

## Champions 341

### Chapter 341: Bright Red Part 2

Thirty-two minutes into the first half, the score was still 0:0. But the Forest fans were full of confidence for the outcome of the game because Nottingham Forest was completely in control of it. Tony Twain had no intention of letting the Spaniards turning the situation around!

Villarreal had automatically adjusted their tactics in the game. After seeing Riquelme being blocked by Wood, the ball was seldom passed to their side. Even if the ball was passed to the Argentine, he could not organize a decent offense.

Senna rushed to take on the task of organizing offense for the team. But he still was not made for offense. When he dribbled the ball forward this time, Arteta intercepted it and the Forest team immediately launched the attack from the vicinity of the center circle. Arteta passed the ball to Ribéry, who retreated to help with the defense. Compared to Sorín on the other side, the strength of Villarreal's right back on this side was not as strong. The Forest team seized upon this point to maneuver the main attack to be on the team's left flank, which was the opponent's right flank. And on the Forest team's left flank, Ashley Young's main task was to contain and suppress Sorín.

Ribéry received the pass and turned around, relying on his speed to force a breakthrough past the Ecuadorian player, Antonio Valencia. Ribéry's rapid breakthrough on the flank was one of the Forest fans' favorite thing to watch last season. Whenever Ribéry forced a breakthrough, the Frenchman's nickname would be chanted: Blade Warrior.

Just like this, Ribéry cut through the Villarreal defensive line at the flank like a sharp blade.

"Oh my God! Ribéry is really fast! He plays like he's gliding on ice with skates on. This is a quick counterattack from Nottingham Forest!"

It was indeed a quick counterattack from the Forest team. When Senna dribbled the ball for the attack, it was Villarreal's offense opportunity. They did not expect the ball to be intercepted in the midfield. The Yellow Submarine team had to fall back in a flurry to defend.

But how could the speed of their return to defense be faster than the Forest team's counterattack?

Last season, the Forest team had relied on their speed at the flanks in the English tournaments. In this new season, that fine tradition naturally could not be lost.

Ribéry broke through on the left flank and Ashley Young worked in concert on the right flank. Equally fast and resolute in pressing forward, he firmly restrained Sorín and prevented him from going to the middle for support. At the same time, Viduka and Bendtner charged into the penalty area one after another. After he passed the ball, Arteta also rushed forward. In the moment when they changed from defense to offense, the Forest team had put in five players.

This was the result of the Forest team's usual training. Twain hoped that his team could maintain this mobility to be able to advance to attack and retreat to defend. Since he had started coaching the team,

he had continually instilled that idea in training and competitions. Now, it was finally assimilated into the blood of the Forest team.

He did not need to wave his arms and roar like a madman on the sidelines anymore, saying, “Go up! Rush up! Attack!” or “Come back! Return! Withdraw!”

His players knew what to do in those situations.

Attack!

The goal is near!

Ribéry beautifully changed direction and accelerated to flash past the Dutch defender, Jan Kromkamp. He then looked up at the penalty area and saw the tall Bendtner and the strong Viduka. So he no longer hesitated and swung his leg to cross the ball!

There were only two fullbacks in front of the Villarreal goal. Their attention was still on the football.

Viduka slashed across to rush forward. He caught all of Villarreal’s defense attention. But as he exerted all his energy to leap, he drew back his neck instead and let the ball pass over the top of his head!

The two Villarreal defenders, including the goalkeeper, were distracted by Viduka. Sorín was also caught by Ashley Young and was helpless against what happened in front of the goal in a flash.

Bendtner suddenly charged up!

“Nicklas Bendtner!! And GOOOAL!”

The City Ground stadium shook violently with the roar.

“This is Nottingham Forest’s first Champions League goal in twenty-four years! This is the City Ground’s first rallying cry for a Champions League goal in twenty-four years! The cameras are shaking. I’m sorry we can’t see the scene after the goal in the first instance. But I don’t think we need to watch this scene to understand. We can imagine it in our minds! The team that once had power over Europe, Nottingham Forest has finally returned!”

Regardless of the differences in the domestic arena, patriotism still prevailed in such European competitions, not to mention the proud British people. They were accustomed to thinking that everything British was good and outstanding. At that moment, not only the Forest fans but even the commentator, who never liked the Forest team, cheered without reservations for Nicklas Bendtner’s goal.

Twain knelt on the ground, raised his arms, and looked up at the sky. He had waited two years for this moment!

The pain of losing a friend, the isolation of meeting with setbacks, being ridiculed, being insulted, and the crushing pressure he had faced. And now it was like he was a phoenix rising from the ashes.

Surrounded by people cheering, the coaching team, substitute players, and fans in the stands behind him, he was still kneeling on the ground with his hands pointing to the heavens.

Thank you, God, for sending me here. This is your best decision!

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The Forest bar had become a sea of beer with the golden suds splashing in the air and raining down on everyone's faces. Laughter, singing, and shouting had long drowned out the sounds of the television.

Either way, the sounds from the televisions must have been the cheering from the City Ground stadium. There was no need to listen when they were cheering too.

The bar's owner, Kenny Burns, did not join the cheering crowd. He just stared at the television screen and watched the sea of red inside the City Ground stadium, lost in his thoughts.

How familiar this is...

The cheering sounds around him changed and faded into the background. The sounds from the television had also changed, becoming somewhat hazy and indistinct.

"Kenny Burns... What a terrific assist! Nottingham Forest is one of the most powerful teams of this era. Brian Clough's team defended their Champions League crown! He has accomplished a great achievement that no one has even dared to think of before! The red tide has swept across Europe! Red is the only color of European football in this era!"

Chief, did you see it?

That Forest team is still here. It has come out of the fog of time. Twenty-four years have passed, and the red color is still brilliant.

### **Chapter 342: The French Forward**

The cheers in City Ground did not rest until the end of the first half. Forest's supporters were still exhilarated over the goal they had scored.

All sorts of voices rang out, singing for a whole 15 minutes. From the end of the first half, it lasted all the way through to the kick-off of the second half.

Compared to the first, there appeared to be slight changes in the second half; Riquelme was more active now than he had been; perhaps he had communicated with Sorin during the half-time break.

George Wood's pressure mounted, and Riquelme began showing signs of recovery.

Tang En could tell at once. He could not let it happen.

Once Riquelme began livening up again, Nottingham Forest's one-goal advantage would be threatened.

Taking the opportunity of a dead ball, Tang En walked to the sidelines and hollered into the field, "George! Be more vicious! Did you not eat!?"

Since Riquelme was afraid of getting injured and fouling, George could play for real.

George Wood was indeed an obedient player. Just as Tang En turned to return to the manager's seat, he suddenly heard a whistle from the field.

In his struggle with Riquelme, Wood had pressed down on the Argentine's neck, pushing him to the ground.

Tang En lowered his head to look at his watch. It had been 10 minutes since the second half started. Depending on such a method could temporarily stem Villarreal CF's offense, but it was not a long-term solution. Although he placed great importance on defense, he did not think it was a miracle pill that could cure any problems.

In their situation, the best method to strike at the opponent's confidence was to score another goal, and even more.

He turned around to look at the substitutes' bench.

Then he pointed at Anelka, who was sitting at the corner. He waved his hand and said, "Go warm-up, Anelka!"

With a look at Tang En, Anelka stood and removed his jacket before running out.

Kerslake, who saw Tang En do that, asked, "This early?"

"What's the use of buying him if I'm not going to use him? Disregarding his temper, his abilities are excellent. Plus, his specialty would be very useful in this match... We're lacking a speed-type forward. If Pellegrini boxes out our wings, we won't be able to launch any fast breaks. Putting in another forward will make Villarreal CF's defense more difficult."

Kerslake nodded and asked no further.

In truth, Tang En also felt rather uncertain. He did not know what kind of performance the eccentric Frenchman would show on the field later; would such a sharp dagger end up in the hearts of the enemy, or in the backs of their own people?

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While Anelka was warming-up, he continued observing the field. He took note of everything occurring on it. As he had guessed, the manager asked him to warm-up because he was clearly displeased with the current situation of the team and hoped for a change. After getting a one-goal lead, were they going to fortify their defenses or enhance their offense? The personality of a manager could be seen from such a decision.

Someone who was more reserved would choose to fortify their defenses, while those who were more willing to take risks would choose to enhance their attacks.

Getting Anelka to warm-up must mean he was planning to ramp up the offense.

This was Anelka's first match since joining the team. Due to his late arrival, he had not even been able to join the team's warm-up matches prior, only managing to train with the team in their usual training for a week. It was a very short period, so much so that he hardly had any rapport with his teammates.

Not being put in the starting line-up of the first match made Anelka somewhat unhappy. In his opinion, he should certainly be part of the main force; he had no doubt in his abilities at all. He did not care

about a lack of cooperation or rapport; he believed that he would be able to decide the outcome of the match on his own.

The good thing was that the manager was giving him an opportunity in the second half. He did not have to wait in vain on the substitutes' bench for 90 minutes.

Anelka shuffled back and forth in a sprint on the sidelines to warm up. He could feel the strength pumping through his legs and muscles. He told himself that his condition was the same as before; he had not become useless after the half year he had spent in Turkey.

He had never believed he should end his career at such a terrible place in Turkey. He absolutely had the ability to establish himself in one of the richer and more powerful clubs. So, he came back. Starting from Nottingham Forest, he was going to push forward step-by-step, towards the goals he hoped for.

His two big brothers had helped him out a lot; he had to be grateful. Now, it was up to him.

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It was no longer realistic to let George Wood defend against the onslaught of Villarreal CF alone. Arteta was forced to frequently retreat to defend, and Ashley Young on his side was also being suppressed by Sorin. Only Ribéry continued to hold out; after all, his abilities were superior to Ashley Young's.

It could not go on this way. Tang En decided to make a substitute.

He asked Kerslake to call Anelka back from his warm-up.

Looking at the man from France, Tang En found it beyond his imagination that such an untameable forward could be standing before him now, waiting to be dispatched to the field.

"Hmm... When you're on the field, I don't need you to set up plays for your teammates, or work with them. I'll arrange for the team to send you passes. Once you get the ball, you only have one mission: to take it to the goal and score."

Anelka nodded. He liked the arrangement.

"But..." Tang En said, turning his words around swiftly, "since your mission is that simple—only needing to score goals—you should know that if you don't succeed..."

"Then, it means I've underperformed."

The Frenchman was brimming with confidence. He wanted to show this youthful team and their young manager his capabilities. He would shut the mouths of those who had either publicly or privately voiced doubts about his abilities.

