

## Champions 291

### Chapter 291: Dirty Rochemback Part 1

When Sporting Lisbon arrived in Nottingham, the manager, José Peseiro, spoke modestly at a press conference held in a hotel. "Nottingham Forest is a strong team, and I'll be glad to be able to obtain one point in this match."

This modesty was not only present in that one press conference; it was displayed in various ways. It seemed that Nottingham Forest was indeed a dangerous adversary in Sporting Lisbon's view. The Portuguese did not open their adaptive training to the media when they arrived in Nottingham a few days ahead. This cautious and prudent behavior was not a symbol of strength to the people of Nottingham.

Indeed, today's Sporting Lisbon was not the Sporting Lisbon of yesteryear. The only time they had won a European Championship was forty years ago.

The final game of round 16 had just begun, and the Forest team demonstrated their home field advantage. They did not test the ground in the midfield. The Forest team charged to Sporting Lisbon's front in the first attack.

Twain had sent out eleven of his best players for the match.

The goalkeeper was van der Sar and the center backs were Hierro and Matthew Upson. The left and right backs were Leighton Baines and Chimbonda. The defensive midfielders were George Wood and Albertini. The left midfielder was Franck Ribéry and the right midfielder was Ashley Young. The two strikers were Freddy Eastwood and Mark Viduka.

This was the Forest team's main lineup when Twain did not rotate it. It was a perfect combination of youthful vigor and the veterans' steady calm.

On the other hand, Sporting Lisbon's lineup looked unfamiliar to Twain. It was difficult for him to put a name and number to the faces of most of the players, let alone have a deep understanding of them. But fortunately, the first round was on his home ground. Twain's tactic was to gain points on their home ground. They had to win and score big. They had to concede as few goals as possible.

It would not be a victory if they failed to achieve those three targets.

"...Mark Viduka! Terrific shot! Ricardo made a wonderful save. This Portuguese national goalkeeper once personally scored the last penalty kick in the UEFA European Championship and eliminated England in that game."

He was a brash goalkeeper. Tang En had a deep impression of him. In that game, Ricardo had first saved England's penalty kick without gloves, and he had personally shot the last penalty kick into the goal to eliminate England. Due to this, Ricardo's wonderful save did not win applause for him but instead invited jeers from the English fans.

Ricardo was the team captain of Sporting Lisbon and one of the few Portuguese national footballers on the team. With him as the core, Sporting Lisbon's defensive tactics for the game were already obvious.

Peseiro wanted to get one point on the Forest team's home ground; on that basis, it would be best to get another goal in this away game if possible. Even if they could not obtain a point in the end, as long as they scored a goal in this game, everything would be fine when they returned to their home ground.

However, Twain would not let him get what he wanted.

Viduka's explosive attack kicked off a surge of attacks from the Forest team. Amidst the Forest fans' cheers, wave after wave of attack struck Sporting Lisbon's goal.

"... Nottingham Forest played aggressively at home. The speed at which they got into the rhythm of the game is amazing!"

This was expected. Twain had prepared a long time for this game. Recently, the team's daily training had been centered around the UEFA Europa League. If the game did not meet Twain's requirements, it would have been all for nothing.

Viduka did not manage to score a goal, but a goal was coming soon.

In the ninth minute of the first half, the Forest team's continuous offensive finally breached Sporting Lisbon's goal.

Viduka attracted two Sporting Lisbon fullbacks in the front, and soon after passed the ball from his foot to Albertini, who came up. The Italian assumed the stance of swinging his leg to shoot directly into the goal. The Portuguese defenders dared not ignore this and rushed to slide to intercept. Although the Italian was old, his long shot was still enough to frighten the enemy.

When the opponent jumped up to use his back to block Albertini's shot, Albertini suddenly sent out a direct pass.

Eastwood received Albertini's pass in the front of the penalty area. After he leaned against Fábio Rochemback, who came up to defend, and blocked him, he turned around to hook the ball into the penalty area. As a result, the Sporting Lisbon players around him would not be hasty with their feet because if they ran into Eastwood with their extended legs, there was a very high chance that the opponent would respond by falling to the ground. Compared to a one-on-one face-off with the goalkeeper, it was more stable to score with a penalty kick.

The surrounding Sporting Lisbon defenders refrained and dared not make a hasty move. Rochemback, who was blocked by Eastwood's back, could not care less. He only knew the opponent was in the penalty area and had edged him outside. Seeing that he was about to shoot, he absolutely could not let his opponent succeed.

He pushed from behind, hoping that Eastwood, who was about to shoot, would lose his balance. But he did not expect Eastwood to use the push and turn it into a launch!

His center of gravity leaned forward with his legs planted and his toe tips pointed. The football soared and flew over Ricardo's head from where he had initially obstructed Eastwood's shooting angle. The ball went into the goal behind him in the midst of cheers from the Forest fans.

"1:0! The game has barely been going on for ten minutes, and Nottingham Forest has taken the lead! This is really an exciting start! Look at Tony Twain's excitement!"

Twain really was excited. He knew very well what it meant to take the lead in the home ground of this important game. No wonder when he saw Eastwood shoot the ball into the goal, he was the first to rush to the sidelines with his arms raised high from the technical area. He pumped his fist to the sky so that everyone could see his undisguised emotions.

After gaining the lead, the Forest team would undoubtedly play better.

Now it remained to be seen what the Sporting Lisbon manager had planned for this game. If he treated conceding fewer goals as a form of winning, then this score was not unacceptable, and he could continue to hold. But if he wanted to score a goal in this away game and obtain a point, then he had to attack. Even though this would dramatically improve the chances of a goal, there would be more gaps in their defensive line that could be exploited.

Safety or risk. Peseiro had to make a choice.

“0:1? This is nothing.” Peseiro, sitting in the visiting team’s technical area, shrugged and spoke to his assistant manager. He was not that frustrated. “We have to take everything into consideration in an away game. This is in my plan. There’s no need to make any changes yet. We’ll keep playing. We have enough time.” He looked up and glanced at the electronic scoreboard on the stand.

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“The scorer is Freddy—”

The live broadcast of the commentary announced the player who had just scored, and the fans in the stands replied in unison, “—Eastwood!”

The Romani Gypsy celebrated in the field with his teammates.

The Brazilian player Fabio Rochemback stood in the spot where the opponent had scored, staring at the crowd with a dark expression.

He had initially thought that by pushing forward to harass the skinny-looking kid, he should have lost his balance. He did not expect to help him instead, and let him make a shot that Ricardo could not save!

Perhaps at least one-third of the credit would have to go to Rochemback.

This was what caused the Brazilian to feel outraged. His defense had turned against his own team. He clenched his fist. I will make them pay for this sooner or later!

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The game started again. Nottingham Forest was in high spirits. Their fans in the stands continued to attack Sporting Lisbon with loud singing, without intending to take a break at all.

They were still not safe with their one-goal lead. Twain had successfully instilled this idea in his players. They would never stop after one goal if they could get two. There were different levels of conservative play. To play conservatively after scoring a goal was obviously low-level. High-level conservative playing was for two to three or more goals. As for playing conservatively without being in the lead, it was clearly the lowest level. One could reference Italy’s 1998 match against France in the FIFA World Cup.

After the goal, Eastwood was exceptionally active. He would withdraw to receive the ball and assist his teammates. He would look for opportunities around Viduka. If he could not shoot, he would coordinate with Viduka. In any case, he played a very important role on the field.

Twain watched Eastwood's energetic performance and wondered if the club's focus on Wood had spurred him on. The Romani Gypsy did not care about the club's favoritism. Deep down, he just did not want to lose to George Wood.

Despite becoming the father of two children, Eastwood was still a young lad in terms of age. The age at which Romani Gypsies could get married was so young that they could marry and have children from the age of fourteen.

Since he was so young, he was still quite competitive. Losing to someone he did not like? That was not acceptable to Freddy Eastwood.

Twain knew the Romani Gypsy's mentality. He had known it early on. At that time, he thought that it could be controlled as a form of healthy competition. It was a good thing for the Forest team. However, after the media's unscrupulous speculation, the healthy competitive atmosphere might be shattered at any moment. There was only a fine line between healthy and vicious competition. The consequences could be polarizing.

This game might be an excellent opportunity for them to get to know each other and resolve their differences. Or it could worsen matters with a loss.

At the moment, the team was leading and Twain did not need to worry.

"Freddy Eastwood is by far the most active player on the field. After scoring, he threatened Sporting Lisbon's goal several more times. Recently, he completed his first hat-trick of the season. He's in great shape."

Chapter 292: Dirty Rochemback Part 2

Even the commentator could see how well Eastwood played. How could Sporting Lisbon's manager, Peseiro, not see it? He got up from the technical area, walked to the sidelines, and urgently whistled twice.

Upon hearing his whistle, the other Sporting Lisbon players had little reaction. Only the defensive midfielder, Fábio Rochemback, turned his head to the sidelines. It appeared that the whistle was specifically meant to be heard by him.

Peseiro pointed at Eastwood, who had withdrawn to support the midfield. Rochemback nodded. He knew what he had to do. It was exactly what he wanted to do.

The manager had asked him to closely mark the most active player on the Forest team.

Because the Forest team usually did not have an attacking midfielder, as a defensive midfielder, Rochemback did not need to mark any players. On the other hand, Eastwood preferred to pull back to receive the ball. His actual position was quite flexible in the opposing half, not like a striker. Consequently, having Rochemback, the best defensive midfielder in the team, to defend against

Eastwood would not disrupt Sporting Lisbon's defensive formation but still ease the pressure on the defensive line.

