

Champions 491

Chapter 491: Extreme Dissatisfaction and Absolute Regret

“Sun Jihai has saved Nottingham Forest’s goal gates! He seemed to descend from the sky, suddenly appearing in the front of the empty goal and blocked out Shevchenko’s shot! Let us look at the slow replay. After he was passed by Shevchenko, he immediately picked himself up from the floor and chased after him. While we put all our attention on Shevchenko and Edwin van der Sar, no one noticed that he had already found his way back! What terrifying willpower!”

As Motson showered Sun Jihai with all the praises he could. The main character himself was still piled underneath the players.

City Ground was a sea of jubilation. Someone unknowing would surely assume that Nottingham Forest scored a goal.

Shevchenko sat on the ground and helplessly watched as Nottingham Forest’s players celebrated. Such a great opportunity. It was such a great opportunity! Yet, he was still unable to score. It was as if God was pulling a prank on him. It would be impossible for him to perform again as perfectly as he did this time, and yet, he still could not score.

Such an awe-inspiring, world-class forward was hindered from his step forward by a Chinese man.

“Shevchenko must be extremely regretful now. If he hadn’t gone for a chest-high ball and took a ground shot instead, Sun Jihai wouldn’t have been able to stop it even if he’s got wings. But of all... Under that situation, however, he couldn’t have done any better. We still need to come back to praising the tenacity of that Chinese man. No matter the situation, he wouldn’t give up. No, this isn’t just his tenacity, this is Nottingham Forest’s tenacity.”

Outside the field, Mourinho had gotten up from his seat when he saw Shevchenko and Edwin van der Sar going one-on-one against each other. He was already prepared to dash out of the technical area in celebration of the goal. Never did he expect Shevchenko’s shot to fail. Yet, precisely such a situation unfolded.

Seeing Sun Jihai leap up into the air, using a movement that looked like Chinese Kungfu to kick the football out of the end line, Mourinho slammed his fist on the ground.

That damned Tony Twain, damned Nottingham Forest, damned Chinese player! Every single person here was so detestable!

Next to him, Tang En led the members of the managerial team in applauding for Sun Jihai in the field. Sun Jihai was an immensely diligent player. No matter if he played as a starter or a reserve, he always did his best. When Tang En first bought him, it was precisely this point about him that attracted Tang En. In comparison to numerous European players, he was much less volatile. Surely, in a team, it could not all be made up of characteristic people like him, right?

Tang Jing watched this scene from the press box.

Back then, when Forest Team main manager Tony Twain spent four million to buy Sun Jihai from Man City, it sparked excitement in the whole of China for a period; it had been the highest value for a Chinese player. But the good times did not last long. Competing internally within the team, Sun Jihai could not defeat Chimbonda. Most times, he could only appear on the field as a substitute. As such, England's media believed that Tang En had bought a pig in the poke, that Pierce had cheated him of four million in selling him a Chinese full back who was on the verge of becoming obsolete. Even the domestic media did not look favorably on Sun Jihai's prospects in Forest Team. The feeling intensified especially after seeing Forest Team's "magnificent" goals.

Unexpectedly, after Tang En's "streamlining" earlier during the season, Sun Jihai remained in the team despite many who left because they could no longer keep up. Tang En rarely evaluated the Chinese player in public events, regardless of if it were praises or criticisms. As a result, the media were also unsure of the true thoughts in his heart.

Now that she had seen this, Tang Jing understood it better to some degree.

In the recent few matches, Sun Jihai had been in the starting line-up for almost every match. His all-rounded abilities supplemented the team very well. Instead of having to bring in more players for every position, the team only needed one Sun Jihai.

However, if it was merely for the position of a utility player, Tang Jing believed that Tony had many other better options. Seeing this scene of Sun Jihai saving the ball, her mind suddenly flashed with inspiration – Sun Jihai's style of not giving up and what Tony had always been advocating fitted very well with each other.

Now it made sense why Tony valued Sun Jihai so greatly.

When it came to choosing players, Tang En did not look so much at the person's age, nationality, or level of technique. His foremost requirement was if the person was his cup of tea.

And Sun Jihai was right for him.

Every manager had their own preferences. For example, Arsenal's main manager, Arsène Wenger, favored players who were technically outstanding although their bodies were not strong. Meanwhile, Tony Twain favored players who had strong willpower. It was evident from how much he valued George Wood. Apparently, George Wood's mental attributes in the newest game of FM were of the greatest value among all the players.

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Sun Jihai's flash of brilliance did not only save the team's goal gates. More importantly, it inspired the team's morale.

Nottingham Forest did not suffer a blow because of Chelsea's attack this round. Conversely, the one who suffered the blow was Chelsea.

Just five minutes after Shevchenko's failed one-on-one, Nottingham Forest scored.

Wasted opportunities would be punished. These words came true for Chelsea.

Taking the chance of Chelsea's lowered morale, Forest Team initiated a series of fierce attacks. After a series of threatening shots at Čech's gates, one by Ruud van Nistelrooy finally managed to blast open the 10-fingered gates of Czech's national goal keeper.

"Ruud van Nistelrooy! This is his seventh goal for Nottingham Forest! From Manchester United to Nottingham Forest, he shows incredible adaptability and has assimilated into the team most quickly! Today, he is the best shooter on the team!"

Losing the ball, Čech could only vent his despair with a mighty pound at the floor. He had saved two straight shots from the opponents but failed to save the third one in the end. Van Nistelrooy had leant on Terry as he stretched out his foot with a jab, kicking the ball into the goal gates. At that time, Čech was still on the floor, yet to get up.

Forest Team's attacks came at them too fiercely.

Mourinho saw it clearly from outside the field. Now that the team had fallen behind, defending was not going to be of use. The only way was to continue enforcing their attacks and equalizing the scores as quickly as possible.

Ever since Shevchenko entered the team, he had been unable to adapt to the pace of the English Premier and Chelsea's football. However, as he was a player that had been especially picked out by the boss, Abramovich, Mourinho was forced to use him. On one side of things, Shevchenko's performed poorly and experienced a low period in his conditions. On the other, Mourinho helped Shevchenko out numerous times before the media, finding reasons to retain him as a starter for every match. Now that Shevchenko lost a one-on-one and was performing poorly, Mourinho finally found an opportunity to change him out.

Swiftly, Mourinho substituted in German national team captain, Ballack, for Shevchenko who was not performing well.

Andriy felt somewhat helpless as he exited the field. He had already done his best, but it was a pity that his luck was poor this time round. If he had scored that goal, everything would be different. Chelsea would not have fallen behind, and he would not have to be taken off...

When he came down, Mourinho even patted his shoulders to comfort him. From the perspective of the outside world, the two appeared to have a very good relationship. But who knew that both Shevchenko and Ballack were not players Mourinho wanted? This characteristic manager did not have a choice when it came to his even more characteristic boss. The Russian tycoon boss of his was fond of super stars and his comrade from the Eastern Europe, Shevchenko. To Mourinho, however, Ballack and Shevchenko were both unplanned recruitments.

If all the transfers were to go according to the Boss' wishes, Chelsea's locker room would have turned into a mess long ago, not to mention having any combative ability.

Ronaldinho, Ronaldo, Kaka, Casillas, Raúl, Buffon; all these were players Abramovich was interested in. Although it may give off a feeling of being amazing and incredible if one placed all these players into a team, Mourinho only saw it as a disaster.

Everyone said that being the main manager of Chelsea was great because they had money and could buy whoever they wanted. However, only Mourinho knew how tough it was to work under this rich boss. Although he was very rich and could purchase any player he wanted, there were also many times that players he did not want were bought.

Not only did he have to consider his boss' preferences, he still had to continuously lie in front of the media, making it sound as if Shevchenko and Ballack's arrival was something he had been anticipating for a long time; a moving transfer. On the surface, he had to maintain Chelsea's harmonious atmosphere in the locker room and prevent their opponents, who were ferociously eyeing them, from detecting anything out of place. There was nothing more important to a team than being united.

After Shevchenko returned to the substitutes' bench, he gloomily threw the towel, given by the coach for wiping his sweat, onto the floor. No one knew if he was angry at himself because he failed to score that goal, or because he was changed out.

Mourinho was not in the mood to care about Shevchenko's feelings.

If they lost this match, everyone's mood would be bad; no one should expect any good days ahead of them.

While he did not care about Shevchenko, he turned his head towards the manager's seats of the home team. Tang En was currently sitting down with crossed legs, chatting about something with his assistant manager.

Seeing his carefreeness, Mourinho wanted to gnash his teeth.

There was something that Mourinho would never publicly admit before the media. There were times that he deeply envied this rival of his. In Nottingham Forest, he was the true king. Whatever he said, the club would carry out; whoever he wanted to buy, the club would supply him with funds; whoever he did not want to purchase, the club chairman would also not put pressure on him. In his conflict with players, the club would also surely stand behind the main manger; just look at Anelka's current situation.

A manager in England having the same absolute authority like a CEO, was gradually becoming a luxury in the face of rapid advancement of modern football and the refinement of division of labor.

Did Mourinho still remember what he said when he first entered Chelsea?

God, other than God, it's me.

Now, he realized it was wrong. The real situation was:

God, other than God, Abramovich, and then me.

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After Ballack got on the field, Chelsea played with only a single forward, Drogba alone. Mourinho wanted to clash in the midfield with Tang En. He could tell; they would only be able to deal a blow to Nottingham Forest's arrogance if they controlled the midfield.