Tang En looked at the serious Frenchman, his mouth turning up into a smile. "Very good! I like that!"

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George Wood used a defensive maneuver that was just a nudge away from being a foul and tackled the ball from under Riquelme's feet, kicking it out of the sidelines. He was already starting to pant heavily, and this was barely past the halfway mark of the second half!

At that moment, it was as if he had gone back in time to the previous winter in Spain's El Madrigal. The unhurried Argentine gracefully showcased his footwork, taking him for a spin in that square inch of space. Still, derision and a lack of concern towards Wood were clearly written across that empty face.

George Wood could not withstand having the same thing happen to him again. More than half a season had passed. He should have become stronger than before.

Wood's entire mind was filled with thoughts of how he should not be losing to Riquelme because of his improvements. However, he had not considered one factor: Riquelme was widely acknowledged by the public to be a world-class master of the midfield, a player greatly esteemed by Zidane. And how long had Wood been playing? At this point, Wood's wish to devour Riquelme in a single bite was truly an underestimation of football in general.

Meanwhile, Riquelme, who had tossed out his thought baggage, began performing with greater ease.

The chains that had bound him were snapping apart ring by ring. The Riquelme adored by fans of the Yellow Submarine, the player who terrified his opponents, was gradually returning.

Sorin dashed forward, wanting to quickly launch a ball that had gone out of bounds, but was stopped by the whistle from the main referee. The ball that had been thrown into the field was again kicked out.

The referee signaled for a substitute on the sidelines.

The Fourth Official held a digital number sign with a red "10" and green "39"; red indicating the player stepping out, and green the player entering the field.

Anelka was substituting in for Viduka.

Watching the scene, the television commentator got excited again. "Oh! Anelka is being fielded! How long has it been? We're again seeing this Frenchman on the field of the UEFA Champions League, despite this only being the qualifiers... the French forward has only joined Forest for a short duration of a week. They probably had barely a week to train together. What is Twain thinking, sending him out now? It's perfectly normal to strengthen one's offense when the defense is having some trouble. But, why would he choose to send out a player who hasn't even established any rapport with the team?"

If Tang En could hear the doubts of the commentator, he would certainly remark on his silliness. Why send out Anelka? Why? Because his substitutes' bench only had one forward!

Anelka slapped his palm against Viduka's and ran swiftly into the field, even doing a short sprint. The familiar feeling was back.

Beside the field, Tang En blew once on the whistle. Upon hearing the sound, all of Forest team knew their manager was about to make some adjustments to the whole team.

When everyone looked at him, Tang En pointed to Anelka, who had just entered the field, and made a signal to pass to him.

Perhaps there were some who would be surprised by that decision—to let a forward who had trained for barely a week with the team be the attacking core, shouldering the heavy responsibility of scoring—but they all did as they were told. In Nottingham Forest, no one would doubt the decisions and power of the main manager Tony Twain. Many of them had been personally led by Tang En out from low-level

leagues; he had given them glory, money, and fame. Leighton Baines, Ashley Young, Chimbonda, Franck Ribéry, and many others.

That was the advantage of having built up a team that was completely according to his own will. The manager clearly understood each player's ability, character, strengths, and flaws, and was, therefore, able to have a firm hold over the entire team.

In England's soccer scene, any team that had managed to sustain their successes was led by a manager who stayed with the team for an extended period. At the same time, the formation of the team was entirely decided by the manager himself, with no intervention from anyone else allowed.

For example, Alex Ferguson's Manchester United, Matt Busby's Manchester United, Bill Shankly's Liverpool, Arsène Wenger's Arsenal, and Herbert Chapman's Arsenal.... In the over 100 years of history of modern football in England, there were countless such "one man's teams." Of course, that also included Brian Clough's Nottingham Forest.

Now, Tang En hoped that someday, people would add one more team and one more person to the list: Tony Twain's Nottingham Forest.

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Forest quietly adjusted their strategy. That sort of adjustment was something that went even unnoticed by Pellegrini. In fact, he would not have believed it even if he had noticed it.

The Chilean would not believe that Tang En would dare to, in this sort of life-and-death match, allow a brand-new forward—who had joined for scarcely a week, had no rapport to speak of with the team, had an eccentric temper, and had been away from high-level European soccer for half a year—to be the key to opening the gates of victory.

But Tang En dared exactly that. The risk-taking side of him was constantly thinking about how he could make a splash. Coming up with something that made people's jaws drop and tongues tie was his favorite hobby.

After his arrival on the field, Anelka speedily took on the heavy responsibility of Forest's offense. Bendtner partnered with him in the front field, though it was more to the effect of having another person divert the attention of his opponents, assisting in setting-up Anelka's play.

No matter from which direction, the ball was constantly sent to Anelka's foot. And what everyone saw next was Forest's members running into positions arranged to complement it, or to stand at the back watching the show. And Anelka was like a black cheetah released from captivity, surging towards the gates of Villarreal CF with the ball.

Forest's strategy did not change. They continued to emphasize a rapid pace of attacking, passing, and moving through the midfield. Both their offense and defense were at a quick pace. What was different from before was that they had an additional express route to take: the middle.

The incredible thing was this: For Villarreal CF, who was now behind, to successfully get through the qualifiers, they needed to get at least one away goal in this match. Only in that way would they be able to maintain their morale when they returned to their home grounds, performing to a satisfactory standard. However, to be able to score a goal here, they needed to attack, which would lead to more

gaps in their defense. At this time, Forest placing a strong forward who was quick and excelled at both dribbling and shooting was not just a push to widen the score gap. It also made it difficult for the Yellow Submarine to fully concentrate on their attacks.

It was a single move comprising of both offense and defense.

As expected, five minutes after Anelka got on the field, he dribbled the ball in a breakthrough, alarming Pellegrini to the point that he jumped off the managers' seat to loudly reprimand the defenders from the sidelines. In that attempt near the margin of the penalty box, Anelka had gotten past two Yellow Submarine players one after another with little tricks before launching a shot at the goal. The shot was blocked by Vallejo's leap, and the ball slid past the goal, flying past the end line.

The attempt caused Villarreal CF to break into a cold sweat. It also allowed Nottingham Forest's fans to see that the abilities of the French forward remained intact.

While Pellegrini stood at the sidelines, infuriated over the performance of his own defensive line, Tang En was telling Kerslake with a straight face, "David, all nonsense about Nicolas Anelka aside, his abilities are still there."

Kerslake was confused. "Of course, Tony. You just said that earlier."

"Mmm, very good." Tang En turned to continue observing the field. But before that, he did not forget to secretly glance at Pellegrini, who was still hopping away at the sidelines.

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To defend, or to attack. Now that was the problem Pellegrini faced.

If they defended, they would be able to defend against Anelka, locking him down and freezing him out. Naturally, that was not difficult. But at the end of the 90 minutes, when the match ended, would they be resentful of losing the match, especially when the situation was originally starting to become advantageous for them?

If they attacked and threw themselves into the offense, they might just crush George Wood and the defensive line sitting behind him, earning an away goal; that was not impossible. However, the large swathes of empty space in their defensive line would then become Nottingham Forest's racecourse, free for Anelka to gallop through.

Tang En's move trapped Pellegrini and threw him into turmoil.

Pellegrini bit his lip furiously as he stood by the sidelines, his mind churning as it searched for an answer to the question.

Swiftly, he chose the first option: to defend. It was no big deal losing the match with a single goal difference. When they got back to their home grounds, it would still be advantageous for them.

He would leave the deciding factor to the second round and let Villarreal CF advance into the Champions League proper at El Madrigal.

A minute later, Villarreal CF made a substitute. Fullback Álvarez took the place of forward Figueroa.



The substitution also conveyed the intentions of the manager to Villarreal's members on the field; he did not wish to pursue victory in this match. A loss with a one-goal difference was acceptable. The team readjusted their focus, switching from offense to defense.

Riquelme had just gotten more active but was suddenly informed that he was of no use; the team need not go on the offense anymore. His face darkened. As a player who seldom needed to return for defense, he just stood in the front field watching his teammates at the back deal with Forest's attacks repeatedly.

Since Villarreal CF had taken a step back, Tang En was not about to be courteous. He even pushed Arteta, who had originally retreated to help Wood defend, forward again; Forest's midfield formation returned to a diamond position.

You retreat, and I'll move forward. Anyhow, these are my home grounds; you're at my mercy!

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The situation on the field recovered in a way that satisfied Tang En. But Anelka was unhappy; he had yet to score a goal.

If he had known about Pellegrini's choices, he would have been all too eager for the manager to decide to fight to the death instead, pushing the team to press forward. In that case, he would have many more opportunities to score.

But now? The Spaniard was acting like a coward, retreating for defense! His movement space in the front field was getting suppressed, and he was surrounded by players. How was he supposed to get a breakthrough like this? How was he going to shoot and score? How would he be able to gain the upper hand in his first exchange with the manager?

He knew that the main manager was not on board with his joining of the team. He was also sure in his heart that Nottingham Forest was merely a jumping-off point for him to spring towards an even greater stage. He did not wish to lose to such a young manager right after joining the team!

In the way he thought about Henry—what Henry was doing at Arsenal, Anelka had already achieved when he was 19—he could view Tony Twain the same way; at 19, when he was playing as the main forward in Arsenal, where was Tony?

The football was again passed to Anelka. He felt someone push him from the back, hoping to unbalance him.

He had already faced such situations countless times. Logically, he should pass the ball to a nearby teammate before trying to rid himself of the defenders who had marked him. Despite Ribéry being within just five meters ahead of him, Anelka did not want to pass the ball. He wanted to break through the opponents using his own technique and score a goal. This was a demonstration; one for the manager.

Anelka's upper body moved quickly, a show of intention to pass to Ribéry. Even Ribéry himself was deceived; he had originally intended to cut towards the end line to disrupt the defensive line for Anelka's benefit, instead, he jammed the brakes and twisted in a bid to return.

Anelka felt the person behind him adjust his center of gravity, intending to shift and press Ribéry directly. At that moment, Anelka swiftly nudged the ball behind him, and with a twist, he got past!

Without any impediment, Álvarez, who just entered the field and was yet to warm up, passed by Anelka!

Letting a forward directly face the goalie was an extremely dangerous matter. Furthermore, it was a forward like Anelka, who excelled at shooting.

At 25 meters from the goal posts, Anelka struck the pose of wanting to do a long shot, lifting his leg high. Even the commentator was already exclaiming, “Anelka shoots-”

Just as the Brazilian, Senna, dashed forward to block Anelka’s shot, the French forward nudged the ball forward with the bottom of his foot and surpassed Senna, who completely lost his center of gravity.