It was a good idea and Rochemback liked it a lot.

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However, before Rochemback could carry out the plan, Sporting Lisbon lost possession of the ball again.

The Forest team took advantage of the opportunity that opened up from Sporting Lisbon's adjustment to their defense and implemented a very efficient counterattack.

Eastwood pulled out, attracting all of Rochemback's attention. Ribéry, who was originally active on the flank, suddenly switched to the middle to replace Eastwood's position. Within a short time, the Sporting Lisbon player lost his defensive target and Ribéry was unmarked! Without hesitation, Albertini passed the ball just in time. After Ribéry received the ball, he did not give the Sporting Lisbon's center back the opportunity to defend. He immediately kicked a long shot and the football flew into the Sporting Lisbon's goal for the second time.

"What a wonderful goal!" The commentator shouted, "2:0! Nottingham Forest once again widens their lead! Sporting Lisbon is in trouble!"

Twain jumped from his seat again, but this time he was not as excited as when the first goal had been scored. He just raised his clenched fist and waved it vigorously in front of his chest.

"This is wonderful, David! 2:0 on home ground!"

Kerslake smiled and nodded. Regardless of how he had previously objected to Twain's plan, he could only concentrate on doing well since he had agreed. Now the score clearly illustrated that their efforts were not in vain.

"I think... Tony, maybe we should think about defense."

Twain looked up at the time on the electronic scoreboard. The first half had already been going for twenty-seven minutes. He shook his head. "It's still too early, David. We'll assess the situation in the second half before we decide."

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Despite their two-goal disadvantage, Sporting Lisbon did not give up. After all, there was plenty of time for them to equalize the score. Although it was an away game, the experience of playing in an away game was common for professional players.

They had to be able to compete under the pressure. If they were unable to, they would not be Sporting Lisbon, one of Portugal's top three teams.

Even though he had caused the team to concede a second goal by letting Rochemback mark Eastwood, Peseiro did not intend to change the arrangement. However, he still took advantage of the moment when the Forest team players celebrated the goal to summon Rochemback to the sidelines. He did not provide any additional tactical instructions. He only made one remark. "Fábio, I don't care what method

you use. I want you to completely freeze Eastwood so that he can't pose any threat to us! Remember, I don't care what you do!"

Eastwood's nightmare began at that moment.

Rochemback might be the most technically crude Brazilian player, but he did not need to rely on his skills because he was a defensive midfielder. He did the dirtiest, most tiresome, and the most detestable moves on the field. He was like the common laborer who was most likely to be ignored by the fans and the club chairman, but who was still the most important and indispensable.

Rochemback was not elegant and at ease like Fernando Redondo, who could turn his playing as a defensive midfielder into an art form. He worked simply; he stuck close to force interceptions. He used petty maneuvers and ferocious tackles. He would commit fouls if necessary.

After Eastwood became entangled with Rochemback, he realized that he could not take possession of the ball as comfortably as he just had. He often had to turn his back towards his opponent's goal to receive the ball. Whenever the football reached his foot, his center of gravity would tilt forward from a violent push from behind. Or whenever he was about to turn around to break through, he would feel an additional weight on his shoulders.

He had to use all of his focus to deal with the player behind him. It was hard to say how much he could contribute to offense at the time. If possession of the ball was lost at Eastwood's feet, it would cause problems for the Forest team's offensive and defensive conversion. Then, if Sporting Lisbon were to seize the chance, it might lead to a reversal of the situation.

Twain saw that Sporting Lisbon was trying to simplify the Forest team's offense by curbing Eastwood, who was the most active. This would make the team easier for the remaining players to defend against.

Passing to Eastwood would put him under tremendous pressure. He could lose control of the ball at any time. If the ball was not passed to him, the Forest team only had a few attack routes. Eastwood improved the middle in many ways. The flanks were primarily dependent on Ribéry and Ashley Young.

It seemed like the Sporting Lisbon manager had put in a lot of effort to study his opponents.

Twain looked at José Peseiro, who stood on the sidelines to supervise the match.

Do we ease the pressure on Eastwood, or do we carry out the Forest team's offense like they want us to?

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Eastwood received another pass from Ribéry. Behind him, Rochemback fiercely pressed on. The physical collisions almost became normal defensive actions. This time, Eastwood did not want to pass the ball back. That would make him looked too cowardly!

You want to force me to submit, but I won't!

Eastwood leaned back with force and used his upper body to signal that he wanted to make a breakthrough on the left. Then, not caring if it worked or not, he quickly switched the ball from the opposite direction and turned around!

He did not look back and could not turn back to confirm if he had successfully shaken off his opponent. But he thought he had done it because he felt that the pressure from behind was not as strong as before. Now, he could speed up and rush past his opponent to charge straight into the penalty area! He could disrupt their defense, score the third goal for the team, and completely lock in the victory!

The football was slowly rolling on the ground, not far from his feet. Eastwood established that he just had to take another step to smoothly dribble the ball away. At that moment, he would have turned around and the pesky Brazilian could no longer have restrained him. He would make the City Ground stadium erupt in momentous cheers again...

The piercing whistle rang shrilly.

There were no momentous cheers. Instead, there was an explosion of earth-shattering boos, enough to make his heart stopped beating.

The football was still rolling in front of Eastwood's eyes, but he had fallen to the ground. Rochemback was about to climb up from the ground. He raised his arms to indicate that the other man had done a flop.

Indeed, the Sporting Lisbon players were happy to accept this version. But the Forest fans were not. Just as Eastwood was about to get rid of Rochemback, this fierce and violent defensive midfielder had ruthlessly tackled Eastwood.

### **Chapter 293: Wood's Revenge Part 1**

Eastwood was collapsed onto the ground. He struggled to get up, but it was clear that doing so was already beyond his ability.

Meanwhile, Fábio Rochemback was still busy explaining to the referee how he had not touched Eastwood and that his opponent was trying to deceive the referee to be awarded a free kick.

"Dammit!" Tang En who was watching Rochemback put on an act of innocence from outside the field cursed aloud in Chinese. He could care less about the strange looks from the people nearby. He could not stand having a liar hurt his players and then utilize his acting skills in front of the referee to escape punishment.

The Nottingham players rushed forward, intending to demand an explanation from Rochemback. Deftly, Rochemback's teammates pulled him away in a hurry. They all knew about his temper; he could make a mountain out of a molehill and start fights over the smallest matters.

When Rochemback was still with Barcelona, he had also depended on his tough defense to eke out a position for himself in one of La Liga's powerhouses. However, his temper was much too wild, and very few teams and managers were willing to put up with him. Finally, he could only leave Barcelona and seek opportunities in Portugal.

If they did not stop Rochemback from starting a fight, Sporting CP would end up with one less player on their side. If they lost a player in addition to already being behind 0:2, they could basically raise a white flag in surrender.

Numerous players from Sporting CP dashed up to surround Rochemback, whose expression was inordinately gleeful. They separated him from Nottingham Forest's enraged members. The scene was a mess, and the referee had no choice but to blow hard on his whistle, reminding the mass of players to calm down. Sporting CP's players, who had already benefited from the incident, tried to smooth things out as they held back Forest's players. Those who could speak English well could assist in explaining: "Look, he didn't mean to do it. It's a football match, this sort of contact is inevitable, isn't it..."

While Forest's players amassed where the referee and Sporting CP's players were, demanding a resolution, George Wood alone stood apart from them. His face was cold as if the situation before his eyes had nothing to do with himself. This made the reporters even more certain of their own thoughts: the relationship between George Wood and Freddy Eastwood could not be any worse! Now, after his teammate had gotten violated and everyone else on the team had gone forward to stand up for him, Wood alone was hiding in a corner instead, looking on impassively. What a beautiful image. Once they captured it and published it as the headlines of the newspaper, complete with some sort of shocking title, it would certainly have an earth-shattering effect. That would attract the attention of readers who would fight to purchase copies.

The reporters no longer saw the football field nor heard the racket from the spectators' stand. Instead, they were looking at a mosaic. From afar, it looked like a spectators' stand, a football stadium, a soccer field, and some lively players. But as they got closer, it became clear that they were dollar bills! Pieces and pieces of real dollar bills!

George Wood looks upon his teammate's injury coldly!

Differences between George Wood and Eastwood exposed!

George Wood without a shred of responsibility!

Titles such as those rapidly formed within the minds of the reporters.

Amid the chaos between the referee and the players from both teams, Forest's team doctors had rushed onto the field with a stretcher. After a brief examination, Fleming decided to bring Eastwood off the field to carry out further examination and treatment. The situation did not seem optimistic.

When the situation on the field got under control, the referee called out Rochemback from the crowd and flashed a yellow card at him.

In an instant, City Ground was again filled with ear-splitting jeers and boos. The fans of the home team were immensely dissatisfied with the referee's decision. They could only use jeers and English cuss words to vent their unhappiness with the Italian referee. The players from Nottingham Forest, on the other hand, were unable to utilize such a direct manner to express their anger.

Team captain Albertini went forward in hopes of a brief chat with the referee, also from Italy, to understand his decision. The referee said, "The tackle came from the side. According to the rules, it was not a serious foul that required an immediate red card. Naturally, you will have your own considerations. However, as the main referee, it is a very important aspect of my work to maintain the balance of the match."