Without George Wood's crazed pressing and sprinting around the midfield, this was Chelsea's opportunity. They could make use of their own numerical advantage and take back the midfield.

Once they had total control over the midfield, Chelsea could attack in any way they desired.

After Ballack was subbed in, Mourinho further used Joe Cole to change out Makelele, leaving only Essien to defend alone. This substitution gave a clear signal to Chelsea's players – Mourinho was going to take a gamble.

With the match already at this point with only over 20 minutes before its end, he did not want to wait until the final 10 minutes before taking a gamble and going all out.

Of course, Tang En would not choose to defend because he led by a goal. If Wood was around, he could have been able to do that...

Now, the best solution was to continue going on the attack and clashing directly with Chelsea, using their own offence in substitute of their defense.

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With such an open match, how could a score of 2:1 be enough?

In the 73rd minute of the match, Chelsea returned an eye for an eye, creating chaos in Forest's penalty zone with a corner kick. Following, Drogba scored a goal that levelled the score.

This goal allowed Mourinho the chance to vent his emotions; he ran outside to the celebrating players and launched into a human pyramid.

Everyone had gotten used to the two managers doing things that were out of line, so the commentator, Motson, did not make a big fuss out of it, only loudly laughing before his microphone.

Chelsea evened the scores with 17 minutes left in the match.

Would the match end in this manner?

Clearly not. Tang En would not agree to it. It began with their lead and a winning situation. Now that it turned into a draw, how was he going to take it lying down?

Mourinho would also be unwilling. When he came here, he did not imagine himself to only leave with a single point. A draw was a failure to him, because he would still have failed to break the awkward record of failing to win Nottingham Forest.

In the final minutes, Tang En swapped out Rafael van der Vaart for Arteta to continue enforcing their attack. Mourinho had not used his final substitution quota yet. Similarly, Tang En still had one more substitution left. This was an ace in case of contingencies and for dragging out time if they took the lead in the last moments.

Time passed as the end of the match drew closer. On the field, the two sides battling did not seem to realize its passing, continuing their attacks on each other in the hopes of scoring a goal again.

This time, Chelsea who had been led by Nottingham Forest twice, finally turned the tables.

"Michael Essien! A beautiful wall-pass and one-two combination in front of the penalty zone! He rushes in and shoots! It's a goal! This all happened too quickly, Edwin van der Sar and the rear defenders of Forest were unable to react in time!"

Drogba gave Essien a tight pull from his back, dragging him onto the ground. The two black men rolled together on the ground and were quickly drowned by even more Blues.

Mourinho jumped up to clap for this goal. In the 80th minute, a turn of the tables!

Tang En had a gloomy face but did not express any anger at losing a goal in the last minute. However, everyone could tell that he was obviously bottling his emotions.

At the last minute? No, there were still 10 more minutes!

While Chelsea's people were madly celebrating, Tang En stood up from the manager's seat.

Surprisingly this time, he did not roar loudly or wave agitatedly with his hands and arms. He only crossed his arms at the side lines with a grim face. Tang En knew that his team did not need his reminders; all his players knew what happened was terrible.

They had taken the lead twice and had the upper hand, but both times had the score equalized by their stubborn opponents. Now that all their thoughts were on taking the third lead of the game, their sly opponents took the chance to launch a sneak attack and took over instead! Could Nottingham Forest accept such a failure on their own grounds? Would they end their record of never losing to Chelsea in this way?

There were still 10 minutes. Other than attacking, they did not have any other choice. Even if this meant they could lose a ball from another sneak attack by their opponents.

Tang En was right. Forest Team's players were well-aware of their own situation. They had also seen the overcast expression on their Head's face. Letting their opponents get off easy would only mean being hard on themselves.

"The match is getting close to the end. Nottingham Forest persists in their attacks. Their attacks are extremely crazed. Chelsea have no choice but to retreat for defense. Mourinho has called up Lassana Diarra from the substitutes' bench. He is getting ready to substitute in the French defending midfielder in the last minutes to strengthen their defense."

With Mourinho fortifying their defense, Tang En naturally enforced their offense. As Mourinho called upon Diarra, Tang En called up Bendtner.

Both parties substituted their players at the same time. There were still six minutes before injury stoppage time.

"High balls? I don't think it's a good idea. The air defense of Chelsea's defensive line is not weak..." Mark Lawrenson once again expressed his doubts regarding Tang En's substitution.

"High balls may be the only method at such a point?" Motson said. "The first time these two teams met in the English Premier League, on this very field, wasn't it Bendtner who scored the goal? Maybe Tony believes this Denmark lad could bring himself some luck."

"Then I'll sincerely wish him the best of luck..." From Lawrenson's tone of voice, there wasn't at all any hint of his "sincere wishes".

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True to expectations, Nottingham Forest began playing concise long balls after Bendtner entered the field. Both Albertini and Arteta's long passes were strong. Added to that the two flanks passing to the center, everyone was searching for the heads of Bendtner and van Nistelrooy.

Although van Nistelrooy was 1.88 meters tall, he was not a center-forward who relied on headers. Most of the time, Bendtner was the key individual in Forest's final attacks. Whether it was to head the ball in a direct attack at the goal or to ferry it across to teammates, it depended on his height of 1.9 meters and outstanding heading skills.

Upon seeing Bendtner sent out, Chelsea also fortified their range of defense against balls from the air.

Putting in a center-forward who was 1.9 meters, their intentions were much too obvious.

Mourinho stood at the side lines and shouted at the players to watch out for high balls.

In competing for a header with Bendtner, Terry succeeded in heading the ball out. He suddenly felt that Bendtner beside him was only so-so. He could not even box out the position, not to mention competing for the header.

Terry's attempt to resolve the danger was not a true resolution. He had only kicked the ball out of the danger zone, that was all. The football very quickly landed under Forest Team's possession. Anyway, the match was about to end soon. The entire area outside of the penalty zone was filled with Forest's members, so Chelsea's players had gotten used to it. They just had to refocus and defend again.

Ashley Young received the ball on the right wing. As he held the ball, only one thought surfaced in the minds of Chelsea's players – it must be another high ball.

Since Bendtner got on the field, Ashley Young had already passed five straight balls, without any change, to the front of their goal via their air space. The boy liked to assist and was a champion in the Premier League when it came to passing center, but did he not know how to change a method? Defending against such balls was not in the least challenging...

Ashley Young glanced at the penalty zone. Ashley Cole came forward to defend against him. He bumped the ball and made a move to pass to the center. Naturally, Ashley Cole jumped up to block his pass route. Even a fool knew he was going to pass high again...

Ashley Young smiled when he saw Cole leap up on conditioned reflex. Only a fool would think I'm trying for a high pass!

Young suddenly pulled the ball back in to him, passing by Cole who had leapt up.

"What an idiotic defense!" Mourinho scolded angrily when he saw this scene from outside the field.

"Who taught him that!"

"Ashley Young suddenly broke through Cole's defense. He enters the penalty zone diagonally. This move of his completely surpassed the expectations of Chelsea's rear defenders. Carvalho rushes over to make up for the gap..."

Seeing the chaos in front of Chelsea's goal, Young gleefully waited for Carvalho to rush up to him before he passed the ball out.

Was it a high ball?

No! A ground ball!

Terry was originally holding onto Bendtner, ready to stop him from jumping to head the ball. Because of that, he was pulling downwards. Unexpectedly, Ashley Young passed a ground ball instead. At the same time, Bendtner went along with his pulling force and fell downwards...

Was he trying to get a penalty shot?

Of course not! This was a sliding shot!

A tall individual had the advantage in headers when they jumped; similarly, they had an advantage when their height translated into a greater length of their body when laying on the ground.

Terry understood what Bendtner wanted to do, so he quickly dropped into a slide tackle as well. At that time, he did not have the time to care if it was going to be a foul. Tackling him had the risk of fouling, but if he did not, it would almost certainly be a scored goal if Bendtner's slide made contact with the ball!

But he was still half a step behind...

"Nicklas Bendtner – YES! IT's a GOOOOOOOAL! Čech tries to make a save, but it's too far! He's helpless! The match has just entered injury stoppage time, and Nottingham Forest has equalized the scores again! Indeed, for a match between the two of them, we cannot know the results until the very final minute!"

"The final second." Mark Lawrenson added in helplessly. Of course, he hoped that they would not know the results until the very final minute. That way, he would still have a few minutes to look forward to.

But things did not go as they had hoped. Nottingham Forest, who had equalized the score, was unable to threaten Chelsea's goal again with their attacks. Both teams were unwilling, but they could only accept the result of a draw with the score of 3:3.

"The match has ended. Chelsea has fought Nottingham Forest to a draw in City Ground. Looking at the faces of the managers, they are evidently displeased with this result."

The two main managers walked to each other and carried out the post-match formalities of shaking hands.

"Let me be clear first. I'm extremely dissatisfied with this draw. We could have won." Tang En said, looking straight at Mourinho.

"I am absolutely regretful that it wasn't a loss for you." Mourinho retorted with a dark face.

Saying their pieces, the two departed in different directions.

Chapter 492: What Had Happened and Was About to Happen

After the game, Mourinho said he was very sorry that Nottingham Forest did not lose, which was somewhat true. Twain said he was unhappy that he had not won the game, but it felt like he was a little reluctant to admit a mistake.

Under such circumstances, it was actually a good result that they could tie the game on their home ground. After all, they had to put more energy into the Champions League.