Shouts of surprise rang from the spectator’s stand of Forest’s home ground. Such a purposeful display of a player’s footwork was hardly ever seen in Tang En’s football team. That was because Tang En emphasized the whole more; the techniques of the players he bought were not what he valued most. That was exactly opposite to “Le Professeur,” Wenger.

Anelka’s beautiful dribble, passing Senna, ignited the atmosphere within City Ground. The spectators’ stand erupted with deafening cheers. Everyone was waiting for a spectacular goal to occur.

After getting past, Anelka suddenly burst into action, accelerating and dashing straight into the penalty area with the ball!

The defensive line of Villarreal CF was momentarily thrown into chaos.

The way Anelka got past the two was too graceful and much too unexpected. Forest fans were delightedly surprised while Villarreal CF’s players were yelling in shock, “Block him, dammit!”

Just before two Villarreal players, donned in their yellow jersey, rushed forward hoping to prevent Anelka’s shot, the French forward abruptly took his kick!

The movement of his calf was extremely small; his act of shooting at the goal was thoroughly concealed. Villarreal CF’s goalkeeper Vallejo only noticed the shot when the ball came through from between the defender’s feet!

He leaped to the side but was too late; the ball had ricocheted off the ground next to him. By the time of its second landing, it had already gotten into the goal.

“What a great GOOOAL!!”

Perhaps, years later, Tony Twain’s “one man’s team” would not have Anelka’s name in it, and Anelka himself would not harbor any special feelings for Nottingham Forest; it was merely one of the many stations he stopped at throughout his professional career. But at this moment, City Ground resounded with record-breaking cheers for this French forward.

This was Anelka’s first goal in his first match representing the Forest Team, donning Nottingham Forest’s red number 39 jersey.

### **Chapter 343: Role Model Part 1**

Anelka's goal made the two managers pound their fists on the sidelines. The difference was that Nottingham Forest's manager slammed his fists in excitement and the Villarreal manager, Pellegrini, did so in frustration.

With fifteen minutes left in the game, Nottingham Forest led with two goals. This game was basically ready to announce its winner.

Villarreal had just adjusted its tactics and was ready to defend when the goal was scored. It was a heavy blow to their morale. Now, even if they wanted to climb back up with a goal, there was probably no chance of that.

Another person who was angry about conceding the goal was Riquelme. Although he seldom revealed his emotions on his face, anyone could see his frustration.

If the manager had insisted on attacking, perhaps they would have already equalized the score in the game before the Forest team chalked up the second goal. At that time, the situation on the field would have been different.

Now that all was said and done, they had to give up on offense and relinquish the power to win. That retribution came quite fast.

The game had already ended early.

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When the referee blew the final whistle, the Forest fans were jubilant over the score on the electronic scoreboard. 2:0! It was a splendid home victory.

This was the first UEFA Champions League victory in the City Ground stadium in twenty-four years, which laid a solid foundation for the Forest team to enter the Champions League.

At the post-match press conference, Pellegrini said that the Forest team had performed better than his own team. It was natural that they won the game.

The Chilean left with his team in a hurry. The Forest team stayed behind in the square outside the stadium to receive applause from all their fans. Twenty-seven thousand people gathered outside the City Ground stadium. They blocked the Forest team bus as they sang the Forest team song over and over.

We've got the whole world in our hands, we've got the whole world in our hands...

Judging by the sea of red outside the bus it looked as if the Forest team had won and brought home the Champions League trophy. But it was only a qualifier victory.

The people of Nottingham Forest had yearned for the Champions League for far too long. Many people might have forgotten that the team they supported was once a strong team in the Champions League, which had won twice consecutively. Now Twain made them feel that again.

They did not have to watch the other teams' Champions League performances in front of the televisions. They could look forward to their own in the Champions League. They could talk about their team's performance at the end of a Champions League game, go to the City Ground stadium to watch the Champions League game, and cheer for their team.

If they imagined further down the road, they could even follow the footsteps of their own team, set foot in Continental Europe, and go to the stadiums of those powerhouse clubs to strut about and show off.

Just a little farther. Maybe we can set foot in the UEFA Champions League final once again?

Who said that it was impossible? When Nottingham Forest was promoted to the Football League First Division from the Second Division, who could have thought Brian Clough would lead the Forest team to win the UEFA Champions League Championship a year later and defend their Champions League title the following year?

Things were achieved by people. Just two years ago, when the Forest team struggled in the bottom fourth of the English Football League, who would have thought they could win Villarreal at home in the UEFA Champions League qualifying match today?

David Kerslake was like a child, pressing his face to the window to look out at the red ocean with a happy smile on his face. This was the first time he had seen this sight since he had entered the Nottingham Forest Football Club.

"Pretty good, right? There will be more in the future." Sitting next to him, Twain grinned.

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The next day, the Nottingham's media was dominated by the game. All the newspapers, television stations, radio broadcasts, and everywhere on the streets talked about the game.

The popularity of Nicklas Bendtner, who had scored the goal, soared. Even Anelka received the fans' support and acceptance. There was nothing the fans loved more than to score in what they thought was the most important game.

Needless to say, the fans still discussed the game enthusiastically. However, after a wonderful victory, the Forest players did not even get a half-day break. It was not because Manager Tony Twain was hardhearted, but because the Premier League's new season had begun.

Out of the five major European leagues, the English Premier League was the earliest to kick off and the last to finish. There was no winter break in that most intensive competition. In Twain's words, it was "savage and brutal. It's double torture of the players' body and mind. During the Christmas holiday period, it was a time for other people to go on family reunions or vacations. It was supposed to be an enjoyable time. For the Premier League players, they had to play twice or thrice a week as if they had to do back-to-back performances. In the cold of winter, the chances of injury also greatly increase."

On August 10th, Nottingham Forest won the match against Villarreal in the first leg of the UEFA Champions League qualifying match, starting off well in the 05 to 06 season. Everyone, from the top echelons of the club down to the players and the regular fans, could approach the initial round of the Premier League three days later with a relaxed and happy mood.

The 05-06 season's English Premier League fully began. Last season's Premier League champion, Chelsea challenged the newly promoted team, Sunderland in an away match. In a home game, Nottingham Forest would face another newly promoted team, Wigan Athletic F.C., nicknamed by the media "the second Nottingham Forest."

This nickname was given by the media to Wigan Athletic during the English Football League Championship because the team's style and certain other characteristics were very similar to the Forest team. For example, their focus on pressing hard throughout the entire game, rapid breakthroughs in both flanks, relentless strength, as well as a plain, hard-working style of play made people see hints of Nottingham Forest in the year where they were successfully promoted to the English Football League Championship in half a season.

After Tang En realized that, he did not know whether to cry or laugh. He certainly knew how impressive Wigan Athletic's first Premier League season was. If the media knew about the future, they would surely be complacent about the nickname they had given in advance. In fact, Wigan Athletic's first Premier League season would be just as impressive as the Forest team's last season, except that their final ranking was not as high.

From this standpoint, it was not wrong to call them the "second Nottingham Forest."

What made Tang En feel the irony was that he had become a role model for others.

In an interview before the game, Wigan Athletic acted in a very low-key way. Their manager, Paul Jewell, simply admitted that for his team to be able to rise to the Premier League, he had learned a lot from Tony Twain. Twain's Forest team gave him a lot of inspiration.

That was making "the second Nottingham Forest" name come to fruition.

Finally, Jewell also said, "...We certainly still remember the newly promoted Nottingham Forest's outstanding performance in the Premier League last season. They were impressive, and I think Manager Tony Twain is an excellent English coach. No, I'm not laying it on thick. Wigan Athletic's target this season is to defend our ranking, but I still hope the team will be called 'the second Nottingham Forest' when the league is over. But this time, it won't be for our style of play, but our results."

When Tang En heard those words, he felt somewhat amazed. His transmigration had unexpectedly made him another manager's role model.

He wanted to laugh, not because he felt smug, but because he felt absurd. But he could not laugh because he took no pleasure from the matter.

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The era of Sky Television's monopoly on the Premier League broadcasts was coming to an end. The European Commission had recently mandated Sky Television to allocate a portion of their monopolized Premier League broadcasting rights to BBC public service television channel and other television stations. This season's Premier League would act as a trial period for the purchase of the new broadcasting rights. BBC and other independent television stations had been given a portion of the Premier League's broadcasting rights.

While this would cost most of the small clubs to suffer some financial losses, it was nice for the Forest fans to have the return of the commentator, John Motson, who had been consistently supportive of the Forest team.

The Nottingham Forest's game against Wigan Athletic would be BBC's first Premier League live broadcast. As expected, the commentary would be covered by their ace commentator duo, John Motson, and Alan Hansen.

Twenty minutes into the game, Motson did not say a few nice words to the Forest team even though he had not covered a game in a long time.

"Now, I really want to replay the words that Manager Paul Jewell had said in the interview before the game." Motson's style was such that he could be generous and extravagant with his praise, but he could also be unbearably sharp and unkind in his criticisms. "The Forest fans must be starting to wonder now, what was Jewell's motive for saying those words? I think it's most likely to confuse the Forest team. Does Manager Twain feel angry?"

Next to him, Alan Hansen interjected and asked, "Why would he feel angry?"

"Because he's been played!" Motson burst into laughter. He knew Twain, so he said that. Twain must have a feeling of being deceived. Based on Twain's character, it was impossible for him not to be angry.

At that moment, Tony Twain was indeed fuming as he sat in the technical area. However, it was not because of Jewell, but due to his team's poor performance.

The contrast was too great!

Three days ago, on the same field, the Forest team had efficiently defeated Villarreal. The scene after the victory still remained in the memories of the Forest players and fans.

And three days later, in this game, the Forest team was now powerless as they went up against Wigan Athletic's tight defensive formation and rapid counterattacks.

Twain shook his head from time to time as he watched the messy situation on the field.

## **Chapter 344: Role Model Part 2**

"Indeed... it does look sort of like..." David Kerslake saw Twain shake his head again and said, "It reminds me of the game we played against Arsenal."

"But they are more thorough and firmer with the recovery than we were that time." Once someone spoke, Twain began to talk non-stop. "And their offense is much rougher than we were. They're just kicking the ball with big strides and relying on two very fast wingers. How can we call this football?" He suddenly got up from his seat, pointed at the field, and said to Kerslake, "Look at their defense and watch their movements. What is Wigan town famous for? It's not football, it's rugby! The straightforward way of playing, frequent body contact defense, and counterattacks with the running speed of a striker are all clearly rugby moves! Just rotate the blue stripes on their jerseys and that would be their rugby jerseys! But! That's not why I'm shaking my head."