The referee only explained so much to Albertini because they were countrymen. Otherwise, he would not have even bothered.

“But his foul caused an injury to our player...” Albertini pointed to Eastwood, who was being carried off the field.

The referee shrugged his shoulders helplessly. “Demi, I feel sorry for that too. But the rules do not account for resulting player injuries nor the severity of any such injury. If he was tackled from the back, even if your teammate were not injured, I would have still given him a red card immediately. But with the current situation, I don’t have a choice.”

Albertini knew the referee had told him only the truth. After all, they were all Italians, and there was no need for them to hide anything while conversing in their own language. Albertini’s influence in the scene of Italian football was still present. It had not waned because he had left the country. Before, he had worked as an official within the Italian Footballers’ Association. In fact, at one point, he was thought to be the most likely candidate to succeed the chair position of the association. If he had continued living in Italy...

After receiving such an explanation from the referee – one he was not happy about but could only accept – Albertini turned around and took his leave. The grating jeers from the spectators’ stand showed no sign of weakening, and the fans had transferred all their displeasure with Sporting CP onto the Italian referee.

Italy’s football scene had always been unclean; the whole world knew that. Inevitably, the English fans made their own conclusions and wondered if Sporting CP had bribed the Italian referee.

Eastwood was still receiving treatment outside the field. Albertini raised his voice and shouted to his teammates. “Alright! Let us keep our focus on the field; the match is far from over!”

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Coincidentally, the stretcher Eastwood was lying on was placed near the sidelines of Nottingham Forest’s technical area. Tang En saw the three team doctors surrounding the stretcher. After a brief hesitation, he decided to go over to check on the situation.

“How is it, Gary?” He saw the group of them in a long discussion and felt that things must not be too optimistic.

As expected, Gary Fleming was frowning deeply when he looked up to respond to Tang En. He pointed at Eastwood on the stretcher and said, “It’s bad, Tony. I can’t make an accurate diagnosis here. He has to be sent to the hospital for a more detailed examination.”

Tang En’s heart dropped. That was the worst case scenario.

“I don’t think it’s too bad, Boss,” Eastwood said through a grimace of pain and tightened brows.

“It’s not too bad, Freddy. But you certainly won’t be able to rejoin the match today.” Tang En comforted him and moved away. Fleming rose and sensibly followed him.

“Call the ambulance” Tang En instructed. “And tell me the truth, Gary. How bad is it?”

“Tony, before he came over, do you remember him getting his leg broken by Wood?”

Tang En nodded.

“The injured spot is now only slightly better than that was.”

“F\*\*k!” Tang En cursed lowly. He already knew how bad this would be.

The ambulance from the Royal Hospital of Nottingham University, which was stopped outside, swiftly entered the stadium compounds. They picked up Eastwood from the sidelines with Fleming also getting on board. Under the gaze of countless spectators, the ambulance sped out of City Grounds. Through the whole process, the TV camera kept going back to focus on it. It was obvious that the severity of Eastwood’s injury was unexpected. The culprit behind it, Rochemback, likely felt the same way.

After seeing the ambulance off, Tang En turned his attention back to the person next to him. It was Peter Crouch, the tall center forward, who had already changed and gotten ready. Tang En sighed. He did not expect to have to so quickly use his first substitution. Although they were leading by two goals in the match, it had suddenly developed into a much more difficult situation.

“Peter. After you get in... just play the same as in usual practice. You don’t have to take on all of Freddy’s responsibilities. Take turns with Viduka...”

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After sending Crouch into the field, Tang En returned to the manager’s seat. Immediately after sitting down, David Kerslake anxiously asked him, “How’s Eastwood?”

“Very bad,” Tang En answered as he stared into the field. “I have an awful feeling about this. It’s possible that the Romani will have to miss out on all the upcoming matches in the season...”

Kerslake was stunned by his words and fell silent, asking nothing further.

Tang En did not have any confidence about the effect of the hasty substitution. He also could not bring himself to care about how Crouch and Viduka’s stylistic clash might cause Forest’s offense to become disorganized. He only hoped to hold on for the next ten minutes and work on a more detailed adjustment during halftime.

Who was it exactly that had created such a messy situation? Tang En cast his gaze towards the other half of the field with Sporting CP, spotting Rochemback with ease. Of course, Tang En knew that both teams on the field saw each other as enemies. For their own victory, it was very common to make use of fouling tactics to take out the most threatening player on the opposing team. However, Tang En could not accept it happening to himself.

Fábio Rochemback!

You’ve succeeded!

I will remember you!

**Chapter 294: Wood’s Revenge Part 2**

Rochemback himself had not expected such a miraculous effect for his first foul. For the price of a mere yellow card, he had made the opponent's main forward leave the field with an injury. The price seemed a trifle in comparison. And even though he had received a yellow card, he did not need to worry about having to play more reservedly in defense. After Eastwood went off the field, Forest had no one who specialized as an attacking midfielder; there were not many opponents to deal with.

With needing to mark any Forest player now, Rochemback even had opportunities to dribble the ball forward and assist in the offense. With Forest adjusting, Sporting CP intended to take the chance and pull their scores closer amid the confusion.

Perhaps that tactic was not the most glamorous, but the manager of Sporting CP, José Peseiro, still had to praise Rochemback for his earlier kick. Shouldering the danger of possibly receiving a red card, he had helped the team deal with one of their most dangerous foes.

While Sporting CP was on the attack, Fábio Rochemback noticed from the backfield that almost every Forest player had returned to defend. The only player left on his side was a player as tall as a utility pole. Rochemback figured that he might as well try to participate in the attack and get a ball in or rack up assists, instead of staying in the back without much use.

Meanwhile, Albertini was directing George Wood to defend and take note of opponents possibly breaking in from the flanks. Wood was told to prepare himself to assist Ribéry at any time.

Wood nodded but his gaze was fixed on Rochemback, who was steadily moving closer.

He did not know the name of that person, but he remembered his face and number. Wood did not believe he would mistake him.

Pinto was currently in possession. He realized that the success rates of a forward pass were low. George Wood and Albertini had formed a wall in front and sealed off all possible passing routes. ( Updated by BOX NOVEL.COM)

At this point, he heard someone calling from behind.

“João! João!”

It was Rochemback.

George Wood looked up. His gaze shot past Pinto's shoulder to find Rochemback hiding behind Pinto's back.

On hearing Rochemback's call, Pinto passed the ball backward with his heel.

Almost at the same time, George Wood abandoned his defensive zone and rushed out; his target was the receiver, Rochemback!

As if he had not seen Wood, Rochemback kept his eyes on the ball and made a move to receive it.

The ball arrived and so did Wood.

Rochemback noticed Wood from the corner of his eye. Suddenly, a crazed idea emerged in his mind: why not take that silly lad down as well?

Rochemback moved the ball to the side in a bid to lure George Wood to commit a foul. So long as he made it look genuine, he might just force Number 13 right off the field!

Come on, boy! Come on!

I'm here, bastard!

George Wood flew out with a tackle even before he neared Rochemback. Rochemback had just finished turning when Wood's right shoe landed on his left ankle!

Firmly and solidly, he stomped down.

With its loud but muffled thud, even the spectators on the viewing stands could clearly feel the power in his strike.

After the back tackle to Rochemback, George Wood continued sliding forward from the momentum. Meanwhile, Rochemback was sent flipping into the air, somersaulting before crashing back to the ground with grass clippings flying up and dropping back on him.

The raucous stadium lapsed into a momentary silence followed by a piercing whistle.

The referee ran to the scene of the incident, at the same time withdrawing a red card from his breast pocket to flash at George Wood. A tackle from the back; it was unquestionably an immediate red card.

Wood ignored the referee. He stood and immediately walked off the field. Even before he had struck out, he had known what was waiting for him. But that could not prevent him from taking this strike. Since he had achieved his motive, he could hardly care less about the penalty given to him.

After flashing the red card at George Wood, the referee again experienced an outburst of jeering and insults from the home team fans. From the fans' perspective, since Wood was fouled out, Rochemback, who had similarly taken down Eastwood and given him an injury, should also have been given a red card.

Rochemback had achieved his aim. He had single-handedly caused Forest to lose two of their core players. The price was that he would probably be unable to continue playing this match. Rochemback only felt a numbness where his left ankle was, and nothing else. He tried to regain some form of control over it, but it was pointless. As a professional footballer, he knew that it was time for him to exit the field.

He had not expected George Wood to be so vicious, so quick. Wood had not at all been going for the ball. Right from the beginning, he had intended for Rochemback to go down!

George Wood calmly walked off the field at a languid pace. He was not in the least bit sorry or guilty about having injured someone. Furious players from Sporting CP tried to rush towards him to demand an explanation, but before they could even get close they were pushed away by Ashley Young and Viduka.

In an instant, the entire scene became chaotic again. Players from both teams gathered together with every intention of starting a fight. The referee had no choice but to leave behind the injured Rochemback and run towards the confrontational players amassed together, all the while blasting on his whistle. Of course, he also remembered to signal to the off-field to quickly bring in the stretcher.

Tang En saw the whole process from outside the field. He had already anticipated it from the moment he caught Wood rushing towards Rochemback. It was useless to say anything more; either way, the Forest team was fated to battle with only ten players.

He stood on the sidelines and waited for Wood to get off the field, stepping forward to give him a pat on the back.

“Go back to the locker room to shower and change.” He said.

There was no reproaching and no lamentation.