After the league game with Chelsea, Nottingham Forest ranked sixth in the league with eighteen points. Immediately after which, there was another Champions League group stage game.

At the City Ground stadium, the Forest team would usher in France's Girondins de Bordeaux.

This was not a strong opponent and furthermore, the game was at the home of the Forest team.

Twain expected that as a visiting team, Bordeaux would retreat and defend at the City Ground stadium and then wait for a chance to counterattack. Therefore, he just took this opportunity to see how the emphasis on ball possession would play out.

Twain used the Champions League group stage as if it was a friendly to train the squad. If the opponent knew of this matter, Bordeaux would certainly feel that they were humiliated ...

Twain guessed the course of the game well. Bordeaux did withdraw at the Forest team's home ground. It was clear that they were playing defensive counterattack, while the Forest team's ball possession was up 68%. Their ball possession rate did go up, but the creation of opportunities had not increased. Even when they laid siege to their opponent, they still could not find the opportunity to send the football into the danger zone to turn it into a shot at the goal.

Nottingham Forest players had become accustomed to the previous game pattern of letting others attack and playing defensive counterattack. It was a little difficult for them to change in a short time.

It was rather impossible to make the imagined tactic become a reality right away.

Twain sighed in the technical area. It looked like he and the coaching staff had a long way to go.

In the end, the Forest team only defeated Bordeaux at home by 1:0. The goalscorer was van Nistelrooy. If they had stuck to their previous tactics, they would have at least won by at least two goals.

When they returned to training the next day, Twain assembled the team as usual and watched the video of yesterday's game together while he and Dunn analyzed every detail of the game for everyone. The Forest team rarely tried playing by using ball control. Now that they had decided to take this route, Twain naturally wanted everyone to see the path they were going to take. Dunn was a tactical expert. With him explaining at the side, everyone stood from the perspective of observers to re-analyze this game. They could clearly see the areas they did well and did poorly, where the issue lied and what the specific problem was, and how they should be avoided.

After every game, there would always be a "training session" to relive the game, analyze and solve the issues by watching the video. Since Dunn transferred to the First Team, he did the specific analytical work, and Twain was only responsible for supplementing it.

A morning was spent watching the video of the game over and over again. No one thought this was a waste of time, because the players often only knew to play according to instinct during the competition.

Now with an observer's perspective, they could review the game they had played. With Dunn's analysis at the side, anyone who was not an idiot would feel that he benefitted greatly.

Few people used to do this type of training model. They obviously watched the videos of the games. But Twain might be the first to insist on them becoming a separate training model.

Twain's idea was simple: football was not just a sport to compete fiercely with one's body, but also with one's brains.

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After a period of previous setbacks and at their lowest ebb, Nottingham Forest entered a steady phase in the league tournament. Their competition results were average. But the difference was quite clear as compared to the Forest team's successive victories in the early part of last season's league tournament.

After the game against Chelsea, the Forest team first beat Newcastle United by 1:0 and then defeated Bolton Wanderers 2:0 at home. Next, at a time when everyone thought the Forest team was going to advance at high speed, they lost 1:2 at home to Manchester United instead.

Although he lost the game, Twain was not unhappy at all.

Because George Wood was back.

Having ended an eight-game ban and like the devil returning from hell, George Wood was back in the top league tournament with his stony expression.

"What have you learned in the reserve team?" At the sidelines of the First Team training ground, Twain smiled and asked George Wood, who had come out of the locker room.

"The coach put me in offense." Wood replied honestly.

Twain smiled. It seemed that McParland carried out his instruction well.

"How do you feel?"

"Made some progress ... Not too fast though." He did not expect Wood to frown and shake his head, feeling dissatisfied with his performance.

"Oh? Why?"

"The opponent was too weak ..."

Twain burst into laughter.

"Didn't take much time for you to look down on the reserves game, did you?" He cocked his head to the side and looked at Wood with a glint of smile in his eyes, "It doesn't matter anymore now that you're back to participate in a high-level competition. At that point, show what you've learned in front of those powerful opponents. I bet they will be shocked! But... of course, don't be so impulsive again. You see, while you've been suspended, the team's performance is shaky, and you also have nothing to gain."

The team's performance was shaky, but it was not entirely due to Wood's suspension. Twain said it this way, hoping that Wood would consider the cost and whether the benefits would tally before taking any action in the future.

Wood nodded, "I understand, chief."

"Go to training." Twain gestured towards the training ground and Wood ran up.

"Hey, George! How does it feel to be stifled for eight games?!" Ribéry shouted out, setting off the laughter of his teammates around him.

George did not answer. He ran up to Ribéry to give him a slap and patted him on his shoulder. Ribéry also played along with a grimace and hunched his body, "Hey, not so hard!"

Twain was happy to see Wood bonding with the guys even though he still seemed a little reserved. But this was a lot better than when he first came to the First Team.

"How did George do in the reserves, chief?" Albertini spoke up behind him.

Twain looked back at him. He had just changed into his training jersey and came out of the locker room.

"While he was over there, the coach mainly got him involved in the offense. But... he said there was little progress."

"Because the opponents were not strong enough?" Albertini quickly guessed the heart of the problem.

Twain nodded, "The kid has pretty high standards."

"A high-level competition is a hotbed of progress for young players." said Albertini.

Twain looked at the Italian veteran and felt he was really a good helper for him. He was the most trusted among the players and was the connection point between the coaching unit and the locker room. He would reassure the disappointed players and help to guide the new players ... He did all this work. Twain was a little reluctant to let this man go.

"Hello, Demetrio."

"What's the matter, chief?"

"You've done a great job in the last few games."

"Thanks for the compliment, chief."

"Do you want to ... reconsider your decision to retire?" Twain intended to persuade Albertini to give up the idea of retiring at the end of the season. He knew the hope was slim, but he still had to give it a try.

Albertini did not hesitate to shake his head and rejected Twain's suggestion, "Give me a break, chief. When I first came to the Forest team, I was thirty-two years old. Now I'm thirty-five years old. I'm old and tired too."

"C'mon, please don't say that, Demetrio. Think about our original goal ... Have you forgotten? I told you that the Forest team has a vast goal. The UEFA Europa League was just a starting point." Twain was still making a final effort.

Albertini smiled and shook his head, "Of course I didn't forget, chief. I've never doubted your goal. Look at this team now, it's completely different from when I first arrived. They're all very good lads." He looked at his teammates who were fooling around on the training ground and said, "The Forest team's goal is to be a champion. But I don't think I can wait ..."

He spoke halfway and suddenly stopped talking. Maybe he felt that it did not sound nice saying it like that. Would the Forest team take a long time for to win a championship title?

"Are you afraid you won't be able to wait for that day to arrive?" Twain helped him finished it.

Albertini did not reply, but his silence was equivalent to consent.

"All right, Demetrio. I'll give up my plan to persuade you to stay any longer." Twain spread out his hands, "But I have to give you a parting gift."

"What is it?"

"It's a secret." Twain played a child's game.

Albertini was surprised as he did not think Twain would say that, and then he laughed again, "All right, chief. I'll wait for your gift."

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With Wood's return, the Nottingham Forest squad was no longer crippled. The team's performance in the league tournament picked up steadily as well.

George Wood also began to actively participate in the offense during the games. Although his main task was still defense, his contribution to the offense was no longer nil.

As for the Champions League group stage competition ... there was no surprise there. The Forest team maintained its unbeaten record and advanced out of the group stage ahead of time after they won 1:0 against Bordeaux at the home game. With two games left in the group stage, Twain did a substantial rotation of the roster and almost replaced the entire lineup. He wanted to give more players a chance to access a high-level competition. After all, the purpose of training them was to play in competitions and win.

That kind of situation last season must not happen again.

In a blink of an eye, it was getting closer to the year end.

A number of things had happened in the international football world during this period. Twain was familiar with some of the matters, which were not that different from what he knew. And there were some things that were not supposed to happen but happened due to Twain's arrival.

Twain did not care about some of these things but was very concerned about some of them.

Twain was well aware of what kind of manager Fabio Capello was and what kind of team Real Madrid was. When Real Madrid's rebellious superstars encountered Capello who governed with an iron fist, Twain also knew what kind of situation it would be.

Ronaldo was on Capello's eradication list and was said to become close with AC Milan. Other people also said Massimo Moratti wanted to let Ronnie back to Inter Milan on the account of old attachments ... Ronaldo, who was cleared out by Real Madrid, was still a popular player in the transfer market even if he was down and out. Even Allan Adams, the Forest team's marketing manager, once excitedly asked Twain if he wanted to try to get in touch with Real Madrid. Now that they were in a hurry to sell Ronaldo, who was also in a hurry to flee the Bernabéu hell, the transfer fee should not be high.

Twain agreed with Allan's price analysis of this transfer, but he refused to bring in this Brazilian striker. Quite simply, he did not like a player who could not be managed. Ronaldo was clearly not a good kid who could obediently listened to him. Therefore, Twain told Allan that he did not want Ronaldo regardless of how famous and talented he was and however many goals he could score.

If Ronaldo were to come, am I going to have to fight to be the boss? I'm not so idle that I would need a pain in my ass ...

Twain was very concerned about another player and that was David Beckham. Originally he was just someone he knew in passing. But because of Shania who was a young girl active in the modeling and fashion world, they had become friends. This world was wonderful. With this additional layer in their relationship, Twain became more concerned about this man.