Twain took a turn in the technical area and waved his arms in agitation in front of Kerslake.

“What makes me angry is our own performance. Even if Wigan Athletic’s performance surpassed our expectations, we shouldn’t have played the game like this. Completely helpless! We’re completely helpless against our opponent’s defense! We aren’t the Nottingham Forest team that relied on defensive counterattacks to survive a year ago! We’re currently playing against an enemy that uses defensive counterattack to deal with us. Did we not think of this? What did the coaching team do all summer? We frequently practiced our offensive routines in the positional play during training. And now, in this game...” he turned around and pointed to the field. “Those guys have forgotten everything!”

Kerslake also didn’t know how to face Twain’s anger. He could only sigh without a word.

After venting, Twain sat down and crossed his legs. “I’m going to give it to them at the halftime interval!”

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“The referee blows the whistle at the end of the first half. The Wigan Athletic fans are delighted, as are the players. They have not conceded any goals at Nottingham Forest’s home ground. They’ve successfully curbed the Forest team’s two flanks. The score is still 0:0! If this score is kept until the end, then Wigan Athletic will be the winner.”

Twain was the last one to enter the locker room. With a sullen expression, he slammed the door with a loud bang. One of the players almost jumped off the bench from the shock of it.

After that loud noise, the locker room was silent.

“You all know I’m angry, right?” Twain smiled wryly. But in the eyes of the players, no one would find his smile amiable. After a season under his command, everyone knew the manager’s temper. The brighter he smiled, the more severe the approaching storm was.

“Does anyone need me to replay the recording of the Wigan Athletic manager’s pre-match interview? The feeling of being worshipped and regarded as a role model is good, right?” Twain pointed at the locker room door, “Well, now you know what damn idiots we are! We’ve underestimated our opponent, haven’t we? Don’t try to deny it. Look at your performance on the field. Do you only know how to score with long shots? Or do you think you can win this game with the simplest possible method? That you don’t need to put in any effort to position yourselves, coordinate with your teammates, or use your brains to create or seek out gaps? And that by just standing in one spot to practice shooting the goal, you can win this game?! Are there any of you who are still sleeping? Raise your hands!”

Needless to say, no one raised his hand.

“It looks like your minds are still clear.” After the storm, Twain’s tone somewhat relaxed. “Remember, in the second half, there are two points for winning: first, place kicks! You must seize all the opportunities for place kicks. This is the best way to break the deadlock. Second...”

Anelka had been sitting in a corner of the locker room. This was the first time he had seen the Forest manager angry. He openly admonished them with a steady stream of foul language coming out of his mouth.

Arsène Wenger would not reprimand his players in the locker room. He would use another way to reprimand us. The Real Madrid manager, Bosque, would not even scold us. He was a nice man. And Houllier? That useless weakling? Then there was also Kevin Keegan. They were all the same kind.

He had never played for Manchester United. This was the first time he had seen a manager so unrestrained in the locker room. He suddenly thought that with a manager with this kind of behavior, he might behave differently behind the scenes. Surely it will be easier to get along with him if his personality is blunt and straightforward?

While he was lost in his thoughts, he vaguely heard Twain call his name. Even though he was uncertain, he still raised his head to look over.

“Your task is to break through in the middle and look for opportunities to score,” said Twain as he looked at Anelka.

In this game, Anelka was still a substitute. He wondered why Twain had suddenly assigned this task to him, nonetheless, he did not raise the question. He thought maybe he’d just missed something, but no matter. If he wants me to play, I’ll play. If he wants me to score, I’ll score a goal and score a few more. See if you’ll still put me on the bench.

“Their two center backs, Arjan de Zeeuw and Stéphane Henchoz, are older and slow in their turning. They’ve jammed our flanks, so we’ll open the gap from the middle.”

“I tell you, Wigan Athletic is just a small hurdle. If we can’t even get past them, then we can forget about the Champions League and any other championships... Those are mountains! We’ll just look up at the mountain, pack up, and go home. We can just wash up, change, go home, and sleep! Do you want that?”

“No...”

“No one wants that, chief.”

“I don’t want to wash up!”

“I don’t want to sleep either!”

The players’ voices were finally ringing out in the locker room.

“Then be more serious! This is the new season and the first game of the new season. Don’t blow it! So, Wigan Athletic wants to be the second Nottingham Forest? And they want to be a dark horse? Fine, we’ll teach them a lesson. We’ll let them know that the English Premier League is not as simple as they think!”

After fifteen minutes of the second half, the Forest players had played very hard but the situation on the field had not changed much. Wigan Athletic’s conservative tactics in the game were ugly to watch, but they were very effective.

Tony Twain once again recalled Anelka during his warm-up and then brought him on to replace Viduka, who was in a bad state.

Five minutes after Anelka came on the field, the situation changed with three forced breakthroughs.



As Twain had put it, the Wigan Athletic team's defensive weakness was not in the flanks as in most cases, but in the middle.

Anelka forced a breakthrough in the middle and tore open a gap for the Forest team. Wigan Athletic was caught off guard and their defensive line immediately became a mess.

At that time, Arteta seized the opportunity for a precise straight pass. He passed the ball to Bendtner, who was ahead. The Danish kid pushed his back against Henchoz, who returned to defend and sent a volley over the hands of the Wigan Athletic goalkeeper, Mike Pollitt, to fly into the goal.

The impasse on the field was finally broken.

The goal, firmly held by the blue-collared Wigan Athletic for sixty-five minutes, was finally breached.

Scoring a goal gave a boost to the Forest team's morale. With persistence, another goal was scored, this time by the substitute, Anelka. While he was still without the ball, he nimbly got rid of de Zeeuw, who was guarding him, and then received Arteta's timely pass to shoot the goal with a low shot.

With a score of 2:0, the Forest team set the tone for the game.

Although Jewell knew that he had lost the game, he still remained on the sidelines and repeatedly yelled at the players not to give up. Even if they lost, they still wanted to score a face-saving goal.

This made Twain sit up and take notice. He had a whole new level of respect for them.

Perhaps Jewell's words were not said just to confuse him. His Wigan Athletic team really did have a lot of similarities with his own Nottingham Forest team from a year ago.

The grassroots football team in the English Football League Championship had held so much of its strength that they had charged straight up to the English Premier League. After the exhilaration and excitement, they calmed down to think about how to survive with their club's financial resources and their players' abilities as compared to the other teams. They depended only on this unyielding integrity: we can concede the goal, but we cannot lose our spirit. Even if the opponent is strong, we will still face the challenge.

He liked this Wigan Athletic team, as well as the manager who instilled this notion in the team.

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The game did not end as Jewell had hoped. In the end, Wigan Athletic could not score a goal. They still lacked offensive strength. But the players stuck to the last second.

As the final whistle sounded, Twain took the initiative to go to the visiting team's technical area and shake hands with Jewell. He seldom took the initiative to shake hands, more often waiting for the others to come up and shake his hand, or simply turning around and walking away. That would be the most extreme display of his bad mood after losing a game that should not have been lost.

Kerslake was aware of that. Therefore, he was not surprised that Wigan Athletic would eventually gain Twain's favor after they had created so much trouble for the Forest team and made Twain furious in the locker room.

That was who he was. He would respect people that he thought were worthy of respect and disregard those who were not. The media said he was arrogant and putting on airs. They said he was ignorant and fearless. It was all good. Kerslake knew that Twain was just someone who had well-defined likes and dislikes. Of course, the standards of his love and hate were not constant.

At the post-match press conference, Jewell praised Twain and his team again. At the same time, he was also proud of his players. "...They did their best, and we lost in our overall strength. But I have a lot of hope for my team. As long as I don't give up, we'll stay in the Premier League by the end of the season!"

Twain admitted that Wigan Athletic had caused a lot of trouble for his team in the first half and was optimistic about the team's future for this season.

"Manager Jewell believes his team can stay in the Premier League at the end of the season. I disagree with him." He deliberately paused at that point and then watched everyone's reaction with anticipation. He was satisfied with what he saw. Everyone looked nervous and thought that he was going to make some startling remarks. Jewell was also a little shocked. Then, Twain chuckled and finished his sentence. "I think his team can do better than he anticipates by the end of the season! Just keeping your position in the Premier League? Mr. Jewell, you underestimate yourself."

Everyone laughed. This sort of relaxed and happy post-match press conference was rarely seen in Twain's presence.

"I still stand by what I said. It's nothing to lose this game. You can win it back in the next game. Of course, I don't want Manager Jewell to win it back against Forest."

The press conference broke out into laughter that was louder than before. Amidst the laughter, Twain stood up and shook hands with Jewell again.

"Thank you, Mr. Twain."

"Don't thank me. Thank your players, Mr. Jewell. They did well," said Twain with a smile.

Now, he felt that it was nice to be regarded as a role model. It motivated him even more.

### **Chapter 345: Heart-to-Heart Part 1**

Tony Twain's team had a fantastic start in the new season. Champions League Qualifiers Round 1: Win!  
English Premier League Round 1: Win!

More than the results, what made Tang En happy were the conditions of the players. Naturally, there were also players for him to crack his head over, such as Anelka.

The better Anelka's performance was, the worse Tang En's headache became. This player, who was originally uninvited in his plans, was substituted twice in a row and scored each time. Such a performance made it incredibly hard to argue against letting him play as a starter.

But letting him play as a starter? Tang En was worried that Anelka would become overbearing.

Either way, it seemed problematic.

Tang En had a habit of speaking to Dunn over dinner whenever he was faced with a problem he could not resolve. Dunn might have a solution; or even if Dunn did not have one, Tang En might somehow be struck by inspiration and be able to find a solution as he spoke.

“Field him,” Dunn answered simply after hearing Tang En’s dilemma.

Tang En looked at Dunn and suddenly waved his hands. “Don’t tell me why. Let me guess. Hmm... His excellent condition is a given, anyone can tell. But, whether he would throw around his temper or not remains unknown... So, there’s no real reason not to let him be a starter.”

Dunn nodded.

“Then, if he acts like a big-shot... I’ll just deal with him when he does that.”

The matter was settled just like that.

Although Dunn was not a member of the First Team’s management, there were many times when he had the same effect as those who were. Tang En had always wanted an excuse to transfer Dunn to the First Team. Dunn working at Tang En’s side would be a great help to him. So, at that point, he spoke up. “Dunn, do you have any interest... in coming over to the First Team?”

He imagined that Dunn would agree to it without any hesitation, and he would then follow-up with an invitation.

Unexpectedly, Dunn shook his head. “No.”