Wood nodded.

“And, clap for the fans to show your thanks.” Tang En instructed.

There had never been a player who would greet his fans after being fouled out; such an action was too provocative. Usually, the penalized player would be hanging his head and walking quickly to the locker room for fear of facing the fans. But Tang En insisted for Wood to do so as if in his eyes Wood was not being penalized, but being substituted as per usual.

Wood obediently raised his hands and clapped towards the spectators’ stand and at Forest’s fans in thanks.

The response?

From three of the stands, he received thunderous applause.

“What an unbelievable sight! George Wood, who fouled and violated his opponent, who was sent off the field with a red card, has become City Ground’s hero!”

To Sporting CP’s players, Wood’s actions were regarded as a provocation and an insult. Even the bench substitutes from the team rushed to the sidelines to make loud protests. Wood ignored them, continuing to wave to the fans as he walked towards the players’ corridor. What made José Peseiro, even more, unhappy was that Tony Twain did not seem shamed by the action. Instead, he was clapping alongside the fans for Wood!

“Mr. Tony! Do you still have any sense of sportsmanship?” Peseiro scolded Tony with his semi-fluent English.

Tang En replied with a beam. “That’s a good question, Mr. Peseiro. Please ask Fábio Rochemback on my behalf.”

“You...”

The Fourth Official appeared between the two and glared at them. Peseiro obediently returned to his manager’s seat. Tang En continued standing on the sidelines, his gaze turned towards the field.

The chaos had already settled. With the combined efforts of Hierro, Albertini, Edwin van der Sar, and other veterans, they had managed to stop the fight from erupting.

George Wood had already disappeared into the players' corridor. The applause from the stands returned to jeers; jeers so overwhelmingly fierce that the players on the field almost forgot they still needed to continue the match.

David Kerslake walked up and stood next to Tang En. "What a terrible match; isn't it, Tony?"

"You're right. It is terrible, David." Tang En said with gritted teeth. "Call Gunnarsson back. I think it's time for him to play."

### **Chapter 295: Unacceptable Part 1**

Now the Forest team had to make a quick adjustment. Albertini alone in the middle would not be able to withstand Sporting Lisbon's bombardment. José Peseiro's reaction was so fast that Twain even thought Rochemback and George Wood's clash was his plan. If not, why had Sporting Lisbon adjusted its tactics right after Wood had come off the field?

The visiting team, Sporting Lisbon, put the focus of its offense in the middle of the field. They intended to use the strength of their numbers to storm the Forest team's defense in the middle. The middle was different from the flanks. It was the most dangerous and the hardest area to break through. Almost all teams would amass their forces in the middle during defense and push their opponents' offense to the flanks.

Compared with the long and narrow flanks, the wide middle section was more difficult to defend. Once a problem emerged, the opposing party's offense would directly face the goal from the best angle and position. The flanks, meanwhile, were different in that the attacking side required one more step: passing the ball from the flank to the middle.

That was why the role of a defensive midfielder in a team was so important. The defensive midfielder was the last line of defense in front of the center back and was the key to increasing the strategic depth of the defense. If the defensive midfielder was not competent, it would cause their goal to be exposed to their opponents' long shots for a long time. It would also nullify the center back's defense. If there was no depth to the defense, it could always be penetrated by a volley. One example was how the loss of Claude Makelele had led to Real Madrid's pathetic performance in a game. That made clear the function of a good defensive midfielder.

George Wood's function on the field was the same. With him on his side, Albertini could feel assured that he could do his assists. Even if he needed to defend, the Italian veteran would not be under too much pressure.

Now that there was no tireless George Wood, always actively running and able to appear in any position at any moment, Albertini's pressure increased sharply. He needed to face the impact from Sporting Lisbon in a very short time. No matter how experienced he was, gaps would inevitably surface.

On the brink of danger, Gunnarsson was brought on to replace Ashley Young, strengthen the defense, and stabilize the defensive line in the middle. And Ribéry moved to the attacking midfielder position.

Twain intended to defend to the last until the end of the game when he would make adjustments.

On Sporting Lisbon's side, Peseiro also made a substitution after adjusting the main direction of the offense. Rochemback confirmed that he could not continue playing. According to the team doctor's preliminary diagnosis, his ankle was probably sprained. At the same time that Wood had stamped on it, Rochemback had just turned around. The two forces twisted together, and that was how Rochemback had ended up that way.

If Rochemback had not wanted to take Wood down in the first place, he could have only suffered injuries like scrapes or bruises by swiftly jumping up to avoid him. Instead, he wanted to play dirty but Wood turned the table on him. It really was a case of him trying to gain an advantage only to end up worse off and suffer a loss.

Sporting Lisbon did not immediately replace Rochemback after he was brought off. They waited for about three minutes. During those three minutes, they sacrificed the advantage of their numbers to wait for one player.

When that man took off his vest and stood on the sidelines to wait to play, Twain saw clearly who he was.

He thought this man looked a little familiar, but could not recall who he was immediately.

The alternating green-and-white jersey was printed with the player's name: Nani.

Nani.

Nani?!

Tang En was shocked.

How is he here? How could he be here now?

It was unlikely that any FM gamer would not know the name "Nani." But his recollection was that Nani did not appear in the Sporting Lisbon First Team so early. Was it because of his arrival that Nani's debut had happened earlier?

The Sporting Lisbon manager, Peseiro, had sent Nani for lack of better option. The departure of Rochemback due to his injury, combined with the fact that they were behind by two goals, made him simply decide to stake it all and go all-out. Nani had performed extremely well in the youth team, but he did not have experience with representing the First Team. He had hoped that by bringing him on at this time, his momentum would bring unexpected surprises to the team.

The Forest team had now given up the flanks and intended to hold their ground in the middle. And Sporting Lisbon had dispatched a young lad who could carry out attacks on both sides of the flanks. His skills were outstanding. Even if he was entrapped, he would still find ways to break through.

When Nani first came into contact with the ball, Tang En was sure that this person was indeed Nani. His stunning dribble caused the Forest team's defensive line to be full of mistakes. Without George Wood, it did not seem like just one player was missing. It felt more like the Forest team was missing two players.

Peseiro gave Nani a very simple task, which was to go wherever there were opportunities or gaps in either the left or right flank. After he had possession of the ball, he had to break through, disrupt the Forest team's defense, and wait for an opportunity to pass the ball or shoot.

This arrangement posed a great threat to Nottingham Forest and was highly targeted.

Even when Gunnarsson was brought on, the defense did not improve much. On one hand, Gunnarsson had too few opportunities for appearances; he was unable to maintain his condition, and he was now rushed to play. On the other hand, his ability was far different from the standard of the current game. Bringing him on, too, was for lack of better option.

The first half had not ended yet, and two substitutions had already been used. There was nothing that Twain could do in his situation. He could only sit and watch where the game would go.

He could not use all three substitutions now. He should keep at least one just in case.

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The shouts of the Sporting Lisbon fans grew louder in the stands. Whenever Nani took possession of the ball, the visiting fans who came from afar would get very excited. Nani did not disappoint them. His continuous sharp breakthroughs made the Forest team's defense particularly pathetic.

Albertini watched Nani being active on the two flanks but had no way to stop him.

The Forest team's defensive line was in a constant state of emergency.

Twain looked at the game time. The first half would be over in seven minutes. He believed that he would find a way to deal with the situation as long as they could endure into halftime.

But the question was, would Sporting Lisbon, who was desperate to close the gap in the score, give him a chance to wait until halftime to adjust?

Time passed, minute by minute. Twain stood on the sidelines and waited with apprehension for the whistle.

Once again, Nani received the ball from his teammate.

Nani appeared confident as he faced Leighton Baines' defense. He was a player who seemed to be born for the big leagues. Currently, his team was two goals behind in the away game. Not only he did not feel disheartened, it actually inspired his fighting spirit.

His upper body swung to the left and Leighton Baines followed. At the same time, Nani moved the ball to the right. He was going to break through!

How can I give you what you wanted?

Baines struggled to change his center of gravity. He turned back to tackle Nani. When he saw Nani's leg swing with the intention to cross, he recklessly leaped to block the path of the ball's crossing. This time, he had no way of stopping Nani's escape.

Nani saw Baines fly out to block his pass, so he immediately changed his tactic and kicked the football into the penalty area!

"Nani! He broke through!"

The effect of a single point being breached was now extended to the entire surface.



Baines, this single point, was breached. The Forest team's defense had a chain reaction. Hierro must fill Baines' position, and Matthew Upson would fill Hierro's position. Chimbonda retreated to the penalty area to act as a center back, and Albertini also had to retreat to the penalty area to help defend.

Hierro and Gunnarsson rushed up from two different directions to defend against Nani. Nani passed the football within the encirclement. His target was not the Brazilian striker, Liédson, who waited for the pass by the goalkeeper. He suddenly passed the ball to the empty area behind the crowd; it was within the penalty area, near the spot for penalty kicks.

Everyone's attention was drawn by Nani's breakthrough. They only focused on the front of the goal, so no one noticed what was happening behind them. Now, Nani took hold of the loophole and included Hugo Viana, who interjected.

"Hugo Viana! Not at all surprisingly, the ball is in the goal!!"

Viana's powerful volley pierced through the crowd. When Edwin van der Sar, whose view was obstructed by those players, caught sight of the football, it was too late to save it. He watched as the football flew past him into the goal, and the visiting team fans behind him in the stands burst into loud cheers!