Everything seemed to be developing according to the written script. No matter how hard Beckham worked during training, he did not receive Capello's favor. Capello had no affection for those star players such as Ronaldo, whose commercial clout was greater than his influence in football. He believed that Beckham was in Real Madrid just because he could help the club sell more football jerseys.

Since Beckham married the Spice Girl, Victoria, there had been more and more people in the world who saw him as such.

Twain did not think there was anything wrong with Beckham and Capello in this matter. The fault did not lie with either side. It laid with a third party.

The Spanish media had always looked down on David Beckham since he came to Madrid. They thought that he was there to drive the sales of the football jerseys. They also said that Beckham alone caused Real Madrid's situation of not winning a championship title in the past few years... As soon as he heard this ignorant assessment, Twain wanted to laugh, whether in the past or now.

Would Capello's misunderstanding of Beckham be so deep without the third-party media adding fuel to the fire at the side? In the second half of the league tournament, did Capello not recognize his mistake, place his trust in Beckham again, and then Real Madrid's results also began to pick up, catching up to Barcelona?

However, Capello was not the only one who fully acknowledged Beckham in the second half of the league. Twain believed that many people was acquainted with Beckham again during that time. Twain suddenly felt that he still had a chance. When they met the last time, he failed to persuade Beckham because David still longed for a future at Real Madrid. Things were different now. He was vexed about his future.

Capello had repeatedly put Beckham on the bench in a number of games. His attitude was already clear. He was waiting for an excuse to purge systematically.

The entire world knew that Beckham would definitely leave Real Madrid. Even the club chairman, Calderón, did not deny this “rumor.” The only suspense was where Beckham would choose to land once he left Real Madrid.

Would he go back to Manchester United? But Ferguson would not want that.

Or Arsenal? It sounded more like a joke.

Chelsea? It was a huge possibility, which could also be just a possibility.

AC Milan? Inter Milan? The Major League Soccer in United States?

There were too many rumors of these transfers swirling around and enticing. Perhaps even Beckham himself did not know where he was headed.

If Twain did not do anything, he believed Beckham would go to America. Victoria, a woman who was around him all day, had a lot of influence over him. Everyone knew that this woman yearned for the colorful world of Hollywood, hoping that her husband would be able to develop his career in the entertainment world after he retired. She should have made arrangements for Beckham’s future a long time ago.

He could not let this happen. Twain decided to make a phone call to Beckham.

When he dialed his number, the line indicated that the user he dialed had turned off his phone.

Is it just my luck?

Twain did not give up. After ten minutes, he dialed again, and it went through this time.

“Hello, Tony!” Beckham’s voice was a little loud, not because he was in high spirits, but because of the noisy surroundings.

Twain could hear the roar of a real motor engine coming from the receiver and could not help frowning. “Hello David. Where are you? Why is it so noisy?”

“I’m at the airport in America. I just got off the plane ...”

“America!” Twain could not help but shouted.

Chapter 493: David’s Plans

“America!” Tang En exclaimed in shock, making Beckham jump on the other side of the phone. Even with the landing and taking-off of planes at the airport, he could not help but pull the cell phone away from his ears.

“What’s the matter, Tony?”

Tang En who realized his loss of composure hurriedly coughed. “I’m just... just surprised. Aren’t you in Spain? Why did you suddenly go to America?”

"I recently got injured, so I can't play in matches. Coincidentally, I had to come to America for a contract discussion." Beckham explained.

Tang En's heart jumped again.

"A transfer contract?" he jokingly asked.

Beckham laughter drifted over from the other end, "How is that possible? It's only a normal business contract."

Tang En breathed a small sigh of relief.

"That's right. Why are you looking for me, Tony?" Beckham asked.

"Uh, I'm calling to greet you for Christmas..."

"It's only the 10th now." Beckham laughed in amusement again.

"I'm calling early- early to do the greetings. I know you're very busy. Then, I won't disturb you anymore. Enjoy your trip in America."

"Thank you, Tony. Then, I'll wish you an early merry Christmas too."

Finishing up the call, Beckham's brows furrowed. Victoria looked back at him. "What's the matter, David?"

"It's Tony. Tony Twain's call."

"Shania's friend?" Victoria recalled.

Beckham nodded.

"Was he looking for you about something?"

Beckham laughed. "What else could it be? He wants me to return to England to play there."

"To play at Nottingham Forest?"

"Yeah."

As the two spoke, they walked out to the airport's corridors. The football fans and reporters waiting outside started a commotion when they saw Beckham and his wife finally appearing.

Beckham stopped the discussion with his wife and lifted his hand to wave at those waiting here. He was beaming with a smile as bright as California's sunshine in America, prompting a wave of shrieks from the females.

"Then, what are your thoughts about it, David?"

As if he did not hear the question from his wife, Beckham only continued the show in front of the cameras and in public.

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The next day, Tang En took note of news concerning Beckham's trip to The States. The news of Beckham using his recuperation time to visit America were mentioned on newspapers, television and the internet. However, he only attended a press conference in New York for the publicity of his own brand.

There was no news about him and LA Galaxy, or of any interactions with personnel from the Major League Soccer.

Tang En finally relaxed. It seemed like it was really a normal business meeting.

The adverse effect of this piece of news was that Beckham fell a step further out of favor in Capello's heart. The tough Italian manager felt that his actions of privately going out to take part in business activities were not a show of professional conduct that a professional footballer should have; that it was a public challenge of his authority. Beckham being iced on the bench became something even more certain...

On the same day, Allan Adams excitedly found his way to Tang En.

"Tony, I've heard that you are friends with Beckham?" Allan loudly exclaimed as he stepped into the main manager's office.

Tang En happened to be reading news on the internet. Hearing Allan's voice, he immediately closed the webpage and looked up at him. "That's right. We even had a meal together."

"This would go well then. You do know that Beckham hasn't been very happy at Real Madrid lately, don't you?"

Tang En could guess at Allan's intentions and shook his head. "It's no use, Allan. I've already asked him earlier in the season if he wanted to return to England to play soccer, but he rejected the idea without any hesitation."

Allan was not at all deterred. "That's at the beginning of the season. At that time, Beckham was surely filled with expectations and illusory ideas of his new manager. Now, it's different. Didn't you see the recent news? Capello is extremely unhappy about Beckham taking a trip to America on his own."

"Beckham said he had gotten the agreement of the club's higher management."

Allan waved his hands. "It's hard to know this sort of matter. But that isn't what we should be concerned about. Now, the whole world knows that he is unhappy at Real Madrid. Many clubs are fighting for him to join them. You must know, he'll be a free agent after this Christmas. There won't be a need to spend a penny on the transfer fee." It was as if Allan had already seen a shiny future of gold.

"Beckham. Do you know what he represents in the commercial market, Tony?" His pitch was a little high with his agitated emotions.

Tang En nodded. "Of course, I know."

"That's good. That's good. What kind of advantage does Forest Team have over the other teams?" Allan pointed to Tang En and said, "You're his friend. This matter would be a breeze. You can persuade him to join Nottingham Forest, not with your identity as Nottingham Forest's main manager, but as his friend, like you're having a heart-to-heart. When he is still lost about his future and in the painful situation he is in, you give him a call and have a soulful discussion with him in the cold winter night..."

Allan was so engrossed he completely ignored Tang En by the side as he described the picture in his mind, gesturing wildly at the same time.

Tang En leaned back on his own chair and watched Allan's performance with a cocked head.

Thanks to Beckham's immense commercial value, this person had become slightly disoriented...

Tang En waited for Allan to finish speaking. He propped his hands up to hold his chin as he asked, "Allan, I have to admit that your thoughts are great, but it's a bit too much of wishful thinking on your part. Do you know how deep the affection David has for Manchester United?"

Allan was stumped hearing Tang En's question. He had not, indeed, given thought to the issue from the perspective of playing football. All he had said earlier stemmed from thoughts of the number of jerseys Beckham could help Forest Team sell, the help he could lend in Forest Team expanding their international influence, of the many new big-name sponsors he could attract for Forest Team, if he joined them.

Seeing Allan's face clouded with uncertainty, Tang En hastily waved his hands with a laugh. "I'm not rebuking you, Allan. I think your idea is good although it has only been considered from the perspective of a business operation. But, isn't that precisely your job? Things about football, that's my consideration. However, I feel that we should put together everyone's opinions of this. You've spoken your mind earlier. Do you want to hear mine?"

Allan made a gesture of invitation.

So, Tang En related his discussion with Beckham, when they had a meal together the other time, to Allan.

Hearing this, Allan was momentarily stunned. "He really said that?"

Tang En nodded.

Allan fell silent and sat on the sofa scratching his head. Tang En understood all too well Allan's feelings about this.

For a man who was trying to come up with all means and ways to excavate the gold from the gigantic gold mountain he saw, what kind of feeling would it be to suddenly hear that the gold mountain was only an illusion? That it was something that couldn't be excavated? It probably wasn't an exaggeration to describe it as having 10 thousand ants crawling over his heart.

"I don't want to be enemies with Manchester United, so I won't return to England."

Tang En's ears once again rang with what Beckham had said to himself back then. He casted his gaze out to the blue sky beyond the windows.

Even until now, do you still think the same way, David?

As Tang En was looking at the blue sky outside the windows, out of sorts, Allan Adam stood up from behind him.

"Although he said that, I still think we should try working at it."

Tang En looked back in surprise at Allan.

“It’s just that I think we might as well try to convince his wife rather than David Beckham himself.” Allan continued, saying, “Victoria is the only person who can influence him.”