“Why?” Tang En thought that was odd. He had thought Dunn would be eager to be promoted to the First Team.

“I have no plans to skip ranks in my promotion.”

Tang En rolled his eyes. That reason could only be thought up of by a person like Dunn. Although Dunn had gradually changed after living with him for a year, there were still some deeply ingrained aspects that could not be changed. Things like having to stick with his plans for work, and remaining alcohol-free despite living with an alcoholic.

“Your life... Is truly boring.” Tang En grumbled in annoyance.

“I have a question.” Dunn put down his knife and fork. “Why are you so interested in my life? From a year ago, until now...”

Tang En laughed as he shrugged and shook his head. “Does the world no longer believe in the joy of helping, or in the good nature of humans? Uh... if I say it’s because I’ve taken over your body, taken over your position, taken over your house, taken over everything of yours, and that I feel some shame and hope to compensate you somehow... Would you believe that?”

Without waiting for Dunn to reply, Tang En chuckled again.

“In reality, it’s like this. I need a good helper, but I never managed to find a suitable candidate until I met you. I was suddenly inspired, and I felt that you were exactly the person I’d been searching for all along. The helper I needed. So, to make good use of you, I naturally have to help you solve all your problems

first; that included your daily needs... and many other things. That way, you would then willingly serve me. How about that explanation?"

"Forget it. I think the first explanation was good enough."

Tang En laughed out loud. He liked to see Dunn this way.

When his laughter abated, Tang En decided to speak to Dunn about some more serious matters.

"Dunn, don't you want to find yourself a girlfriend or something? In terms of real age, you're older than me, aren't you?"

Dunn shook his head. "I'm not interested in women."

Hearing this, Tang En was shocked, jumping exaggeratedly up from his chair.

Dunn looked up at Tang En's performance with an expressionless face, and said, "Don't start having weird thoughts. I'm a celibate."

Tang En chuckled and sat down again. "That's good, that's good... I don't have much interest in taboo love..."

"What about your other half?" Dunn asked after seeing Tang En sit.

"Me?" This question came unexpectedly, stumping Tang En for a bit. He looked up at the ceiling as if seriously considering it. "I'm not a celibate, but about my other half... I don't know."

A figure flashed through his mind, but he shook his head.

Another person drifted into his thoughts. But this time, Tang En did not hastily shake his head. Instead, he stared at the ceiling, his eyes becoming unfocused.

Dunn watched Tang En enter a daze, and muttered, "Some people are fretting about where they could find one, but you're fretting about which one to choose..." He shook his head.

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After deciding to let Anelka be one of the starters for the next match, Tang En felt that it was time for him to have a discussion with Anelka.

The arrogant and wilful Frenchman had played under numerous managers, several of which were world-class. Tang En did not presume to think he could do better than those people and manage to keep control over Anelka, but he had to at least try. What kind of manager would he be if he did not even make an attempt?

Two days before the match, on the day Forest was supposed to head to Bolton Wanderers F.C., they conducted a final team training. Kerslake arranged for a 20-minute warm-up match within the team. Usually, such matches would confirm the selection of the starting line-up and finalize the player list; Tang En could not possibly bring the entire team to the away field. He would only bring the 16 on the player list.

According to the norm, players who received the yellow vest during the pre-match grouping were 80 to 90 percent likely to be included in the starting line-up for the official match.

Kerslake held a list as he called out players. Those who were called stepped out and took the yellow vests being handed out by a manager at the side. Thereafter, they stood to one side.

Edwin van der Sar, Pepe, Piqué, Leighton Baines, Chimbonda, George Wood, Arteta, and Ribéry... Those were in the starting line-up of the previous match; there were no changes here.

But when they got to the final segment of calling for the forwards, the first name to be listed turned out to be Nicklas Bendtner.

Following that, Kerslake repeated “Nicklas,” but it sounded somewhat like “Nicolas.” Anelka was uncertain, but he then heard the Assistant Manager read out the full name. “Nicolas Anelka.”

Several players on the team turned to look at the Frenchman who stood in the back. In their hearts, they were hardly surprised. After seeing how the French forward had scored goals in both his substitutions, one match after the other, they knew it was unavoidable to have him playing as a starter.

Such a performance could not be ignored by the manager. He himself had said that there was no distinct separation between the main players and substitutes on the team. Their performance would decide if they played as a starter or reserve. If Anelka, with such a fantastic condition, could not play as a starter, how else would Tang En prove that his words about using a rotational system weren't a lie?

Anelka kept the surprise from showing on his face. He strode forward, passing his teammates, and took the yellow vest from the manager's hands.

It was his first time putting on the yellow vest since his arrival at Forest.

“Alright!” Kerslake blew hard on the whistle. “Get into positions!”

The warm-up match was beginning.

Tang En stood quietly at the sidelines, observing. Anelka was extremely active in the match; he continuously requested passes from his teammates and showed enthusiasm in his movements. The lad had yet to stir up any trouble since his entry into the team two weeks ago. It surprised Tang En...

Could he have misunderstood Anelka?

Before this, Tang En's understanding of Anelka was only slightly better than that of a normal fan. Most of it came from rumors that stemmed from the media. But who could guarantee if the media themselves hadn't added some personal spice to it? After all, they had been rather unhappy with Anelka and his two agent brothers.

In that case, what kind of person was Anelka, really?

Just from the interactions of the past two weeks, Tang En felt that Anelka was someone with a very introverted character. It was not just the usual introversion; he was extremely introverted, to the point he was somewhat shut-off. Other than being a little more open when he was with his two brothers, he was otherwise quiet and did not like to talk.

Eastwood was the perfect counter-example. The Romani could become familiar with everyone on the first day of his entrance. Anelka, on the other hand, had been on the team for two weeks but kept only to a hi-and-bye relationship with most of his teammates.

Anelka's introverted character could also be viewed from another perspective. Despite being an infamous player who had a bad reputation among the media, there were hardly any scandals regarding his private life. The news about him was always about the differences between him and his manager. When it had something to do with the club, it was usually a squabble about the transfer fee or his salary. Or, it was about some opposition against the French Football Federation. There was essentially no gossip and only a scarce handful of scandals.

It was because his life was much too simple. There were also very few social events he would attend. After training every day, he would drive back to the hotel on his own and go out with his brothers for a meal. Then, he would look for some entertainment in bars and clubs before returning to rest.

That was a very common sort of night life for an adult. Tang En would do the same, so he did not think there was anything inappropriate about it.

A person with that sort of character would generally not be proactive in speaking about their thoughts. But once they exploded, it would be no small matter; a classic introvert with still waters that ran deep.

To build a relationship with such a person... What a headache. It was enough having someone like George Wood. Now there was the addition of Anelka!

## **Chapter 346: Heart-to-Heart Part 2**

The match ended very quickly. As it was just an internal warm-up match, the match duration was not set to be very long. It was only 20 minutes.

In the last segment of training, Tang En gathered everybody to stand in a circle. He and Kerslake then led the team through an analysis of the strengths and flaws observed from the session before dismissing them.

As the team was being dismissed, Tang En called out to Anelka. "Nicolas, come to my office for a minute after you change."

This time, Anelka did not manage to conceal his own surprise in time; it showed clearly on his face.

"Not Bendtner, I mean you." Tang En said as he pointed to Anelka. "Change and come to my office." Saying that, he turned and left the training grounds.

Ribéry walked up to Anelka and gently patted his shoulders. Speaking lowly in French, he said, "Having a talk alone with the Boss is usually nothing good. You've got to watch out."

Hearing such a tone of mystery from Ribéry, Anelka turned to look at his serious face but said nothing in response.

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Tang En was organizing his desk in his office, but there was nothing much for him to pack. Most things were filed in the computer. Other than a pen and a notebook that he carried around with him all the time, the desk had nothing on it. He just did not want to look as if he was dumbly waiting for Anelka when he came in later. As the manager, he sometimes needed to make a show of attitude in front of the players, such as, 'I called you here, but I'm tremendously busy; I'm taking time out of my busy schedule to speak to you.'

A knock could be heard coming from the outside. It was not loud, but Tang En caught it.

"Come in."

Anelka pushed the door open and entered. He had already changed and was now wearing a white shirt with light blue jeans, complete with a casual suit jacket in sky-blue. He had even hung a pair of sunglasses at the neck of his shirt.

Tang En looked over his attire.

"What do you have going on tonight?"

Anelka was momentarily stunned, not expecting the manager to ask him that first. When he recovered, he shook his head in response. "I don't have anything going on tonight."

"Okay... take a seat." Tang En casually indicated to the sofa. He then continued to be "busy" organizing his things. This time, he grabbed the mouse and continually refreshed his computer desktop just for show.

After finishing busying himself with that, he looked up at the Frenchman. "This is our first time speaking alone since your entry into our team. I'm sorry about that. I've been extremely busy until now. With the start of the new season, there seem to be a lot more things to deal with."

Anelka nodded in understanding.

Tang En found it draining to converse with someone who had such lacking responses.

Holding a conversation was like playing tennis; it could only work when it went back and forth. But, when Tang En conversed with Anelka, it felt like he was just playing with air. Not only did he have to take charge of serving, but he also needed to run over to pick up the ball after. He was already tired and sweating, but it remained uncertain how much longer this would go on.

"Yes... Well, putting aside the other things, I'm quite interested in your sudden decision to return to England from Turkey. Do you mind telling me more about that?"

Tang En then intentionally paused, waiting for Anelka to speak, only to be disappointed. To prevent the atmosphere from becoming awkward, he could only continue, saying, "Uh... Your brother told me it was because the level of the leagues there was too low? And it couldn't..."

At that point, Anelka suddenly interrupted Tang En. "Yes. I want to go to a higher-level league to play football."

Tang En did not mind in the least bit; he was delighted that Anelka was willing to speak up at all.

“But, Fenerbahçe S.K. can also participate in the Champions League.”

“That’s too far.”

Tang En knew where Anelka was referring to when he said it was “far.” So, he only nodded.

“I think so too. Nicolas, do you mind telling me what you’re really thinking? That is to say... What other aims do you have? What do you hope to get? What is it that you are working hard for at football? Do you have some goal?”

These questions stumped the Frenchman. He sat there silently.

Some players played for the pursuit of glory, but he had almost received all of the highest recognition available to a club. Then there were those who played hoping to be selected for the National Team, battling for the World Cup; but he had already harshly told the French Football Federation that “unless Santini kneels and begs before me, I will never return to the National Team.” Saying that he wanted to work hard to enter the National Team would seem rather fake. In that case, what kind of goals or reasons was he left with?

