew louder, he could no longer sit still, so he stood up.

Standing in the VIP box, close to the huge glass wall, he looked down at the fans below who were starting a violent commotion.

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Skinny Bill in the stands whistled and clapped. He waved his scarf after a few claps, and faced the VIP box. Behind him, many people did the same as him.

These people used to scold and boo Twain in the same place. But now they gave the same person applause and cheers from their hearts.

"Tony!!" Bill roared till he was hoarse as if his vocal cords would break.

John looked at him beside him without clapping as he and his companions were holding a banner and facing the VIP box.

The banner was not unfamiliar to Twain. The banner was here when he led his team here to compete half a month ago. The banner said to him here:

Welcome home, Tony!

The thunderous cheers lasted a whole minute, and there was no sign of abatement. What should have been a ten-second close-up turned into a minute, and then two minutes...

The commentator and pundits, who were doing the pre-match analysis, looked at the live footage of the stadium and exclaimed, "This is indeed a reception fit for a king..."

"Perhaps the English Football Association should consider changing the England national team's home ground from the new Wembley Stadium to the Crimson Stadium. In this place, Tony Twain's team will definitely get the warmest and most unconditional support."

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Both teams had finished their preparation work in the locker room and the players showed up in the tunnel one by one. They lined up and waited for their appearances.

Then they heard a round of loud cheers and applause, which erupted without warning, especially when the sounds came closely after a series of boos. No one could figure out what was going on outside.

"What's going on?"

"I don't know..."

While a group of people were still confused about it, Flores walked out, accompanied by Kerslake.

Thunderous cheers came from the stadium and he was almost rocked into stumbling by the noise.

His first reaction was: This is a tribute of cheers and applause for me!

So, he held his head high and puffed out his chest, intending to accept the welcome gift.

He did not expect to look up and see a close-up of Tony Twain on the big screen. His expression turned awkward, and he understood whom the momentum was meant to welcome...

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As the fans cheered louder, the uglier Evan Doughty's face became on the podium. In his view, the fans' move was undoubtedly a slap in the face in the name of welcoming Twain.

And what made him even more furious was that he could not retaliate yet...

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"I know!" said Bale as he suddenly snapped his fingers.

The Forest players looked at him.

Bale did not announce the answer directly, but acted mysteriously and asked instead, "Who can be so popular here? Who's the one who can make the fans outside cheer for two minutes? Who is eligible to enjoy such a treatment? Who indeed?!"

When Bale asked the first question, the players had already guessed who he was talking about. Because in the whole of Nottingham, there would not be a second person who could meet all of these characteristics.

So, before Bale finished talking, everyone followed suit and shouted out, "The boss!!"

"Yes!"

The Charlton players next to them got a fright when the Forest players suddenly shouted. They leaned on the other side and curiously observed the opponents with their strange behavior. They definitely could not understand the older Nottingham Forest players' deep affection for Tony Twain, just like they could not understand the earthshattering cheers outside.

George Wood was the last to come out. As soon as he got here, he heard his teammates shouting, "The boss!!"

"What's going on?" Wood asked.

Bale pointed excitedly above and said to him, "The boss is back! He's up there!"

Wood glared at him and said, "What does it have to do with us? Our mission here is to win the game."

Bale shrugged it off and ignored the surly man.

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Twain stood in the VIP box while the fans were still shouting his name, waving scarves toward him, clapping, whistling and expressing their love for Twain unreservedly.

His emotions finally stabilized.

Although it was a freak combination of factors that he would appear here in the beginning, he'd never thought he would have anything to do with such a professional football club in England. But now Nottingham Forest had taken a very important place in his life.

He thought he would never fall in love with a second team again in his life.

This place held his ideals, but also the cruel reality. There were years full of passion and even more painful memories full of tears. Eleven years of his life were also spent here.

When he left here after bringing back twelve championship trophies for the team, he found that no matter how many championship trophies were won, they could not be compared to the fans' support from the heart, which gave him a sense of accomplishment.

It was precisely because of these people in front of him that there was a glorious meaning for him to give his best to "grab" back the championship trophy.

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The players came out and the cheers still continued.

Almost all the players who had played for Twain, turned their heads and looked up as they ran out of the tunnel to look for Tony Twain in the VIP box. After learning the truth, the players who were previously bewildered and at a loss, rediscovered their faith. It made them ecstatic to know that their most admired person did not betray them.

As Bale ran out, he turned to salute the VIP box.

Walker knew what this action meant. He lamented at the side, "It's really tough to be your successor."

Still standing in front of the glass wall, Twain replied, "Eleven years. If I couldn't even leave something behind, then I would have failed."

"You said Doughty had called you again and invited you to return to the team. Why did you refuse?" Walker could not help but ask when he saw Twain looking reluctant to part with the team.

"Although Evan was a jerk, he said something right. It was time to start a new journey again, which is true for me and for Nottingham Forest as well." Twain turned around and said to Walker.

The fans had already turned their attention to the players who came out. Every Forest player was greeted with a hero's applause.

The big screen in the stadium also changed to show the list of appearances for the two teams. Twain finally retreated from everyone's sight.

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In the opening game, Nottingham Forest, who had the home field advantage, was almost beaten by the newly promoted team, Charlton. Had it not been for the two consecutive goals scored in the last five minutes, there was a chance they would have lost the game at 1:0 in their home ground.

The Forest players did not want to perform too badly in front of their boss. However, they were burdened by that thought.

A near-miss victory did not please the fans. Instead, it only made them yearn for Tony Twain in the VIP box even more. In the final ten minutes of the game, the fans took aim at Evan Doughty on the podium again. They stuck their middle fingers at Evan and mouthed the word "F**k" to insult him. Then they shouted Tony Twain's name to further embarrass Evan.

Even the news media and match commentator did not pay much attention to the outcome of the game... Or it could be said that the results and proceedings of the game had further fueled their interest in reporting on "Tony Twain's influence on this team."

To all the media present, they had personally witnessed the shocking scene before the game began and learned from one aspect what Tony Twain meant to Nottingham Forest.

Although he was not a leader of the club with the highest post, he was indeed the king here.

It was because —

Even though he might no longer be here, his legend still laid her