“But I have no way of convincing Victoria too...” Tang En said, opening his palms up in a show of helplessness.

“No, you do.” Allan said without hesitation. “Have you forgotten how you got to know Beckham?”

A thought suddenly flashed through Tang En’s mind.

Shania and Victoria were friends; that was how he became friends with Beckham...

“Alright, I’ll try. But I can’t promise anything.” Tang En was also thinking about reaching out to Beckham for a discussion again. Without needing Allan’s additional input, he knew how great his commercial value was. Even from a sporting perspective, Beckham was a player that he very much hoped to get.

A player with outstanding passing ability, he could play both as a side midfielder or defensive midfielder. His energetic running and professionalism were also a good example for the younger players in the team. While he was slightly old, it was just perfect for him to play a few more years before giving a hand to the ones coming in to succeed him, stably transiting to a new era. How nice would that be?

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“... David Beckham is in big trouble, but is it any lesser than the ones he was in when in Spain? Ever since his transfer to Real Madrid, he has been entangled in all sorts of trouble; on the field, off the field, and with his family. Now, his time with this century-old powerhouse is finally coming to an end.”

A huge LCD television was showing the latest sports news. During the press conference regarding the team’s line-up, Capello expressed strong unhappiness about Beckham’s private trip to America when answering related questions from the reporters.

“... He is a professional football player. He should know what it means to abandon his team and to go to such a place at this time...”

With a cut in the scenes, Beckham appeared amid a ring of reporters. “... I have gotten permission from the club’s higher management.” Saying so, he slipped into the car and left.

“Beep-” The screen turned dark; the television had been switched off.

“Don’t watch that anymore.” Beckham stood behind Victoria in his sleepwear with the television remote in his hands.

Victoria turned to look at him with a smile. “It’s time to consider about the future, David. America is a pretty good place, or more precisely, Los Angeles.”

Beckham furrowed his brows and fell silent. Recently, there were fewer and fewer smiles on his face. Unless he was in front of the media or the public eye, he had this expression most of the time.

"I've grown weary of Real Madrid's attitude." Victoria continued. "It's obvious that they don't want to renew the contract with you. Everyone here treats you as some kind of pain. Leaving is the best solution."

Beckham rounded over and sat down. "Of course, leaving is the best option. But where do we go after leaving?"

"David, have you already forgotten about the development plan I drew out for you?"

Beckham shook his head lightly.

"Los Angeles is very good. Everyone there hopes for you to go. You will be treated much better there than over here. And then we can..."

Victoria had not finished her words before being interrupted by Beckham. "But, it's a football desert over there."

"David-" Victoria said, dragging his name out. "You should really consider about your life after retirement. You're no longer young."

"I'm old at 31?" Beckham smiled, looking at his wife.

He had to admit. The development plans his wife had designed for him were rather good. Going to Los Angeles in the US to play football symbolically for a few years, and then naturally developing into the entertainment circle; even if he retired from the world of football, he could continue his career in other aspects. There were also other footballers who went into filming after retiring. From England, there was one – Vinnie Jones. He played football in Wimbledon. Later, he retired in Queens Park Ranger and went to Hollywood for further development. Now, he could already be considered as a stable B-List film star.

However, in all honesty, Beckham did not feel that he had the talent to act. When the film crew for the movie "Goal! The Dream Begins" came to Real Madrid for the shooting and needed them to be actors, he felt particularly awkward. It was a world of difference from how he felt on the field...

His wife though was very keen on such things.

At times, he felt that he owed Victoria too much. To take care of himself, who was playing in Madrid, Spain, she sacrificed her career in England and followed him to Madrid, a place that was not included within the fashion entertainment circle.

"Look at your legs." Victoria pointed to Beckham's legs. "It's all battered. I don't wish to be pushing you in a wheelchair when we go out for a walk in the future, David."

From her words, Beckham could feel his wife's concern for him. Beckham stretched out his arm to wrap around her shoulders. "It's not as scary as that, is it? There are many retired players but only a few in wheelchairs."

As the atmosphere developed into one suitable for a beautiful night life with his wife, the handphone he placed on the table started ringing.

Beckham felt helpless hearing the ringtone that disrupted the atmosphere. He smiled at his own wife and let go of his arm around Victoria. Standing up, he walked over to pick up the call.

“Hello, Tony?”

It was a call from Tang En.

“Hello, David.”

“Are you wishing me an early Merry Christmas again?” Beckham asked with a laugh.

“Ah. Not this time. Shania would be in Madrid for a fashion show a few days later. She won’t be in England this Christmas, so I’m thinking of going over to accompany her for a day. And then at the same time, I want to treat you and Victoria to a meal. You treated me the last time in London, so I should return the treat this time around.”

Of course, Beckham knew that returning the treat was an excuse. It seemed like the main manager of Forest was “especially fond” of him. Since the other party invited him so warmly, he had no reason to refuse.

“Alright, sure. Let’s set a time and I’ll see you then.”

After hanging up the phone, Victoria looked over to him from her position splayed out over the backrest of the sofa. “Is it just a simple meal?”

Beckham smiled. “Clearly not.”

“Hey, David. Do you wish to return to England?” Victoria suddenly asked.

Just like the time at the airport, Beckham was stunned for a moment. However, this time, he was unable to avoid answering by waving and smiling to his fans.

Victoria looked at him, awaiting his answer.

Beckham fell silent for a while and shook his head. “I don’t know.”

Back then, he had firmly shaken his head in denial of the possibility of returning to England. Yet, it had now turned into an “I don’t know”...

Chapter 494: The Meeting

Shania was definitely going to take a modeling assignment in Madrid. This was not a fashion launch. It was a separate event for a brand which she had signed an endorsement deal for.

Victoria also knew about it because Shania frequently messaged Victoria as good friends. She told her about her coming to Madrid for the show and was keen to invite the couple to watch it live.

This was also the only day Twain had been able to squeeze in during the Christmas period. The English Premier League had entered an annual period of intensive schedule since the nineteenth. The team must play more than once a week for the fans to celebrate the Christmas season.

Twain could only make time to give the team a day off before Christmas, and also to give himself a day off.

And it just so happened that Shania was going to Madrid, Spain and did him a big favor. Otherwise he really did not know what reason he could use to invite the Beckhams.

Shania did not care why Twain wanted to invite Beckham and Victoria to discuss a matter. What made her happy was even though she still had to spend Christmas busying herself with walking the runway shows, Uncle Tony would come and accompany her for a day.

The two of them were very busy with work, so to be able to meet for a day was very precious.

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On the December 11th afternoon, after the home game against Aston Villa had ended, he did not go to the hotel bar with the team but went straight to London and took the evening flight to Madrid, Spain.

The next day the team had a day off and Twain would spend it with Shania in Spain.

It was well known that the Spanish lifestyle habits were not the same as those of other countries. Their clocks seemed to be set a few hours later at night than elsewhere. By the time Twain arrived in Madrid at 9:30 P.M., the Spaniards had not even started their dinner time.

It was Shania's agent who came to the airport to pick up Twain.

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Twain. Shania is with Victoria and can't come." Fasal said to Twain in the car from the airport to the city.

"It's okay. I'm the one who is imposing on you all." Twain was not entirely being polite by saying so.

Twain's trip was on a tight schedule. After the game, he came straight to Spain to invite the Beckhams to dinner. The next morning, he would attend Shania's runway show and have fun with her together in Madrid in the afternoon. Then he would fly back to England at night.

Not a minute was wasted.

With such a tight schedule, he naturally had to bother Shania's agent, Mr. Fasal, to make careful arrangements so that there would be no slip-ups.

Fasal naturally thought of these things too. As he drove the car, he looked back at Twain and smiled, "Mr. Twain is also a busy man now."

"Is it always like this for Shania? Flying around all the time ..." Twain asked, sitting in the back seat.

"It used to be. Now it's a little better. Previously, in order to make a name for herself, she would participate in any activities. Now that she has made a name, she can decline some activities."

Twain nodded to show his understanding. Being famous naturally gave her the power to choose the corporate partnerships. Sometimes being unavailable would also help to increase her worth.

"Shania is still continuing her studies now." Mr. Fasal added, "After all, she's only seventeen years old."

"It's time to go to college, isn't it?"

"Yes."

“Do models ... still need to go college?”

“Shania said she can’t be a model for the rest of her life.” Fasal said with a smile in front of him.

Twain listened but did not answer. Had the young girl already made plans for her future? A model really had to make the most out of her youth in her profession. Many models made use of their youth to earn more money while they were still young, and then they would find rich men to marry, and then play the traditional role of being a wife and mother ... That was how the rest of their lives passed.

Shania actually thought of going to college to continue to recharge herself and plan for the future. But it was also in line with Shania’s independent character. She never liked modeling, so she did not expect to have a lifelong career as a model. Some models formed a modeling agency when they got older or became another young model’s agent. Some even became a modeling coach to groom new models. It was clear that Shania did not intend to do so. She seemed to want nothing to do with her career as a model after she retired.

“Mr. Fasal, you’re her agent. Why does it sound like you do not stop or oppose her thinking?”

Fasal smiled, “Mr. Twain, I’m just her agent, not a guardian. I have no right to interfere with what she wants to do in the future. Besides... Everyone knows that modeling is mostly a career during youth and is short-lived. I can’t always drag her around to do fashion shows till she’s fifty just so that I can make money, can I?”

Twain immediately laughed. His last remark was really interesting. Walk the runway till she is fifty? An oldie fashion collection?