“Do you want to hear my answers to those questions?” Tang En noticed Anelka’s silence and decided to keep on going anyway.

“Initially, I was the Youth Team manager of Forest. Gradually, from a normal manager, I became the assistant manager of the Youth Team, and finally the main manager. Following that, I became the main manager of the First Team, just like what you see now.” He extended his arms, indicating that the manager’s office belonged to him.

“Have you heard my story?”

Anelka shook his head.

“Then, let me tell it to you.” Tang En sat at the corner of his desk and crossed his legs.

“At first, I thought it was a good idea to become one of the managers of the Youth Team. I was very satisfied with the job. I’m an idiot who doesn’t know anything else apart from football; I didn’t know carpentry, didn’t know how to fix pipes, didn’t know how to sell merchandise, didn’t know design, make repairs, rob a bank... I didn’t know anything. I was over the moon finding a job in Nottingham Forest Club, and I had intended to just keep on working like that. After some decades, I’d become one of the old managers in the club and retire.”

“But later, I became this team’s interim manager. At the time, the team’s situation was miserable. Within half a season, I had to guarantee that my team could stay in the then First Division, now called EFL. In the beginning, my performance was terrible; the first match I coached completely fell through.”

Tang En shook his head, and said, “But, I thought later, since I had already become the main manager of the team, regardless of whether it was just interim, I should achieve something as proof of having been here, right? I decided to lead the team to a promotion... Yes, that’s right. You didn’t hear me wrong. I didn’t want to just avoid relegation, I was aiming for a promotion.” Tang En explained upon seeing Anelka’s shock.

The Frenchman nodded. He was completely engrossed in the story.



"I so nearly succeeded. That's a nicer way to put it, but the truth was that I failed. For that, I lost many things. From that moment on, I swore that I must do even better and never be a loser. But God did not give me that opportunity. My time as an interim manager ended, and I returned to the Youth Team to continue being the main manager of the Youth Team. The position of the First Team manager was snatched away by a guy called Collymore. Have you heard of him?"

Anelka nodded. "I know. I hate that guy."

Tang En burst out laughing. "That's right, I hate him too! Look, we have something in common now." As Tang En's laughter faded, he continued.

"Very soon, that guy was fired because of the lousy results he led the team to. I was back in the same position again. At the halfway point of the season, Nottingham Forest was fourth from the bottom. No one believed that a crappy team like that could achieve anything. In fact, there were many who firmly believed that we would end up being relegated to Second Division at the end of the season. But in the end? When the season ended, my team were the EFL champions, and had the entry ticket to the English Premier League."

"Isn't that an incredible story?" Tang En asked with a show of his palms.

"What came after is even more incredible. In the new season of the English Premier League, everyone said Forest's should just try to avoid relegation and guarantee their spot in the League. I held that idea in contempt. My aim was much greater and further than those bumpkins. You saw it too. My aim is the UEFA Champions League. Currently, we've gotten off to a good start. I'm no longer willing to return to the same life as before. To be satisfied mucking through life on the Youth Team. In my view, there are many more championships awaiting me."

As he finished saying that, Tang En rested for a beat before continuing. "I've heard some things regarding your brothers..."

Anelka's expression changed the moment he heard that it was about his brothers. Naturally, Tang En noticed that. Perhaps it was really that way; in Anelka's heart, no glory could compare to his own blood. If he could have a falling out with the French Football Federation over his brothers, wouldn't it be even easier to fall out with a mere club over them?

Today was meant to be a heart-to-heart. Tang En did not want to purposely poke at Anelka's sore spot.

So, he followed up by saying, "To be honest, I don't think there's anything wrong with their methods. Anyone would want to fight to have more benefits for themselves. That's totally normal. When I'm negotiating the terms of contract for my renewal with the club, I would also request for a higher salary and more monetary rewards. But, beyond money, I have other pursuits that can't be satisfied merely by a high salary. As I mentioned earlier, I have many championships that I have yet to get. You're now a player who has already been the champion of the Premier League, English FA Cup, UEFA Champions League, UEFA European Championship... You lack no glory and have no need to further prove yourself. Earlier, if you had answered that money was your greatest motivation to kick a football, and your only aim, I wouldn't have been at all surprised. That's very normal because you're a professional football player."

“I don’t care about your previous transfers. Now you’re my player. You’re playing on Forest team; that means you’re a member of Forest. I need you to help me achieve my aims... In truth, I’ve said this to every one of them. I need all of your help. Otherwise, by myself alone, I don’t even qualify to compete. We are a body, so our aims should be the same. I’ll take the championship, and you take the prize money.”

Speaking to that point, Tang En started chuckling.

“With championships, there’ll be money; with money, there’ll be motivation; with motivation, there’ll be championships. Look at how amazing that loop is!”

Although Anelka clearly understood that viewpoint, it was the first time he met with a football manager who would say it aloud so directly.

After working with so many managers, practically everyone believed him to be a greedy scoundrel whose head was full of thoughts about money. They believed he would not play well and was someone eternally incapable of any loyalty to a team.

Back then, during the period when he insisted on transferring to Real Madrid and leaving Arsenal, his mentor, Arsenal’s main manager Arsène Wenger, said, “People live for three meals and a bed. What do you want so much money for?”

Arsenal’s vice-chairperson also lashed out at him suddenly.

“In the final 48 hours of the negotiation, he mocked all the rules of English football; he completely lacks respect for others!”

Even earlier, Arsenal spent only 750 thousand for him to refuse a contract renewal with Paris Saint-Germain, where he first embarked on his career. He then took off all the way to London. His mentor, Fernández, angrily said, “It’s not worth mentioning that person. When he left, he himself slammed the doors to join Arsenal... Wherever he is, he would be a problem...”

In Real Madrid, people called him “trash.” At that time, there was a running joke:

A child frantically told his mother, “Oh no, someone has forced their way into our house!”

The mother asked, “What does he look like?”

The child replied, “Tall and thin. He was wearing Real Madrid’s jersey number 14.”

The mother then said, “There’s no need to be frightened, child. Such trash can’t do anything.”

...

There was only Tony Twain who would say that to him: Pursuing money isn’t a problem – it’s normal. I don’t need loyalty. I only need you to seriously fulfill your own duties during the period of your contract. Take the money and do the work; it’s that simple.

Anelka remained silent, his mind filled with what Tang En had said earlier.

“If you want to be a core player, show me the abilities a core player should have. If you have the ability and you show it, you’ll naturally become a core player. Of course, one day, when you start getting sick of

everything here, and you find my face detestable, or you wish to earn even more money and there happens to be a club who has offered you tempting terms... When you decide to leave, please don't forget to give me a call to tell me your thoughts. I won't make things difficult for anyone who wants to leave this place, because it's your freedom to do so."

Finishing his words, Tang En hopped off the table and exercised the half of his butt that had gotten numb from sitting.

"Let's move. We should be going back." Tang En switched off the computer on his desk and tucked his small notebook and pen away into his shirt pocket.

"Don't you have some activity going on at night?"

Anelka stood up and shook his head. "I don't have anything going on, Boss."

Tang En laughed and said, "That's great. Do you have a car?"

"Yes."

"Can you give me a ride? Half my butt has gotten numb from sitting. It's rather inconvenient to walk." Tang En groused as he massaged his bottom.

"Of course, Boss."

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Three days later. Bolton Wanderers' home grounds, Reebok Stadium. Nottingham Forest achieved a complete victory over the home team with a score of 2:0. Jersey number 39, forward Frenchman Anelka, played as a starter and stayed on the field for the full 90 minutes. In the 21st minute, he scored the first goal for Forest, contributing for his third match in a row.

### **Chapter 347: The Tournament Part 1**

With three consecutive goals in three games, Anelka's performance attracted the attention of the media. Although the media might have little affection for Anelka's two agent brothers, they could not ignore Anelka's performance. The return of a prodigal son was the best topic for the recent Premier League.

As a result, the Forest team's training ground had another increase of reporters. The buzzing flies had returned.

Looking at the reporters pestering Anelka, Twain suddenly felt that Anelka's two brothers did a good job. The price of forty thousand pounds per interview could really scare away a lot of people. He rubbed his chin and wondered if he should give himself a price of one hundred thousand pounds to make his life quieter. With the success of the Forest team, there were more and more people who wanted to get in touch with and interview Twain.

Twain would not reject media interviews, but he could not accept it if they went to his house and blocked his doorstep.

That was what happened to Anelka, and Twain did not plan to worry too much about it. The French striker was someone who had been in professional football for years. Some things were clear in his mind.

Anyway, he had made his stance pretty clear—“Since you’re on my team now, you will have to do a good job. When you do well, there will be lots of money up for grabs. But if you’re not willing to do well and want to leave, I won’t make you stay.”

What he had actually said to Anelka that day was, “Whether you stay or go, I don’t care.”

Anelka was different from his other players. Twain did not need Anelka to be loyal to him because he was never part of his plan. He did not need Anelka to like him. He only needed Anelka to score for him.

What concerned him more was another person.

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George Wood had encountered the most important problem in his nineteen years of life.

He thought that he should be a little different now from what he used to be, in training, in the locker room, and in the game....He should do some things that he had never done or paid attention to before.

But he did not know how to go about it.

Because he was the team captain. Although he was only a proxy, he was still the captain.

He needed to behave differently from the past because he wore the captain’s armband.

To be honest, asking him to do this was a little difficult for him.

When Albertini was around, he was able to make his teammates feel his presence as a captain, whether during training, in the locker room, or on the field.

George Wood did not have that ability. More often than not, everyone did not feel like they had a captain at their side during training, in the locker room, or in games.

Even though no one complained openly about it, Twain could see some signs of it; he believed that Wood could see it too. He was not an idiot.

He felt that he had to intervene to help with the matter. Since he had handed the captain’s armband over to Wood, he was obliged to pull him up when he encountered difficulties, or else he could hand the armband to Edwin van der Sar, or anyone else.

While the team was in training, Twain slipped back to his office and used the landline to call George Wood’s home.

The person who received the call was Wood’s mother, Sophia, who was pleasantly surprised to hear Twain’s voice. “Mr. Twain!”

Twain was not sure how to face the increasingly enthusiastic Sophia, so he rarely contacted her now. Nevertheless, it might be better for Wood’s mother to deal with the matter.

“Hello, Madam. Are you feeling better?”

“I’m much better.”

“That’s wonderful.”

“What’s the matter, Mr. Twain?” Sophia could sense that Twain was beating around the bush, so she asked first.

“Uh, Madam. Did Wood talk to you about his situation in the team recently at home?”

“Yes, he did. He said he was made team captain.” Sophia smiled. She was proud of her son.