"Sporting Lisbon turns the score to 1:2! The first half is not over yet. It looks like the outcome of this game is not decided. They still have a chance! Nani! This 18-year-old is brilliant. His breakthrough created a chance for Viana to score. The Forest team's defensive line is powerless against him! He had never played a game for the First Team. His debut is in such an important 16th round game for the UEFA Europa League. His performance was flawless! Another star winger has emerged in this Portuguese powerhouse that once nurtured Luís Figo, Simão Sabrosa, Ricardo Quaresma, and Cristiano Ronaldo!

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When some people were happy, naturally there would be some people who were worried.

The cheers from Sporting Lisbon's substitutes' bench and technical area reached the Forest team's side. Twain swore in anger. He turned back to the technical area and sat down. Now his heart was not in his throat and he no longer felt perturbed. Either way, Sporting Lisbon had scored a goal. It was too late to say anything now.

Nani! Nani... If I had known today would happen, I would have brought you from Portugal to England last summer!

You son of a gun! Now that you're famous, I'm out of luck.

The first half of the game ended a few minutes after Sporting Lisbon pulled the advantage closer. Nani was in a good mood despite the fact that his team was still behind. He did not expect his debut performance to be so good. Twain scowled as he looked at the elated Portuguese kid and turned to walk towards the locker room.

**Chapter 296: Unacceptable Part 2**

George Wood was the first to reach the locker room. He had already showered and changed his clothes. He just sat there, looking up at the television broadcast.

When he heard someone come in, Wood took a glance and saw that it was Twain. He did not look away; he just stared.

“If you were in the game, the score wouldn’t look like this.” Twain shrugged. “But I’m not blaming you. I think your choice was understandable under those circumstances. I just hope you can be smarter the next time, George. You can wait till the 89th minute before you wipe out the bastard.”

Wood was taken aback for a moment, then nodded. He lowered his head. “I’m sorry, boss.”

Twain gave a grin, walked in, and patted Wood on the shoulder, “All right, let’s not think about it. No one will blame you. I don’t, and they won’t.” He pointed to the door as the noises outside grew louder and nearer. The players were heading back.

He knew why Wood was the way he was, so he said he understood Wood and did not blame him. For people who were not good at expressing their inner feelings to others, they could only choose the method which they thought was the most direct, even though they might look stupid to other people.

The first person to walk into the locker room was Ribéry. He was not surprised to see Wood and Twain standing together. He gave Wood a thumbs-up and shouted, “Well done, George!”

His voice caught the attention of the rest of his teammates returning to the locker room after him. They expressed the same opinion as Ribéry.

“That’s right! I’ve wanted to deal with that bastard for a damn long time!” Leighton Baines said.

Just as Twain had said, no one complained that Wood’s foul was a momentary impulse of individual heroism which disregarded the team’s interests. No one felt that Wood was accountable for turning their two-goal lead into one goal. Everyone commended Wood’s actions for retaliating on their behalf.

Eastwood was extremely popular on the team. Even though everyone speculated that there were some irreconcilable differences between Wood and Eastwood, it was hard to believe those rumors again based on what he did today.

Albertini and the assistant manager David Kerslake were the last to enter the locker room. He looked at the situation in the locker room and turned to ask Twain, “Chief, how’s Freddy?”

Everyone fell silent. They were still haunted by the image of Eastwood being taken to the hospital in the ambulance. As a professional footballer, they were well-acquainted with the feeling of an injury. His was definitely not a minor injury.

Twain shook his head. “I don’t know, there’s no news from the hospital yet. But our goal now is to play this game well.” He smacked his hands, signaling for everyone to re-focus. “The opponents took advantage of our chaotic timing to regain a goal. We can’t give them that chance in the second half. In the next half, we’ll concentrate on our defense. We’ll guard against our opponents’ attacks first, and wait for an opportunity to counterattack.”

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The halftime interval went by quickly. The fifteen-minute period probably felt long for the viewers, who were bored stiff watching the commercials in front of the television while they waited for the second half. But for Tony Twain, who was making impromptu adjustments in the locker room, another fifteen minutes for him would still be too few.

Eastwood's departure due to his injury and George Wood's sent-off completely disrupted his pre-game plan. He needed to almost completely overturn his plan during the fifteen-minute halftime interval. Keeping Nani in check was the key.

They could not continue to let Nani be. But who was going to take care of him? It was really a problem.

Gunnarsson could not keep up with Nani's pace. Albertini was in charge of the middle and could not be moved. If Wood was here, then he could have marked the active young man. But not now...

In the end, Twain decided not to use man marking. Instead, he would employ zonal marking. Wherever Nani went, the focus would be on defense and preventing his breakthrough.

After the start of the second half, this zonal defense gave Nani some trouble. He had to face two defenders at all times. Although the Forest team had one less player than Sporting Lisbon, the entire team retreated to their own half of the field to defend. It was not difficult to gain the advantage of strength in numbers in their half.

Nani soon found it difficult to seek a breakthrough on the flanks.

Twain had changed the Forest team's midfield positions. It was formerly a triangular layout with two defensive midfielders and an attacking midfielder. After conceding a goal, he found that that defensive combination was not good enough. Assigning an attacking midfielder position also wasted already tight human resources. As a result, he simply withdrew Ribéry to the right in the second half.

The three midfielders' positions were parallel. Ribéry was on the left, Gunnarsson was on the right, and Albertini was in the middle. In this way, it solved the problem of the defensive forces being too weak in the middle, and also balanced the left and right flanks. Whether on the left or on the right, Nani would have to face the tight defense of two Forest players (a fullback and a winger).

Looking at the scene of Nani struggling to cope, Twain was a little relieved on the sidelines. They had conceded a goal to their opponents, but it was better than losing the game.

He had not at all expected Nani's appearance. Was this kid Sporting Lisbon's secret weapon?

Just as Twain breathed a sigh of relief, the Forest team conceded another goal.

This was due to the fact that the Forest team had put most of their defensive effort on Nani but overlooked the others.

This time, the player who had seized the opportunity was Sporting Lisbon's other midfielder, Pedro Barbosa.

When Nani had engaged the Forest team's excessive attention, he and João Pinto used a simple two versus one pass in the midfield and dribbled the ball within his shooting range, which was then followed by a powerful long shot!

Edwin van der Sar tried his best to save the goal, but he only brushed the football. He could not completely change its trajectory, and the football slammed into the net!

Seeing the football fly into the goal, the Forest team momentarily froze and seemed to think they had seen wrong; surely the football had not entered the goal, but had gone over the beam to hit the top of the net...

But the reality was cruel. The referee's whistle and gesture were clear: it was a valid goal.

Amidst the silence, the cheers from the visiting fans in the stands were particularly harsh.

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Twain, sitting in the technical area, did not jump out of his seat in rage over the loss. He just suddenly brandished his fist and punched the awning in the technical area.

To play like this on our home ground is simply terrible beyond words!

Kerslake held his head in his hands. Their two-goal lead was equalized to 2:2 just like that! He found it unacceptable; no one would stand for this!

### **Chapter 297: What Comes Around, Goes Around Part 1**

At the 57th minute of the match, Nottingham Forest was at a draw with Sporting CP with 2:2.

No one could have expected to see that score when Forest team had been leading by two goals.

What did it mean? Sporting CP had gotten two precious away goals! This result meant that they practically had gotten half of their foot in the quarterfinals.

Were they giving up?

There was no reason to. The first round still had 30 minutes left, and the second had 90. It was much too early to give up.

Tang En turned and looked at the substitutes' bench. The players were all warming up outside. He thought for a moment and asked Kerslake to call Mikel Arteta back.

"This is bad, Mikel." Tang En said to Arteta. "Have you ever seen such a match on home grounds? It seems like we're the ones on an away match. For this match, I want you to play right midfielder. Even though it's on the wings, I still want you to play like before and set up the attacks."

Arteta nodded. "I understand."

Even though Arteta was a Spaniard, he had already kicked through an entire season in Scotland. It was not a problem for him to converse in English.

"We have to score again. Create opportunities for your teammates or do it yourself. Go! Tell them to attack! Other than attacking, don't think about anything else!"

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“Just 30 minutes before the end of the match, Twain has finished all three of his quota for substitution. Mikel Arteta substitutes Leighton Baines. Forest team has one less fullback. Instead, they opted for an additional holding midfielder. Clearly, Tony is not willing to end the match this way, despite already having such a terrible situation on his hands. They’ve fought their opponent to a draw of 2:2 on their home ground.”

During the period when Arteta stood on the sidelines waiting to be fielded, those who saw it must have thought that Viduka would be changed out. A forward for a midfielder. That would maintain the formation and stability of the defense; it was the normal method of substitution. Unexpectedly, Tang En took off a defender instead and was playing with only three fullbacks. He no longer cared about defense.

Tang En knew that Sporting CP’s morale was at an all-time high. It might not be effective even if they continued to fortify their defenses. Furthermore, they had already lost two home goals. Any further fortification of their defenses made little difference. They might as well go on the attack and take down the match. The two-goal losses could be considered later.

He simply could not tolerate losing this match. If they lost the match, wouldn’t Eastwood’s injury and George Wood’s penalty be for nothing? If they lost the match, what kinds of feelings could Tang En have when visiting Eastwood in the hospital?

Arteta ran onto the field and yelled at his teammates for attention. He threw his hands forward.