But... what will Shania look like when she is fifty? Still attractive, or a faded beauty? How old will I be when Shania is fifty years old?

At the thought of this question, Twain shuddered. He always intentionally or unintentionally ignored his age, because his psychological age was twenty-something, but his biological age was ... almost thirty-eight years old ...

Shania is seventeen years old and I’m older than her by almost twenty-one years. I can’t believe that we can still be this close with such a big difference in our ages...

The two men chatted along and arrived at their destination — a restaurant filled with Spanish flair.

Twain looked down at his watch and it was ten past ten o’clock. People were still going in and out of the restaurant door. It was popular. Not only this restaurant, the entire street was brightly lit and bustling. A lot of luxury cars were parked by the street. From this, one would know what kind of clientele would come to this street.

The two men had just entered when the enthusiastic waiters came to take them to the private room.

Twain did not want the paparazzi to recognize himself. So, he wore sunglasses and kept his head down in silence with the waiter leading the way in front.

The waiter stopped in front of a door and opened it. Twain took off his sunglasses at this time and saw a few people seated inside.

Shania was chatting happily with Victoria, Beckham's wife and former "Spice Girl" with a mixed reputation as well as his old friend, David Beckham. What Twain did not expect was that the Beckhams had brought along their three children: their eldest son Brooklyn, second son, Romeo, and youngest son, Cruz.

It looked more like a family gathering.

However, this atmosphere was very suitable for a heart-to-heart chat.

Twain entered and took off his sunglasses. Everyone's eyes was on him.

Shania got up from her seat with a smile and opened her arms to Twain, "Uncle Tony."

Twain went over to give her a hug and a featherlight kiss on her forehead.

Then he let go of Shania and smiled at Beckham and Victoria, "I'm sorry to have kept you all waiting."

This was not the first time Beckham had met Twain, so he found nothing strange about the behavior between him and Shania. On the other hand, it was Victoria's first meeting with Twain in person. Although she had heard Beckham mentioned the relationship between Twain and Shania, she was still a little perplexed at seeing such a scene.

Except this was a woman who hid her true thoughts well. She graciously stood up and shook hands with Twain.

After he had dropped Twain off, Shania's agent, Fasal took his leave. Only the few of them were left to have their dinner and chat together.

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After Twain had taken his seat, the waiter began to serve. Beckham's three sons were mischievous. Victoria took care of her children most of the time and had little time to really eat. It was clear that Shania also liked children very much, so she was always by Victoria's side to tease her three lovely sons together.

As a result, only Beckham and Tony Twain were the only ones who really sat and chatted at the table.

"What a happy family." Twain said to Beckham as he looked at Victoria, who was playing with her sons.

Beckham turned to look at his wife and sons with a soft gaze.

"More than ten years of career, and only a family is the most important thing in the end." He stated.

Twain knew the position that Victoria occupied in Beckham's heart. Although there had been some gossip about this man, which man did not have lust? This did not get in the way of Beckham's love for Victoria.

"Championship title, trophy, money ... all that don't matter?" Twain probed.

"Those things can never appear every day when I retire, right?" Beckham replied.

When Twain heard Beckham's reply, he moved closer and lowered his voice, "David, are you planning to go to America to expand?"

Beckham was a little surprised. He did not tell anyone but his agent the plan that Victoria gave himself. How would Twain know?

Twain certainly would not tell Beckham that he knew this in advance because of his transmigration. So, he looked at Victoria and smiled, "Everyone knows Victoria is interested in Hollywood. You love your wife and cherish your family. It's only a matter of course to follow her to America, right?"

Beckham did not speak. Twain was right. Victoria desired for a Hollywood lifestyle, which was not new news.

The three children were playing around in the large private room. Shouts and laughter rang out from time to time. When Twain saw that Beckham was silent, he glanced at Shania.

This young girl really likes children. Look at her playing so happily with other people's kids...she does not look like a supermodel at all, more like an ordinary older sister. As he looked at the bright smile on Shania's face, a hint of smile pulled at the corners of Twain's mouth: No matter that she's a supermodel, she's still a child in the end ...

"Tony?" Beckham saw Twain locked his eyes on Shania and smiled softly. Then he spoke up to rouse him.

Twain hurriedly turned back and looked at Beckham.

"You did not come to Spain this time just to invite us to dinner, or to hang out with Shania, did you?"

Beckham's eyes reflected the glow of the lights and twinkled as he waited for Twain to show his cards.

"Well ... You're right, David. I know you're not doing well in Real Madrid right now. That club doesn't give you enough trust and respect ...Uh, you see, I knew what the outcome would be before I came out here. But I still want to give it a try again—" Twain paused when he got to this point. He looked at Beckham's eyes. The sound of the surrounding children playing was still there, and the women did not seem to care about the discussion between the two men at the table. Twain continued to say, "Nottingham Forest is very sincere in extending an invitation to you in hopes that you will return to England."

Beckham stayed quiet for a moment before he smiled and asked, "Is it to help you sell your jerseys?"

Twain could not figure out what Beckham's smile meant, but it did not matter. "No, you should know that when I bring in players, I never consider commercial reasons. I admire you because of your football standards and dedication. David, I'm going to say something which you don't need to take it as a compliment—you're the most professional player I've ever seen."

When he heard Twain said so, Beckham smiled and did not express any opinion on Twain's assessment.

This time, he did not reject Twain with "I don't want to be a direct rival of Manchester United." He did not bring up that remark.

After a while, Beckham asked, "You just said you knew what the outcome would be before you came out here. In that case, why are you asking me again?"

"I want to at least give it my best shot. Even if I know the result in advance, it is not a reason to give up. My team and I are like that." Twain boasted. He was qualified to say these words.

Victoria and Shania settled the children down and returned to the table. Twain and Beckham discreetly stopped their discussion of the topic.

Twain casually brought up some interesting topics which amused everyone and did not let the atmosphere turn cold. Beckham laughed too, but his brows were still slightly creased.

After that, they did not touch on the matter of the transfer any more until they took their leave.

At the restaurant doorway, Victoria looked at Twain, standing next to Shania, and smiled, "Mr. Twain, you really surprised me. I thought you were like how the media portrayed."

"Don't believe them, madam." Twain winked and said, "They're used to describing a stranger based on their imagination. You still have to validate it with your own eyes. I'm a nice guy." He puffed out his chest.

"Well, goodbye then, Mr. Nice Guy. When we're back in UK, please accept our invitation to come to our place." The hostess gave a warm invitation, and Twain had no reason not to say yes.

"I'll definitely be there, madam."

"You have to bring Shania with you." Victoria added.

"Of course."

With that, Twain waved to Beckham, who stood by the car door and said, "Goodbye, David. I look forward to our next meeting."

Beckham smiled and said nothing. He just waved his hand.

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As soon as they send off the Beckhams, Fasal also drove his car to pick up Shania.

"Come stay with me tonight, Uncle Tony."

Twain was startled to hear Shania say this.

"You can sleep in Mr. Fasal's bedroom."

Only then Twain breathed a sigh of relief. Shania was staying in a hotel, same as Fasal. His room was next to Shania's room.

"Ah, I'm sorry to trouble Mr. Fasal." Twain said courteously.

Fasal was unexpectedly good-natured about it. He chuckled as he drove, "It's no hassle at all. But if you think it's a hassle, you can stay with Shania."

Twain suddenly coughed. Shania chided, "Mr. Fasal!"

"Haha, I'm just kidding! It's a beautiful night. Where else would you like to go?" Fasal wisely changed the subject as he pointed to the brightly lit city of Madrid outside the car window.

Twain looked at this city which he was familiar with. He led the team here to play a game once and he had been here too when he was on a tour to Spain with Shania. This would count as his third time.

He did not know what was fun to do at night, and he did not really want to go out to have fun.

Shania clearly had the same idea as Twain, so she shook her head and said, No. Uncle Tony must be tired from the day. Let's head back to have an early night's rest."

Twain was indeed tired from his day. He had gotten up in the morning to prepare for the afternoon game and it was a fierce battle against Aston Villa in the afternoon with the home game ending in 2:2. Then he immediately rushed to London and came to Madrid from the London airport. Without stopping to rest, he went to meet the Beckhams and tried to find a way to change the "future" he was familiar with at the dinner table.

Now, he really did not have any energy to go have fun anywhere.

He felt that he could fall asleep at once if he lied down now.

The beautiful night in Madrid had nothing to do with him.

Chapter 495: Vacation in Madrid

The business event Shania was involved in was held in the morning. Bright and early in the morning, Tang En was already woken up by the noise. The staff and reporters had already found their way into the hotel where the event this time was held at.

Tang En did not want to reveal his own presence and be discovered by the reporters to be hiding in the room right next to Shania. While his relationship with Shania was no longer news, the extent of their closeness would still exceed much of the expectations of the media.

Taking the chance when there were fewer people, Tang En sneaked out of the hotel to stroll the streets of Madrid in the early morning. He did not walk far, only circling the area nearby the hotel. Seeing the many premium sedans and TV stations' broadcast vehicles parked in the carpark of the hotel, it was not hard to imagine the scale of this promotional event.

And Shania was the only star; the main lead in this event.

Tang En walked around aimlessly nearby. No one here could really recognize a manager that came from England, even if he had once led a team to beat Real Madrid. There would not be anyone to disrupt his period of contemplation – he was still thinking about the issue of Beckham's future.

Clearly, he did not manage to convince Beckham to change his mind yesterday. Hearing the words that he said, the meaning was more than clear:

He valued family.