“The thing is the new captain has met with some trouble lately.” Twain recounted the situation, “Wood listens to his mother the most. So, I need your help with this matter.”

Sophia kept quiet for a while over the phone, and then nodded, “Okay, I got it. Don’t worry, Mr. Twain. I know my son, I understand what I have to do.”

“Thank you very much, Madam.”

“I’m the one who needs to say thank you, Mr. Twain. If you had not allowed him to go to the Forest team for training, where would George be today?”

Twain laughed as he recalled his first season of coaching the Forest team. He had met George Wood in that cold season and the kid had said to him, “I think you should sign the best player in England,” as if he was reciting a line. Wood himself had had no idea what the best player in England was at that time but now he was getting closer to that goal.

After she thanked him again, Twain ended the call with Sophia and returned to the training ground. He stood on the sidelines and quietly observed.

Wood worked diligently, harder than before. He looked like he wanted to complete enough training for two people. But his simple and crude approach did not have any effect on his teammates, because he always worked hard. Everyone had long been accustomed to him working so hard.

The kid failed to grasp the point of it. Twain secretly shook his head.

He waited to see what Sophia could do to help.

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A day’s training was over again, and Wood broodily head back to the locker room to change his clothes. He then walked away by himself.

He felt that today was as bad as any day in the past. He had not accomplished anything and had failed as a captain. He even began to doubt Twain’s decision to make him the team captain. He felt totally unfit to be a captain. Although he admired Demetrio and had learned some things from him, he did not think he could be a captain like Demetrio.

It was too difficult for George Wood to have a smile on his face all day long and treat everyone familiarly like old friends of many years.

Wood only smiled when he went home to face his mother's smile. His mother always smiled at him and watched him smile. It was hard to keep a straight face. Furthermore, his mother's smile was warm with no other meaning. It was a genuine smile, completely different from all the smiles he had encountered outside. That kind of smile completely put him at ease.

Both mother and son made dinner in the kitchen together. As if she suddenly remembered something, Sophia asked casually as she busied herself with her work at hand. "That's right, George. When you return from Spain, I would like to invite someone to dinner."

Wood was a little surprised. His mother was poor in health. Except for Twain and his agent, Woox, who occasionally came to update Wood on work, they did not receive any guests at home. With his mother offering to invite people to dinner out of the blue, he could not help but be surprised. He turned to look at his mother.

His mother pointed to the pot. "Give it a stir."

Wood obediently picked up a ladle to stir in the soup.

"Well, didn't you become the captain?" His mother said with a smile. "I think we should thank a few people, so I would like to invite your mentors to have dinner at home."

"Demetrio?" Wood did not think that his mother would have thought to invite him.

Sophia nodded. "He's been a great help to you. I want to thank him in person."

Although he was surprised, what his mother had suggested was appropriate. Wood did not object.

"Other than that, I would also like to invite Mr. Twain too."

Wood turned to look at his mother again. Sophia bowed her head to busy herself with her chore as if she had not said anything.

"Oh, okay. I'll talk to him." Wood nodded.

## **Chapter 348: The Tournament Part 2**

After the team ended their game with Bolton Wanderers, they stayed another day in England before flying to Spain.

On August 25th at Villarreal's home stadium, El Madrigal, the Forest team would challenge their opponents in the Champions League qualification game. This game was crucial. Even if Forest defeated Villarreal by 2:0 at home, there was no guarantee that nothing else would go awry.

Twain could imagine that this game would be difficult, so he reminded his players more than once to treat it as such and not think that they could rest on their laurels with a score of 2:0.

Twain showed caution in the tactical and lineup arrangements with the strongest squad and defensive counterattacking.

Anelka was still in the starting lineup. His speed was Twain's most reliant weapon in the game.

Anelka was in the middle, Franck Ribéry was on the left flank and Ashley Young was on the right flank. This was the trident formation in the Forest team's counterattack. Twain had only one request for them: to send the football to the opponents' penalty area as quickly as possible.

Riquelme played a lot better than he had in the first round and Pellegrini did not make an indecisive error. The Villarreal team had an excellent performance overall and scored two goals in the game.

Despite that, the Forest team still held their destiny firmly in their hands during the second half.

After a beautiful breakthrough by Anelka, his shot was blocked by the Villarreal goalkeeper who threw out the ball. Arteta quickly followed up with a rebound shot and the ball went into the net.

That goal occurred four minutes before the end of the game. The Spaniards had already looked forward to overtime. They did not expect their fellow Spaniard, Arteta, to send his teammates into the UEFA Champions League tournament proper.

With an away goal, the score of 3:2 meant that if Villarreal wanted to drag the game into overtime, they had to score two goals in the remaining four minutes!

However, that was an impossible task to complete for the Yellow Submarine players, who had just suffered a heavy blow to their morale.

The fourth official raised the signboard to indicate the injury stoppage time of three minutes. From a minute and a half, the Forest team's substitutes gathered on the sidelines to wait for the referee to blow the whistle and for them to rush onto the field to celebrate. Now every Nottingham Forest player found those three minutes of injury stoppage time to be too long. Every second seemed to crawl. Some people were even afraid that something else would happen at the last moment. Anything could happen.

Finally...

"The game is over! Nottingham Forest is back in the European Cup after twenty-four years!"

Of course, it was no longer called the "European Cup." It was now called the "Champions League."

The ecstatic members of the Forest team did not spend too much time on the field. After all, it was not nice to celebrate so publicly on another team's turf. Their celebrations were moved to the locker room.

Evan Doughty and Allan Adams were also there to watch. After the game, they both came to the locker room to congratulate the team for their success.

Naturally, the most important person in the locker room was the manager. Twain waved his hands to quiet the crowd and then announced loudly, "You guys did a terrific job. Let's go to the Champions League and do our best!"

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The team returned to England with glory. At the Heathrow Airport in London, the hardcore Forest fans greeted them with songs and a number of media personnel.

Before the Forest team's expedition to Spain, a piece of good news came from Liverpool.

As the defending champion of the Champions League and being decided on by the Union of European Football Associations to start from the first round of the qualifier, the “Red Army,” Liverpool, had prevailed in all the rounds to finally defeat the Bulgarian PFC CSKA Sofia in the third round with a total score of 3:2. They advanced into the UEFA Champions League tournament.

In that case, with the Forest team’s elimination of Villarreal, a new record was created. There were as many as five English teams in the Champions League this season.

This was a special circumstance caused by special reasons. It was regarded as a mockery of the UEFA Champions League that the champion of the UEFA Champions League was not able to participate in this new season’s championship due to its Premier League ranking. It would be the first time in its fifty year history that a defending champion was unable to play in the next season’s Champions League. This was because formerly, only the champions from each league could participate in the European Cup, while the previous European Cup champion could automatically enter the tournament. This was the reason why during Brian Clough’s time, Nottingham Forest had been able to participate in the European Cup even though they had not won the Premier League title. They were the defending champion. They were there by virtue of their last championship title, which allowed them to automatically participate.

After the European Cup was changed and became the Champions League, the number of teams that could participate in the Champions League increased and the automatic participation of the defending champion was canceled.

Liverpool’s situation was special. At that time UEFA had discussed it for a long while, and it had even involved the possible sacrifice of Nottingham Forest in exchange for the Reds’ eligibility for the Champions League. If this resolution was passed, then it would be unfortunate for the Forest team. Luckily, that seemingly absurd decision was rejected. The UEFA gave special permission to Liverpool to take part in the Champions League for the new season. However, it would have to start from the first round of the qualifying games. Furthermore, this was an isolated case and would not happen again.

But who would care about what would happen later?

The people of Liverpool benefited, and so did the English. From the moment the news was announced, the English people looked forward to the arrival of the day: five English teams collectively in the highest level of the European club league: the UEFA Champions League.

Now that the day had finally come, it was seen as a major victory for English football. It was also natural for the returning Forest team to receive that kind of attention from the media.

“It would be better if they could bring some fresh flowers.” Twain looked at the scene and spoke with indifference. What did the victory of English football have to do with him? He only cared about his team.

“No matter what you think, you still have to go for an interview,” Kerslake said while they waited to disembark from the plane.

“Once again, I think that Anelka’s brothers are too smart. I should set myself a one-hundred-thousand-pound interview price so that I don’t have to deal with this.”

“You might as well set a hundred thousand pounds per word,” George Wood unexpectedly said as he walked past Twain. All of a sudden, the laughter of the other players could be heard around him.



“Hey!” Twain made as if he was going to grab Wood’s sleeves and the laughter became louder.

Then, amidst the laughter, Wood walked past Twain and said, “My mother would like to invite you to dinner this evening.”

Twain was stunned.

### **Chapter 349: A Captain Like You Part 1**

Journalists are always passionate. They throw out all kinds of questions to make things difficult for their interviewee. Even things that did not seem the least bit connected would be regarded by them as questions that had to be answered.

Tang En’s method of dealing with such annoying inquiries was simple and uncouth: he turned down all of them.

After squeezing their way through the airport and getting straight on the team’s coach parked outside, it was only two hours later that the team finally arrived in the Nottingham they were familiar with.

At the gates of Wilford Training Grounds, Tang En dismissed the team and announced that the players had the day’s afternoon and the next day’s morning off; two half days.

As Tang En was about to leave, Wood repeated, “Eight o’clock at night.”

Tang En asked, “Is Dunn invited?”

Wood stood there thinking for a moment before he shook his head. “Mum didn’t say so. I’m guessing not.”

“Oh. Okay.” Tang En nodded. “Head on home early, don’t let your mum wait. I’ll be there later.”

Wood turned and left. The cars in the parking lot drove off one by one. All the players had left. Some had gone home to enjoy some peace, while others had gone to indulge themselves. Tang En stood alone in the empty parking lot, scratching his head.

Was this a dinner with only him?

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From the moment Tang En returned, Dunn noticed him tidying up his appearance; bathing, shaving, combing his hair, changing, and polishing his leather shoes.

He was curious. Tang En was not usually this meticulous about how he dressed and looked.

“Are you heading out?”

Tang En nodded. “Oh, yeah. Dunn, you’ll have to settle on your own tonight.”

“Shania is back?”

Tang En paused in his polishing and turned to look at Dunn. “Why would you think of her first?”

Dunn shrugged. "I don't know. Is it not?"

Tang En shook his head, continuing polishing his shoes. "No. It's Sophia, George's mum."

"Oh." Dunn fell silent.

Tang En lowered his head, repeatedly scrubbing at the shoe he held despite the fact that it was already gleaming.