“Attack! The Boss wants us to attack!” U.p.dated by Boxnovel.com

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In the following period, Forest reactivated their attacks amid waves of cheers, each louder than the last, from their fans. They had the same thoughts as Tang En. No one was willing to lose this match. It had nothing to do with victory and everything to do with honor.

If you win through honorable means, we have nothing to say. We were simply lacking in skills. But if you use underhanded means to take advantage of us? There’s no way!

Defense? F\*\*k that! Go ahead and attack if you can! The question is, can you get in?

“Mark Viduka! A beautiful shot! It went a little high. Ricardo didn’t even get to touch the ball even though he took a mighty leap to save it. He got lucky!”

“Forest is going on the offense now. Arteta is very active. He hasn’t even been on for ten minutes, but he’s already made two incredible passes. It’s a pity that the forwards failed to make use of the opportunities. Who will he be passing it to this time... A breakthrough! He dribbles the ball alone in a breakthrough!”

Arteta’s breakthrough threw Sporting CP’s defensive line into confusion and created chances for his teammates. But Crouch still failed to make good use of the chance this time; his shot went ridiculously wide. The Sporting CP fans on the spectators’ stand applauded him for his shot.

Even though they had not yet been rewarded for their efforts, the attitude displayed by Forest gave their fans great confidence.

Arteta was remarkably spirited. With him on the field, Forest's organization of the midfield had much more order to it. The aim of their attacks also became clearer; they were no longer just blindly passing the ball forward. Although Albertini was similarly clear in that aspect, he was positioned further away from the front of the field. The attacks he launched depended more on long passes. On the other hand, Arteta could get closer to the opponent's goal, causing his passes to become even more threatening.

Tang En felt extremely satisfied with Arteta's performance. It proved that he had made no loss in his transfer. In his recollection, Arteta was the future midfield core of Everton. Only, from now on, he was to become Forest's midfield core.

"This is hard to take in. Nottingham Forest, who is a man down, is suppressing Sporting CP. I don't think anyone would agree if I said this was only due to the home team advantage."

Sporting CP's manager was already satisfied with the current result. Even if they lost the match in the end, he could ask for nothing more after having gotten two goals in the away match. When they returned to their home grounds, the two away goals here could be considered four there. So, when he noticed the Forest team's attacks beginning to intensify, he decided that he might as well substitute in defensive players to enhance the defense. It would be even better if they could maintain the draw until the end.

As a result, the scene was a strange sight. Forest, who was lacking a player, was oppressing Sporting CP on their half of the field, bombarding them with attacks. Meanwhile, Sporting CP with their extra player had instead sent out defensive players, withdrawing into a passive defense in their backfield.

Nani felt rather helpless. His reason for being on the field was to attack and score goals. Yet, before being able to obtain more chances to show off his skills, the team's tactics had changed again. Now, it became the priority to defend. He had to retreat for the defense. The front field did not even have a forward left behind, not to mention a midfielder like him. But he did not like defending. That work was way too troublesome.

Several times he drifted to the side of the team's formation, imagining that he could get an opportunity. The opponent team would launch a massive attack and empty their defenses; his team would successfully intercept the ball, but there would be no one in the front field! At that point, he would suddenly raise an arm to signal his presence. A precise long pass would come his way, sending the football to his feet. With the wide, open field before him, he turns, dribbles, and breaks through!

Alone, he would ditch all those chasing behind him and have a face-off with the goalkeeper. He would use his flashiest moves to get past the poor goalie and stop the ball on the goal line itself. When the opposing team finally chased him down, he would tap the ball into the goal with his heel. Immediately after, he was going to put his finger to his lips and get the opponent's fans to all shut their mouths!

What a fabulous feeling it would be!

But now... Pinto kept on reminding him to defend, defend, defend... he had gotten sick of hearing it. What was a football match? Defense? Bulls\*\*t! It's for attacking, for scoring goals! What's the point of football if you can't score goals?

Are you already happy with only a draw now?

I'm not!

Arteta was currently in possession in the front field, looking around for someone to pass to. He was deliberating about how he should pass the ball when Nani suddenly burst out from his diagonal, stretching his leg to steal Arteta's ball!

Arteta, completely taken by surprise, allowed Nani a successful steal!

"Arteta lost the ball! This is deadly!"

On seeing Nani's successful steal from Arteta, Tang En's first thought was, if Wood were here, so what if it got stolen... but after returning to his senses, he dashed to the sidelines and hollered towards the field, "STOP HIM! Dammit..."

The moment Albertini saw Nani's steal, he did not wait for Tony's reaction before sprinting straight for the opponent. That was despite his tiredness. He was extremely tired. Without Wood, his workload was simply too heavy. Even though it was only the 74th minute of the match, he was even more tired than usual. The demand on his body already made it so that he could not participate as often during their attacks. Arteta's appearance on the field relieved him of some of his duties, and he could stay behind in the backfield to defend.

In the past, such situations were always handed to Wood to deal with; but it was his turn now.

No matter what, I'm also a defensive midfielder!

"Move forward to support him!" Sa Pinto saw Nani's successful steal and immediately knew that it was a chance to catch hold of a win, a golden opportunity to turn the tides. They must not just let it go. Without thinking, he waved his hand to signal his teammates to press forward, switching from defense to offense.

Nani, in possession, saw a flicker of a shadow rushing towards him. He did not know who it was, but that was not important. Regardless of who it was, they could not stop him from fulfilling his dream of making his mark.

This is my chance, I must grab hold of it!

Albertini was gradually closing in. With his speed, he was certainly unable to outrun Nani. He knew that he absolutely needed to block this ball when he got to Nani; there would not be a second shot at it.

There was only this chance, right here!

Nani had intended to abruptly switch up his dribbling rhythm and pass by Albertini, who looked as if he was rushing too heavily forward. But, as Nani lowered his speed and shot the ball between Albertini's legs, momentarily parting from the ball, Albertini suddenly deepened his stance. Snapping together his feet and sinking, he blocked the ball.

By this point, Nani had already passed Albertini, prepared to continue dribbling forward. In other words, he had already completely lost possession of the ball; he was already intercepted!

Trying to get past me from under? Do you really think I've gotten old?

Albertini did not bother sparing his defeated foe a glance. Instead, he left Nani surprised and looking backward at his tall, proud back.

Sporting CP, who had been transiting between defense and offense, suddenly became stuck in an awkward position. Clearly, it was impossible for them to try to attack from this position. Defense-wise, they needed to return immediately; but would Forest team give them such an opportunity?

The answer was no. Albertini made a pass straight to Arteta, who immediately kicked it over to Viduka.

Striking a pose, Viduka lifted his feet and readied to take his shot. Just as the opponents shifted in front of him to block it, Viduka passed the ball to Crouch instead.

### **Chapter 298: What Goes Around, Comes Around Part 2**

This time, Crouch even had a Sporting CP player marking him by his side. The opportunity did not look too good. However, Crouch having someone marking him so closely seemed to be forcing him to perform at his best. He suppressed his opponent with his towering body and a swipe of his long leg.

“GOAL! GOAL! GOAL! Crouch, who had wasted several chances, finally gets ahold of this one. He scores a crucial point! Nottingham Forest takes back the lead!”

Crouch was incredibly excited after he scored. Despite knowing that the value of victory in this match was not all that high, especially since their opponents had already gotten two away goals in, he was still happy to be able to win. This win was for Eastwood and for George Wood. It was a match that they had to win for their teammates.

He had not even taken two steps before being pulled down by Viduka. Following that, more of his teammates swarmed over and piled atop them, their faces all twisted from the excitement.

At the moment that the ball flew through Sporting CP’s goalposts, a long-suppressed outburst of cheers erupted from Tang En’s side.

“That was damn beautiful!” Even Kerslake, who usually refrained from cursing, could not help but swear. It was easy to imagine their level of excitement.

While Tang En himself was not as excited, he was still overjoyed by the goal. He stood and gave a thumbs-up to Crouch. His thoughts were the same as those of the players. If this was merely about advancing into the quarterfinals, they were no longer that hopeful after having played to a draw. The team had no reason to risk so much, running their bodies haggard with the risk of injury. But they all knew the true meaning behind the victory of this match.

Honestly, as the manager, he should be more utilitarian. But Tang En very much liked the feeling of being one with the team, working hard together in pursuit of a victory even if it appeared meaningless. Although professional football was ultimately about profit, wasn’t it also meaningful to occasionally play a match like this? Tang En keenly felt that only such a team would have a future to envision. It was because they were an inseparable team.

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Forest was leading once again. The cheers that arose in the stadium continued for ten minutes straight.

In the face of the loss of a ball, Sporting CP's manager, José Peseiro, was not in the least bothered. After all, he had already gotten two away goals.

Just like that, the match progressed to its end without any more surprises. While Forest's players were collectively thanking their fans in the stadium, Tang En left the area and headed towards the location of the press conference.

As a manager who had held in his temper fairly well earlier, this was where the fun began.

It was not only he who knew this. The reporters and their keen noses knew it too. After quickly wrapping up the interviews in the common area, everyone had swiftly taken their spots in the press conference hall, waiting for it to begin.

When José Peseiro arrived, the press officer announced the commencement of the press conference. Countless hands shot up immediately.

No one cared about how the match's results would impact Forest's pursuit of the UEFA Europa League or Nani's breakthrough performance. Everyone was only concerned about the two injuries and one red card that had appeared in this match.