Victoria was the person with the most influence over him in his family. Valuing his family was equivalent to valuing Victoria's attitude.

And was there anything more to say of Victoria's attitude? She was certainly going to Los Angeles, America.

The only thing that comforted Tang En was that Beckham did not flatly refuse his suggestion to return to England this time around. Evidently, this was a tremendous change from his attitude half a season back.

Last night, Beckham promised that he and his wife would come to support Shania this morning. It would be Tang En's final opportunity to convince him. If it still had no effect, Tang En could only surrender. Then he had to go back and tell Allan to completely give up on the idea.

As more and more reporters began congregating at the front doors of the hotel, Tang En looked at his wrist watch. It was almost time. He snuck back in from the side doors again.

Unable to find Tang En in the hotel, Shania left to prepare somewhat huffily. Meanwhile, Fascal bumped into Tang En, who had just returned, in his own hotel room.

"Mr. Tony, did you go out?"

"Ah, I went out to take a walk. It was getting a little noisy."

"Then, please remember to come down in a while. Shania wouldn't be at ease until she sees you." Fascal closed the door and left after.

Tang En tidied up slightly, changing into a suit prepared for him by Fascal and combing his somewhat messy hair. When he was done, he went downstairs on his own.

The event was held in one of the conference halls of the hotel. The hall was packed to the brim with people. In it, there was a temporary runway constructed in the center. The two sides of the runway were filled with chairs to seat the guests. Additionally, there was a media zone especially designated for them. Majority of the guests already arrived. Needless to say, all the spots in the media zone had long been taken.

Tang En stretched his head out from the side door and shrunk back hastily again, taken aback by the scene. In any case, he himself was also considered a famous person, but he had never been faced with these many reporters at one time. It seemed like the profession of a fashion model was very popular.

As Tang En looked around outside the doors, he suddenly felt a pat on his back.

He jumped and turned back to find Shania smirking.

"What are you looking at, Uncle Tony?"

Without thinking, Tang En answered, "I'm looking for you, girl."

Hearing Tang En say this, Shania smiled especially beautifully. She grinned from ear to ear but glanced at him from the side with some suspicion. "Really?"

"Of course. I've never lied to you." Tang En pointed to the hall outside behind the doors. "There are a lot of people. Are you nervous?"

Shania shook her head. "No, I've gotten used to it." Saying this, she suddenly recalled something funny. Unable to help herself, she burst into laughter.

“What’s the matter?”

“You know, Uncle Tony. Whether it’s this kind of show, or the ones in groups for a fashion event, do you know what I’ll be thinking in my head after I get on stage?” Shania asked while giggling.

Tang En shook his head. How would he know?

“I imagine every person off the stage as a football. They don’t have faces nor expressions, just one rounded football one after another. Haha!” Saying so, Shania started laughing in a very unladylike manner as she clung onto Tang En’s shoulders.

“Ah. No wonder you aren’t nervous. There’s nothing to be nervous about when you’re facing footballs.” Tang En looked at the girl before him bent over laughing. She was utterly different from the ice beauty on the runway. He still liked this Shania a bit more.

“Shania...” A woman wearing a staff tag at the front of her chest looked as if she was looking for Shania. She was momentarily stunned seeing the scene of Shania’s hands draped over Tang En’s shoulders, her own shoulders shaking from laughing too hard.

Tang En could guess in his heart the reason for her shock. He lightly knocked on Shania’s head.

“Someone’s looking for you, girl.”

The female staff widened as she saw Tang En’s actions to the famed model, Shania.

At this, Shania straightened up. When she turned and saw the person, she said to Tang En, “It’s the costume assistant. I’m guessing she’s here to ask me to try on the clothes.”

“Go ahead then.” Tang En waved at her. “I’ll just look around here.”

“Remember to go in in a while.” Shania pointed to the hall which was getting even more crowded. Tang En nodded in agreement.

As the female assistant led Shania away, she did not forget to take a few more glances at Tang En. Clearly, she did not recognize him. She was only surprised by the closeness of the relationship between this famed model and that man.

Tang En paid no heed to it. After seeing Shania off, he turned to look at the people outside and put on the dark sunglasses he kept in his pocket. Lowering his head, he walked in.

Although he promised Shania to support her, he did not wish to be photographed by the ever-pervasive paparazzi. He should still disguise his identity.

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Tang En found a seat near the stage and sat down. There was no one next to him. Just as he sat, a burst of clamor drifted in from the main entrance behind him.

There were females shrieking, clicking of the camera shutters, and hasty footsteps.

Tang En sighed. He knew who it was without having to stand up and look back.

Other than Beckham, who else still had this level of appeal?

As expected, it was Beckham and Victoria squeezing their way out of the crowd and entering the hall under the protection of their bodyguards. Seeing Beckham's appearance, many guests, even those with some status, could not help but approach him to ask for a signature. Only Tang En stood up where he was without moving. He caught sight of Beckham and Victoria, and the latter two saw him too.

He smiled at them and considered it as having greeted them. He was not keen on getting any attention. Unexpectedly, Beckham and Victoria started walking over directly to him! In an instant, all the attention became focused on Tony Twain.

"You're kidding..." Tang En watched with googled eyes. If he had known, he would have just pretended not knowing the two. Great. Tang En had an ominous feeling as he watched the camera lenses of the reporters getting directed his way. He would certainly be seeing pictures of Beckham and himself sitting together on Spain and England's media tomorrow.

What followed unfolded exactly as Tang En had imagined. The media watched as Beckham and Victoria walked to the front of a middle-aged man wearing dark sunglasses and shook his hands. They greeted each other and then sat down together.

Beckham looked at Tang En beside him, the latter with a face of uncertainty, and laughed. "I had thought you'd be ready for this, Tony."

Indeed. Having agreed to come support Shania and knowing Beckham would be attending at the same time, Tang En should have somewhat known the kind of situation it would turn out to be. He just wasn't expecting Beckham to take the initiative to approach him.

"Stop thinking so much. Many clubs want to recruit me. It's no big deal having one more Nottingham Forest." Beckham said as he sat beside Tang En, his eyes looking at the busy staff on stage.

It appeared that this matter was going to be revealed, no matter what. Tang En stopped worrying. Beckham was right. Everyone knew that there were some clubs interested in him. It was no big deal for Forest Team to be included among them.

He had already known the consequences of coming here. Since he was here now, he might as well take it in his stride.

This fashion show was organized by an international luxury brand well known across the world. Shania was the brightest and most brilliant star in it; she was already the global spokesperson for the brand. The other models were only here to serve as a foil to her.

Victoria was immensely interested in such activities as she could use the opportunity to make acquaintances with many famous people around the world. She was working hard to pave the way for her husband's future and broadening his options. Beckham and Tang En who sat beside were casually chatting away meanwhile.

"David..." After chatting about a few mundane topics, Tang En decided he should start on the more serious matters.

"Are you going to convince me again?" Beckham could guess his intentions.

“I know there’s a high chance for you to go to America, but I still feel that it’s really too much of a pity for you to go over.” Tang En said sincerely. This was not a show performed for Beckham. These were his true thoughts. No matter if it was before his transmigration or now, after it, he felt the same way. “You’re only 31 years old. Isn’t it a bit too early for you to go to a place like America?”

“America isn’t bad too. Having nothing over there means there’s potential for me to change things.” Beckham shrugged.

“David. Don’t patronize me with the things you say to deal with the media. You know what it means to go to America. Are you willing to end your professional career in this manner? Your hundredth match in the National Team, your UEFA European Championship; are you already giving up on them?”

Beckham said nothing.

“America isn’t Europe. After you leave the heart of the international football scene, no one would pay any more attention to you. Before the day you announce your retirement, you’re first and foremost, a football athlete. Whatever else you are is secondary. Why did you cry after England was eliminated from the World Cup? Do you feel that you would no longer have the chance to once again stand on the grounds of a World Cup match? Are you already admitting defeat? Even giving up on your career in a club? I admit that you can earn a lot of money going to America, and it would be more convenient for your development in the future. But my heart hurts to see an outstanding player like you muck around that place for a few years and then retiring!”

Beckham opened his mouth, as if about to say something. At the same time, Shania got on stage.

The lighting at the scene lit up brightly and applause rang out. Beckham also closed his mouth again, knowing it was not the right time to speak.

Shania’s appearance interrupted the discussion between the two men. Tang En also could not help turning his gaze to Shania on stage.

This Shania and the one he saw earlier at the backstage were almost two completely different people. Tang En had to admit that he understood nothing about fashion. He simply could not see the beauty in using make-up to transform a young girl filled with unbridled youth into an image of an icy mountain with a cold face, dark-rimmed eyes, and seductive purple lips.

He did not at all like the Shania standing on the runway. Regardless, he still smiled whenever Shania looked at him.

He was completely flummoxed when it came to fashion. Wearing these costumes that could not be worn on the streets and putting on make-up that made one look like some blue enchantress; was this considered fashion? Then he would rather be a boor and an average person. At least he would be normal.

Tang En had no interest in the costumes Shania wore. He turned his attention to Shania’s figure instead.

Her taut, snowy white calves strode past him, presenting a round in front of the audience before walking back again. In this outfit, Shania’s real age could not be told. Her figure was also good; she had curves in exactly the right places.

At this point, Tang En suddenly discovered that Shania was no longer the 13-year-old when they first met. Four years had gone by. She was already a lady, a beautiful flower at 17.