Why would Dunn mention Shania first? The girl should have already returned to the UK from Brazil, right? Recently, he had been so busy, he had not contacted her at all. When they parted ways, he had even said he would call her, but once he started busying, he could care less about anything else. She couldn't be angry, right?

Dunn heard the polishing become monotonous. He instantly knew Tang En must have been in some sort of stupor again.

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Tang En reached Wood's place slightly before the agreed time.

"It's been a long time, Tony." Sophia smiled as she opened the door for Tang En.

"Yes, it's been a long time... You look great."

After entering the house, Tang En realized that the big place seemed empty of anyone else. So, he asked, "Where's George?"

"He went out to buy something. He'll be back in a while." Sophia continued looking at Tang En smilingly, making him a little embarrassed. He sat down with a cough.

"Do you want sugar in your tea, Tony?" Sophia asked.

"No, thank you."

Sophia retreated to the kitchen to make tea for Tang En. At that moment, a knock sounded from outside the door. Tang En rose to stop Sophia, who had run out from the kitchen.

"I'll open the door."

He thought it was Wood who had come back. That way, it would diffuse the current awkwardness. He opened the door and found himself unexpectedly faced with a child's face.

The child opened his mouth, but a matured voice sounded instead from behind it. "Ah, Boss! I didn't expect to see you here."

Hearing the English words accompanied by a heavy Italian accent, Tang En immediately knew who the visitor was.

"Demi!" Tang En felt elated. Inviting Albertini for a meal was certainly a good way of helping Wood work through what was troubling him.

Albertini laughed at the side, while his wife, famous model Uriana Capone, carried the child. The beautiful former model greeted Tang En with a smile. "Good evening, Mr. Twain."

"Good evening, Madam. Please come in. George has gone to buy some things while Sophia is making tea. I'm lending a hand to our host." He opened the door for them and made a gesture welcoming them in.

"Hello, little Albertini." Tang En reached out and nudged the child's nose, making him giggle in his mother's arms.

Tang En was no stranger to Albertini's wife. When Albertini had transferred to the Forest Team, their family had moved from Italy to the UK. Despite not being quite used to the UK's terrible climate, Uriana continued staying by her husband's side. Occasionally, she would bring the child back to the grandfather's place in Italy. Usually, however, so long as there was a home match for Forest, Uriana would make sure to wear Forest's red jersey and bring along their child to cheer for her husband from the spectator's stand luxury box. They were a happy family of three.

Albertini's quick adjustment to English football and Nottingham Forest was, in large part, attributed to his wife's devoted care and full support of him.

The cup of tea Sophia brought out from the kitchen became three, and everyone sat together for a leisurely chat. From the looks of it, Tang En seemed more like the head of the house.

Until Wood returned.

Even though it was said to be dinner, the food was not of much importance. It was the conversation that was important. The women chatted about what interested them as the child played by the side. The men also flocked together to discuss their matters; the real aim of the day's dinner.

The topic started with Albertini's injuries.

"How's your leg, Demi?" Tang En asked as he sat by Albertini with a cup of tea.

"Fleming says I'll be able to return to the field at the end of next month if everything goes well."

"And what do you feel about it yourself?"

"I'm sure you wouldn't agree if I said I can return to the field right now, Boss."

The two laughed.

George Wood joined them after helping his mother clear away the dishes. In truth, he already knew why his mother suddenly wanted to host a dinner at home, especially when the ones she invited were Albertini and Tang En.

As Wood sat down, Tang En glanced at him before giving Albertini a wink.

Naturally, Albertini knew what the real purpose of the dinner was. He looked at Wood and asked with a grin, "George, how does it feel to be captain?"

Faced with Albertini, Wood was somewhat embarrassed. He lowered his head and kept silent.

Tang En started laughing beside them.

"It's not looking too good, Demi."

He stopped laughing and said to Albertini, "This kid... he's always trying to imitate you. Am I right, George?" He looked at Wood again.

Wood raised his head and said to Tony, "You made me the captain, and you're the one who asked me to learn from Demi."

Tang En did not reply, but Albertini continued. "George, tell me honestly. Do you think there's anything we have in common?"

The question stumped Wood. He considered it carefully. Demi was a warm-hearted person. Despite being unable to speak much English when he had first joined the team, he could get everyone on the team to accept him in the shortest possible time. He was always happy to help the teammates who had difficulties, regardless of whether they had often interacted with him or not. His face always had a smile on it, and he was polite to everybody. Whenever he spoke in the locker room, everyone would naturally quieten down... Perhaps that was the unique charisma Demi had.

And did Wood have those qualities? Even though Wood did not always plaster an unfriendly look on his face, he gave off an impression of being unapproachable. Albertini used a month's time to get his teammates' acceptance and liking. But Wood took nearly a year and a half. He rarely went out to play with the others; after training every day, he would rush back home to accompany his mother. He also did not go out to drink or visit clubs to seek the company of beautiful ladies. He didn't get involved in relationships or have any after-hours hobbies. He lived a simple life.

Wood shook his head. "No."

Albertini laughed and gestured questioningly. "If we're so different, why do you still think you have to become a captain like me?"

Wood squirmed for a bit before saying, "I think a captain... should be like you..."

Albertini was one of the captains George Wood had worked with the longest. It was very normal for him to have such ideas.

"No, no. It's not like that." Albertini shook his head.

"Since people have different characters, there would be different types of captains as well. You shouldn't try to be a captain like me. You should try to be a captain like you."

## **Chapter 350: A Captain Like You Part 2**

"A captain... like me?"

"That's right. Like you. You work harder than anyone else on the team. No matter the results you attain, you've never become arrogant. You're always firm-footed and grounded. Everybody sees this. Do you think your position in the team was only given to you because of the Boss?"

Wood turned to look at Tang En, but he only smiled.

“No. It’s because everybody knows you truly have that ability. Your performance had everyone convinced, so nobody objected to you consistently being a starter.”

Tang En nodded. “Last season, the media thought you sat so steadily in your position as the team’s main defensive midfielder because of special treatment from me. Do you believe that bulls\*\*t?”

Wood shook his head.

“That’s it. You are a very confident person. I knew that from the beginning.” Tang En beamed. That’s right. Wood had wanted to train with the First Team right after entering the team and not having even signed a contract yet. Wasn’t that enough confidence?

“So... we are different people. You can’t imitate me in everything, George. Are you worried that you won’t have any authority or be trusted as the captain in the team? But, you have already proven it with your actions... Do you still remember the Europa League match last season? Do you remember what you did after Freddy got injured by the Brazilian’s tackle and had to leave the field?”

Wood nodded.

“Although the Boss is here, I still want to say that you did fantastic. At that point, I believe several people on the team must have had those kinds of thoughts; to do the Brazilian guy in. They did not have that courage, but you did it without hesitation. This matter made everyone adjust their perspective of you.”

Tang En interrupted Albertini, saying, “This, George... I must add, even now, I would still insist on applauding that foul. Back then, I was not purposely trying to pick a bone with the referee or vent my unhappiness. I just thought that the foul was incredibly cool! Do you know what a captain is? A captain is someone who would stand up for his teammates. You need to protect your teammates because they trust and support you. They know that even if they meet with some trouble on their own, the team captain would step up to help them solve it. If they get bullied by others, someone else would bully back on their behalf! That... is being a captain. It’s what a captain like you should do.”

By Tang En’s side, Albertini nodded in agreement.

“In that instant, you let your teammates feel that you’re someone trustworthy, someone worth supporting. You’ve succeeded, George. Think about it. Why did no one object when I announced your captaincy in front of everybody in the locker room?”

“It’s because you’ve used your actions to tell them that you would help them solve their problems whenever they meet with trouble,” Albertini said, chiming in.

“No matter the method used... You’ve already established your authority.”

It was as if Tang En and Albertini were performing, with them taking turns to talk, slowly helping Wood untie the knot in his heart.

“What are you still worried about? One day, if you suddenly act like Demi, smiling and greeting anyone whom you see, I’m afraid everyone would just think you’ve gone crazy.”

Hearing Tang En say that, Albertini chortled in amusement. He imagined Wood with a beaming face; it was just too strange.

“Your teammates have already accepted everything about you. Why do you still want to change yourself? No one said the captain had to adapt to the team. Conversely, a team should have the mark of the captain leading them. For example, Demi’s style is more like the wind while yours is like fire. That’s excellent. I do not think there are any problems having two captains of different styles. There is only one thing you need to change...” Tang En raised his index finger.

“Open your mouth and talk. Let your teammates hear your thoughts, opinions, your wishes about what you want them to do, your suggestions, what you hope they won’t do, or what you think is good and what you think isn’t... All your ideas, express them with your words instead of sitting in a corner of the locker room all day in silence. George, when you’re entering the field, how does it feel to stand right at the front of the team?”

Wood said nothing. He was still thinking on Tang En and Albertini’s words. He had believed that any captain should be like Albertini to receive everyone’s welcome, support, and respect. But, he never thought that there might be a different path to achieving the same things.

To be a captain of his own style?

It had never crossed his mind.

But... perhaps it was worth a try.

“I think...” Wood finally said, “It feels good.”

Tang En and Albertini exchanged looks and smiled.

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Dinner had come to an end. Tang En and Albertini and his family bid their goodbyes.

Albertini and his wife thanked Sophia before leaving to retrieve their car. Meanwhile, Tang En had stopped Wood.

“Hmm... I want to say something. You say that you have no commonalities with Demi at all. But, I disagree. Of course, from the surface, one is an extrovert, and the other is an introvert. However, I still think there’s a very big common factor between the two of you. Do you know what it is?”

Wood shook his head. “I don’t know.”

“Seriousness. You’re both very serious people.” Tang En turned to look at Albertini, who was waving at him from inside the car. “I believe that serious people may have to live a tougher life than most others, but they always achieve great things.”

Tang En patted Wood’s shoulder and left, walking towards Albertini’s car. Demi had said he would take Tang En home.

Albertini was serious about football, about Milan, about his own love and family. Wood was serious about how he treated his mother and similarly serious in how he treated football; otherwise, he could not possibly achieve the results he had gotten today.

Tang En was halfway to the car when Sophia called out to him. "Tony, feel free to visit whenever you have the time."

He turned with a smile and nodded at Sophia. "I will, Madam."

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Sophia and Wood only returned to their home after seeing Tang En and Albertini leave.

"George. It was Mr. Twain who called me, telling me you've recently met with some problems and hoping I could help. You're a lucky boy, with so many people keeping you in their thoughts. So, you mustn't let Mr. Twain down."

The mother gently ruffled her son's hair.

"Yes, I know now," her son said, vigorously nodding his head.