Peseiro's expression was grim when he took his place at the press conference. The joy from scoring two goals on an away match had all but vanished after hearing about Rochemback's injury.

According to the preliminary examination by the team doctors, Rochemback's injury was most likely to be a ligament tear in his ankle. After hearing this, the smile on his face completely disappeared. As a manager who was constantly in contact with football and its associated injuries, he knew exactly what it meant for a player to get a ligament tear.

For this season, Rochemback was finished.

As a result, he spoke nothing about the results of the match during the press conference or if it made him happy. Instead, he jabbed his fingers towards Nottingham, Tony Twain, and George Wood.

"...I think that the foul by Forest's number 13 was an extremely unethical and dirty play. He needs to suffer a heavier penalty for it! That was completely..."

Peseiro had not even finished his criticism when he was interrupted by Tony Twain beside him. "I think there's a need for me to remind Mr. José Peseiro of something. If Rochemback had received a red card after fouling against Eastwood, he wouldn't have gotten injured. No one would have gone looking for trouble with him in the away locker room. Rather than criticising my player, shouldn't you be reprimanding the main referee for this match? Of course, if you must keep criticizing my players, I would like to trouble you to first lecture Fábio Rochemback, your own player. Currently, Eastwood is still lying in hospital, and I have no news of the severity of his condition. Can I ask, Mr. Peseiro..." Tang En swiveled his head to glare at his opponent, suddenly raising his voice, "What are you angry?!"

"That- that was just an accident. Such accidents will occur from time to time in a football match. That can't become an excuse for your player to maliciously violate Rochemback!"

“Very well, then. Regarding George Wood’s foul, I feel extremely sorry. I’m sure that was just an accident that we did not want to see, right? Such accidents occur from time to time in a football match. Surely, there’s no reason to feel angry because of it. I’ll ask the same question, Mr. Peseiro. What on earth are you angry about?”

Watching the confrontation of the two managers who had begun arguing back and forth without heed to their audience, the media kept their silence. They were all watching a good show. No one tried raising their hands to ask questions; that would only disrupt the ongoing dramatics.

Tang En’s retort left Peseiro without any response. Realising that the situation was not going well, the press officer made a move to end the highly-reactive press conference ahead of time. However, Tang En raised a hand to stop him.

“Allow Mr. Peseiro to finish venting his anger. You can’t stop him from speaking, can you? Mr. Peseiro, what are you angry about? Don’t you feel that it is very, very normal for your player to intentionally violate my player, that it’s something that ‘occur from time to time in a football match?’ Yet, when an opponent fouls your player, it’s unethical, dirty, and should be severely punished?”

Tang En continued pressing him, his barrage of questions causing Peseiro to sweat.

“I am truly sorry about George Wood’s foul. I believe that he definitely, definitely did not mean to do it. After all, no one on the field would purposely try to violate a stranger that they don’t have a grudge against, right?” Tang En purposefully emphasized heavily on “don’t have a grudge,” making the sarcasm painfully obvious.

“I don’t know if Mr. Peseiro has ever heard of the phrase, double standards. I think that your earlier performance gave it an excellent definition. You have flawlessly explained to our current audience what makes a double standard. Oh, dear. In fact, I should have spoken first in today’s press conference. In that case, I would surely have pronounced Fábio Rochemback’s foul to be extremely unethical, supremely dirty, and deserving of a more severe punishment. That way, you could have used my words against me. You were too anxious, Mr. Peseiro. As for Rochemback and his injury, I believe he had the same realization when he acted against Eastwood. What goes around, comes around.”

After saying this, Tang En stood and said to the reporters below the stage, “Everyone, despite Sporting CP having scored two away goals, we are greatly overjoyed about our victory. That is especially true after the situations that cropped up. I am tremendously proud of my players and team. I am also proud that Forest has such great fans. Thank you, everyone. Today’s press conference will end here. Thank you and goodbye!”

Once again, he prematurely left the scene... Or perhaps not; he had already announced the end of the press conference.

### **Chapter 299: The Fate of The Romani Part 1**

Tony Twain was once again in the news. However this time, he did not only appear in the local media of Nottingham or the English media; he was also in the major sports editions of the European media.

The focus of media coverage was not the 3:2 Nottingham Forest home game, a narrow victory over Sporting Lisbon, but the argument that had happened at the post-game press conference. The first to break the news was the Lisbon media in Portugal. Naturally, they would not say that José Peseiro was at fault. The Portuguese people described Tony Twain in the news as an ill-mannered, arrogant, rude, and uneducated country bumpkin and hooligan. They twisted the words he had used to attack Peseiro and published them as evidence.

The Portuguese press fired the first shot, and the English tabloids had absolutely no reason not to retaliate. "The Times" launched the first counterattack from the English press. The English media's counterattack was mainly focused on Rochemback's malicious assault and his smug expression afterward. Thanks to the advanced television technology, such a subtle and fleeting expression could be captured, and the frozen frame could be repeatedly broadcasted for a long time for viewers to appreciate.

Both countries' media waged a war of words which, unsurprisingly, attracted the attention of the media of other countries in the European continent. In the UEFA Europa League 16th round match, two players were injured and one player was sent off. After the game, the two managers did not let the matter drop and quarreled endlessly in the press conference. There was a lot to cover.

Funnily enough, Tony Twain was now a manager of some European renown.

But Twain was simply in no mood for jokes.

As mentioned earlier, it was a game with two serious injuries. Sporting Lisbon's Fábio Rochemback was diagnosed with an ankle ligament tear, accompanied by a slight fracture. It was optimistically estimated that he would not play for eighteen months!

George Wood's seemingly ordinary kick had that kind of power. If Peseiro had known that exact piece of news about Rochemback's recovery time after the game, it was likely that he would have enacted a scene from "Mortal Kombat" with Tony Twain on the spot in front of reporters.

Eighteen months was a full year-and-a-half. It would be 2007 before Rochemback could return to the field. Even if he recovered, his condition and physique would surely take a nosedive, and he might never return to his former self. Rochemback was a tough and strong defensive midfielder. Perhaps he did not know how many opponents he had injured in his career, but he certainly had not expected that he would be seriously injured with a kick one day.

Manager José Peseiro had a good reason to be angry. And Tony Twain was no exception.

As soon as the press conference was over, he received a call from Professor Constantine himself, telling him the bad news.

Freddy Eastwood's injury was in the medial meniscus of his knee.

Just hearing this name, Twain's heart leaped wildly. When he was a football fan, he had often heard this term. Countless players were ruined by this small medial meniscus.

Eastwood's right knee had suffered severe trauma again and his outer meniscus had ruptured. He had to undergo surgical treatment and required a minimum of five months of recovery after the treatment.

This meant that if he was lucky and everything went smoothly, Eastwood would still have to wait until next season to play again. Furthermore, the meniscus was basically a special part with very little or no regenerative ability. Even if the operation was very successful, Eastwood's right leg would be permanently left with hidden damage. He could fall again at any time due to this injury. Even if he was not injured, the damaged meniscus would greatly limit his play. No one knew how he would perform when he returned to the field.

Only two years had passed since his last serious injury and now he was seriously injured again. Twain was very worried that Eastwood would lose his mind before his body recovered. The next day after the game, he decided to personally visit the striker he had brought back from a community green space in East London.

He hoped to still be able to see Eastwood's mischievous smile and hear his rapid, sharp, and cheerful voice.

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Twain had not been to the Royal Hospital of Nottingham University for a long time. The first time he had come here was to find someone who could give his head an authoritative appraisal. From then on, he had met the loyal Forest fan, Professor Constantine, and procured two clinical experts in sports injury as well. The last time, he had brought Shania, who had seemed to be running a high fever. He and the young girl had gotten to know each other well for the first time here in the hospital ward. Time flew so quickly; one and a half years had gone by in a flash.

Professor Constantine greeted Twain alone at the gate. Although Eastwood was under sports injury, which he was not in charge of, as Tony Twain's personal friend he still helped in the matter.

"How's he feeling, Professor?" was the first thing Tang En said when he arrived.

"I don't know what to say." Constantine shook his head. "We informed him of the injury. His reaction was very... Well, it's inappropriate to say he was happy. But he was the one who smiled and comforted others. I feel like his mood is abnormal. It's not the kind of emotions a normal person would display at a time like this. You know what I mean, Tony?"

Twain nodded.

"The same area suffered two serious injuries. I'm worried about his career..." Constantine could not continue. He was aware that Twain knew as well.

Twain did not speak and his head was lowered. He just quickened his pace.

The two men walked silently into the inpatient building.

Compared with the comings and goings in the outpatient building, the inpatient building seemed deserted and quiet. The footsteps of Twain and Professor Constantine were crisp in the corridor. The last sound of their footsteps faded away in front of a door.

"Here it is." Constantine pointed to a door with the number 402. "I'll go back first. Come find me if you need anything, Tony."

Twain nodded again. "Thank you, Professor."

When Professor Constantine turned and left, Twain raised his hand to lightly tap on the door of the ward.

“Come in, please.” A female voice could be heard from inside.

Twain pushed open the door and stepped in. He saw the heavily-pregnant Sabina peeling an apple for Eastwood.

Sabina’s back was towards the door and she did not see who pushed the door open and entered. Lying down, Eastwood sat up on the bed. “Chief.”

The room was filled with flower baskets, like a florist. The biggest one was from the Nottingham Forest Club and the rest were from the Forest fans and players.

“It all looks really nice, chief,” Eastwood quipped when he saw Twain fix his gaze on all the flowers. “Even if I retire now, at least I can open a florist.”

Twain smiled. “That’s pretty corny, Freddy. Are you starting to think about your life after retirement?”

When Sabina heard the two men starting to discuss the topic, she quickly put the apple down and found an excuse to go out.

Twain watched Sabina leave and then asked, “When is your baby due?”

“There are still three months,” Eastwood replied.

“You’re so young, and yet you’re going to be a father of two...” Twain sat the chair where Sabina had sat, picked up the half-peeled apple and continued Sabina’s unfinished task.

“Chief, don’t you want to find someone for yourself?” Eastwood laughed.

“Uh... I haven’t met the right one.”

“Who would be the right one?”

Twain lowered his head to peel the apple and said, “I don’t know. That’s too difficult to answer. There is a saying in China; a real man aspires to travel far and make his mark. That is to say, a man should put his career first. Matters like finding a wife before you’re successful in your career should be secondary. As you can see, I still haven’t achieved anything yet.

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled.

“The legendary manager...” muttered Eastwood. It was a picture of the future that Twain had once painted for him, and it was wonderful. “I think... Chief, maybe you need to find another legendary striker to partner with you.”

Twain cut off the last apple peel and handed the apple to Eastwood. “You have no confidence in your abilities, Freddy?”

“No, I never doubt my ability. I just... I just have no confidence in my body.” Freddy took the peeled apple and stared blankly at it. “After my first injury, I’m thrilled that I’ve been able to play professional football again. Chief, you helped me to realize a dream that I could only think about occasionally. I even

got a championship trophy. I'm very lucky compared to the guys I used to know on the Grays Athletic team. Some people love football, have a healthy body, but can't even touch glory. And me? I have a championship, played in European competitions, participated in the English Premier League and scored goals..."

Twain quietly waited for him to finish his words and then put away the fruit knife. He looked at him and asked, "Do you know the result of yesterday's game?"

Freddy nodded. "Sabina specifically bought a lot of newspapers for me. I even watched the news on TV. We won. It was really good, but too bad we let the opponents score two goals."

### **Chapter 300: The Fate of The Romani Part 2**

"Hmm..." Twain tapped his nose. "You know, when the opponents scored the second goal, it didn't matter how we played in the end; the Forest team would be considered to have lost. You were injured, and George was sent off by a red card. In the second round, the Forest team will be down two main players. I don't have high hopes for the away game."

The Romani smiled. "Chief, when did you become so uncertain?"

"When we lost you and George."

"Me? I can't be that important, can I? Even if I can't play, there's still the Australian beast, the giant machine. And that Danish kid who always likes to show off. We have a strong forward."

"They are them and you're you. No one can be replaced by any others. The substitute can relieve your position, but they can't replace you. Without you, we're going to have a harder time playing for the rest of the season. But I think the team will persist till you're back. I didn't ask them to do that. It's what they want."

Eastwood did not speak. He thought about what would happen if he did return. Playing with an injured leg was like having a bomb waiting to explode at any time. He could become a burden to the team at the most critical moment; just like in this UEFA Europa League game.

"Are you worried about becoming a liability to the team?" It was as if Twain could read Eastwood's mind. He questioned the Romani, looking straight into his eyes. "Where's the Eastwood that I know? The one who's optimistic and cheerful, always speaking the fastest speed and the loudest? The popular one who likes to joke and give his teammates nicknames? Every time I see you riding a horse in the morning, I think of our first meeting and I laugh. You're the most interesting person I've ever met, Freddy. I don't think I'll ever meet someone like you again. You think your right knee can't hold on anymore? But when you became a member of the Forest team, did those doubts crush you? When you were at the Stadium of Light making your debut on behalf of the Forest team in the tournament, did those Sunderland fans' abuse scare you? Those people who thought you weren't worthy of being a Forest footballer, that you had no right to stand on the field wearing the red Forest jersey, ridiculed you for being an amateur player and thought you would never be successful... and what did they get in return? A loud and clear slap on the face! You never doubted yourself. You always believed that you

could play professional football ever since you played in an amateur team two years ago. Why are you cowering now?"

Eastwood tightened his jaw. The apple in his hand changed shape and the juice seeped out of his fingers.

"Do you believe in fate, Freddy? Sabina often uses cards to tell people's fortune. You also know a thing or two. Do you ever believe it? What do you think fate is? ...It seems to me that fate isn't a net that sets a path for you to walk on. Fate is a network of crossroads, and you're always faced with a variety of choices." Twain thought about Tang En, how he inexplicably transmigrated into this world and time period. Perhaps that could also be considered fate. If he had abandoned himself to despair at that time, indulged in the British pub culture, and went to work with a muddle-through attitude and no desire to do well, what would have become of him? Where would he be, what would he do, who would he know? He had no idea, but Twain firmly believed that if he had done that, he would never have been better off than he was now.

"If you choose A, you will give up B, C, and D. If you choose B, you will give up A, C, and D... Your choice will be your fate. I choose to be a legendary manager, and I will continue to try my best. No matter how many crossroads I face, I will only choose the direction that I can take to achieve my goal. Maybe it's left, maybe it's right. But no matter which direction, I will never choose to stand still. Because I don't know if I'll have the courage to continue on if I stop to take a break. And now, Freddy!" Twain suddenly raised his voice, "You have come to a crossroads just like that. What will you choose? To continue to go forward, or stop here and now? Are you willing to accept it? To stop? Are you physically and emotionally exhausted?"

With a pop, Freddy Eastwood crushed the apple to pieces in his hand, scattering them across the bedding.

"I... I'm not willing, chief. When I see healthy people, I can't accept it. If... if you can give me a pair of healthy knees, I can score more goals. I think I want to be a legendary striker... I want to help you, chief."

Always optimistic and cheerful, his laughter always heard before his face was seen, the Romani now buried his head in the blanket and wept. This father, soon to welcome his second baby, cried like a child.

Watching him cry, Twain smiled. He put his hand on Eastwood's head and gently rubbed his hair.

"We can do it. I'll be the legendary manager, and you be a legendary striker. It's going to be okay. Your knee will be just as healthy and active as before in a few months. Don't worry; there's nothing to worry about. You've done a lot of things that people with a pair of healthy knees can't do. Okay, don't cry. Now is not 'time to say goodbye.'"

Eastwood nodded his head and gradually stopped crying.

When it was time for Twain to say goodbye, he said to Eastwood, "Relax and work with the treatment and rehabilitation. The team is waiting for you to come back, as am I."

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Having said goodbye to Eastwood, Twain found Constantine, hoping he would take him to meet the chief surgeon of the operation so that he could feel reassured.

Upon hearing his request, Constantine's expression looked a little odd. He told Twain that the surgeon was a diehard Notts County fan and his family had been Notts County fans for several generations. He was worried that it would be awkward when they met.

"I think it's okay... I'm meeting him in my personal capacity, not as a manager of the Forest team."

Constantine nodded his head in assent, seeing Twain's insistence.

The surgeon in charge of Freddy Eastwood's meniscus removal surgery was Stephen Albert, a bald, middle-aged man with golden-rimmed glasses and a somber expression. He looked rather difficult to deal with.

Twain tactfully explained his purpose for coming to Albert. The other man looked serious and did not reveal a warm smile.

"I think Professor Constantine has explained some things about me to you..." When he said this, he gave Constantine a glance. However, Constantine looked out of the window and pretended not to have noticed.

"Yes, I'm a Notts County fan. Notts County and Nottingham Forest are arch rivals. But Mr. Twain, there's one thing I want you to understand; I'm a doctor before I'm a Notts County fan. It's my job to save lives. My work at the operating table has nothing to do with whether I support Notts County or Nottingham Forest."

Twain smiled. "Thank you, Dr. Albert. Professor Constantine says you're a respected physician, and I'm sure he's right."

Twain had made this up. Constantine certainly would not make such a sappy remark.

Unsurprisingly, when Albert heard Twain say that, he turned to the slightly uncomfortable looking Constantine who stood on the side and smiled. "Constantine, that old chap, would never say such nice things about me. That said, I would still like to thank you for your compliment, Mr. Twain. I also admire your devotion to your players."

After the lie had been laid bare, Twain did not feel embarrassed and gave a chuckle. He asked some questions relating to Eastwood's surgery and then excused himself.

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After he thanked Constantine for his help and said goodbye, Twain left the Royal Hospital of Nottingham University. Eastwood had regained his fighting spirit and confidence, so Twain was in a good mood. Though he was fated to lose the Romani for five months, it was better than losing him forever.

So Twain was not in a hurry to go back. He decided to take a walk.

At that time, it was not crowded near the hospital entrance. The hospital was not in the downtown area. It was a very quiet road and the traffic flow was not busy. There were few pedestrians on the sidewalk.

There was a person walking towards him, holding a bouquet of flowers. Twain thought the person looked very familiar, and the other man saw him too.



After he saw Twain, that man seemed to a little flustered. He hesitated for a moment and turned to go.

“George!” Twain called out.

Wood broke into a run as if he was afraid to see Twain here.

“Stop there, George! If you run again, I’ll send you to the reserves team to calm down!” yelled Twain.

It worked. The person ahead stopped running and stood on the spot. He looked somewhat awkwardly at Twain walking towards him. Twain smiled happily. “George, are you visiting someone? I just happen to know the exact ward he’s staying at.” He pointed to the flowers in George Wood’s hands.