She was already 17. Tang En rubbed his chin as he clucked his tongue. Time had gone by so quickly. Without realizing, it had already been four years.

Shania was the main lead for this event, so she appeared frequently on the scene. Each time she appeared, she wore a different outfit with changed make-up and hair. It was tough on her. Although Tang En was not interested in the event itself, he still brightened his spirits to smile at Shania whenever the girl looked at him during her appearance.

Each time she came out, Shania's gaze would drift towards Tang En. This time, she was not looking at dozens of footballs. She was only looking at one person, Tony Twain alone.

She suddenly felt a little nervous. It was a good thing that Uncle Tony maintained his encouraging smiles at her the whole time.

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Midway through the event, Beckham had to depart first. He explained to Tang En that it was because he still had training in the afternoon and needed to rush back home to prepare for it. Tang En believed it was the truth. Anyhow, since Shania was still yet to return to the runway, Tang En decided he might as well get up and send Beckham out personally.

One by one, the camera lenses of the media swiveled around from the runway to focus on the two.

Tang En was no longer concerned about how the media was going to report on this.

Squeezing their way out from the crowd, Tang En walked Beckham all the way to the car park. Neither of them spoke on the way there.

Beckham opened the car door, and turned to Tang En standing behind him, saying, "It's really a pity, Tony."

Tang En knew what he meant by his words and sighed. "It really is a pity, David."

Beckham got into the car and shut the doors. He stretched his head out from the window. "Goodbye, Tony."

"Goodbye, David." Tang En muttered. He watched the car slowly drive out of the carpark and turning into the main street.

Seeing Beckham's car vanish into the stream of vehicles, Tang En took out his cell phone from his pocket and dialed Allan Adam's number.

"Hey, Allan. I'm Tony."

"Tony! How's the matter progressing?" Hearing Tang En's voice, Allan was elated and filled with anticipation.

"Stop thinking about David Beckham, Allan. He won't belong to us. I'll tell you more about the situation when I return." Saying so, Tang En hung up the phone. His mood was terrible. Despite having

transmigrated, he still did not manage to change that damned “future”. Beckham, at 31, should never go to a subpar League such as the Major League Soccer, and spend his days mucking around there until his retirement.

No matter how many people there were in the world who loathed and felt disgusted by David Beckham, Tang En continued standing by his own viewpoint – that this man was one of the professional footballers that he admired. Other people’s hatred of him was their business; Tang En did not need to be accountable for their feelings.

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After loitering for a while outside, Tang En returned to the event and obediently watched Shania’s show until its end.

His “work” in Spain had already ended. Now, he should be putting all his focus onto “private matters” – accompanying Shania to have fun.

What was fun in Madrid?

In Tang En’s eyes at least, nothing was truly fun. This place was no different from any other city from around the world. The only difference it held today was Shania’s presence in Madrid, and not Paris, Shanghai, or Tokyo.

So, the supposed “fun” was only to accompany Shania wherever the girl wanted to go. He would simply follow and be by her side accompanying her.

Shania’s idea of fun was also not about having to visit places of scenery, tourist attractions, or amusement parks for rollercoaster rides. It was not any of them. She was happy so long as Uncle Tony was by her side accompanying her. After all, it was not a common thing for them to be able to meet like this.

What surprised Tang En was that Shania did not choose to go to luxury brand stores, or anything of that sort. Instead, she directly dragged Tang En to Bernabéu Stadium.

Standing beneath the gigantic white structure, Tang En was still puzzling over why Shania wanted to come here. Didn’t she dislike football?

Shania did not have any intentions of looking around the place. She pulled Tang En to stand at the square outside, and then asked manager cum driver, Mr. Fascal, to help take a photograph of Tang En and herself.

Shania curled her hands around Tang En’s arm and leant her head on his shoulders. A sweet smile blossomed on her face.

Tang En turned to look at Shania. It was then he discovered that the girl was already almost as tall as he was. His height was at 1.84 meters. In his estimation, Shania had to at least be 1.78 meters now. She had truly become a grown-up. Would he no longer be able to continue treating her as a child in the future?

At the instance when Tang En turned his head to look at Shania, Fascal pressed on the shutters. He felt that the effect of the shot was great and did not intend to retake it.

“Woah! You took it just like that?” Tang En was startled by the flash. He was not even the least bit ready.

Fascal waved the digital camera he held in his hands. “I’m no professional photographer, but I’m very satisfied with this shot.”

Shania’s sunny smile and the attention Tang En unwittingly showered on her had both been captured on the LCD screen.

Tang En looked at their picture on the screen and thought it was great too.

“Alright. Give me a copy when you develop the picture.” He said. The two of them, Shania and himself, did not have any formal shots together. He intended to frame this picture up and place it on the bedside table in his bedroom. That way, he would see that vibrant smile every morning when he woke. His day’s mood would also become better.

Fascal looked at Shania with a smile and nodded. “If Mr. Tony wants a copy, I can give it to you right away.”

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After ending their day in Madrid, Tang En sat on his return flight to England, from Madrid to London, with the photo he had taken with Shania in front of Bernabéu tucked closely to him.

Tang En gained his first picture together with Shania, but at the same time, failed to acquire Beckham whom he wanted.

Chapter 496: If It Had Not Been for Him ...

The day after Twain returned to Nottingham, a number of Spanish and English media outlets showed pictures of him shaking hands with Beckham. The media speculated that the reason for his trip to Spain was not as simple as attending Shania’s show.

His relationship with Shania had been clear to everyone since The Sun had speculated that he had abducted the young girl and gone to Spain. They were just friends. It was understandable for him to attend and support a friend’s runway show.

Victoria and Shania’s friendship was also known to the media, so it was normal for Victoria and her husband to attend Shania’s show.

But was it truly a coincidence that Beckham Tony had run into each other? Who could guarantee that they had not talked about anything during this half a day?

Without Twain and Beckham speaking out, the media came to the conclusion that Twain must have gone to Madrid to lobby for Beckham to join the team. Everyone on the planet knew that Beckham was not happy in Real Madrid. However, given his thirty-one years of age and his wife, Victoria, who hankered for Hollywood in America, there were not many football clubs that had decided to bring him in. At present, based on the summary of news from everywhere, the United States Los Angeles Galaxy was the closest to the truth even though it sounded the most absurd.

If Beckham really went to the United States, he would upset a lot of his fans. Especially those fans who really liked to watch him play football rather than look at his face.

Although Twain was not a fan of Beckham, he also felt that it would be a shame for him to go to the United States. If he could not sign on this heartthrob as he wished with this great opportunity, it would be even more impossible in the future.

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Beckham had already informed his agent to stop the negotiation for a contract extension with Real Madrid. The Real Madrid club did not show enough sincerity in the negotiation and seemed happy for Beckham himself to offer not to renew his contract and leave here. Since that was the case, Beckham would fulfill them.

On the face of it, Real Madrid still said they were in talks with Beckham's agent about a contract renewal. In fact, both sides had already known for a while what kind of situation it was.

Victoria showed her husband a photo album of Los Angeles. She planned to find a good area to buy a house. Tom Cruise warmly introduced to her the mansion next to his place.

Victoria was delighted with the environment there.

Nonetheless, all of those still required Beckham to give the nod.

Beckham was a little distracted while looking at the scenery surrounding his future home. He had been like this ever since Twain spoke to him. He had been preoccupied.

How could Victoria not know what was going on in Beckham's mind?

Twain had brought a new option to her husband, and her husband was bothered by it.

Victoria put down the photo album and sat opposite Beckham.

She looked at her husband, "David."

"I think it's good," Beckham replied absentmindedly.

"I didn't ask you a question," Victoria sighed.

"Oh..." Beckham smiled apologetically.

"Okay, I'm going ask you now. Do you want to accompany me to America?" asked Victoria.

"Of course, I would, Victoria," Beckham replied without hesitation.

"You're lying." Not only was Victoria not placated, but she also exposed Beckham's lie with a blank face.

"If you really wanted to, why would you be so distracted?"

Victoria revealed Beckham's heart, and he was speechless.

"You want to go back to England, don't you?"

After being quiet for a long while, Beckham shook his head and said, "I don't know." His gaze drifted to another picture book which was a team publication for the Los Angeles Galaxy team. His agent brought

it for him to get to know the team better. But he did not flip through it at the time. Since he was really going to the United States anyway, how much time did he have left to play football? Choosing to negotiate with the Los Angeles Galaxy was not due to the brilliance of the team or how powerful the squad was. It was purely because it was a team in Los Angeles and Hollywood was there.

When Victoria first got the team publication, she also said to Beckham, "This team's jersey really looks like Real Madrid's."

Now, he looked at the white jersey again. It was all sponsored by the same sporting goods company, so it was no surprise that the style was the same.

If the white color was like Real Madrid's, what about a red color...

It was just like Manchester United.

The red-colored Manchester United and the red-colored Nottingham Forest.

Beckham raised his head. "I'm sorry, Victoria. I know I owe you a lot ... For the sake of my career, you've sacrificed yours. I'm willing to go to America because I think that can make up for all the sacrifices you've made. To be honest, I'm not interested in going to the United States to play football." He emphasized "play football."

Victoria did not look surprised. She just shrugged. "I knew it."

"This might be somewhat holding fast to something. It's not fair to you. But I'm..." Beckham stopped in silence at that point.

Victoria also did not speak. She picked up the Los Angeles photo album again and looked at it.

There was a brief but awkward silence in the room. Fortunately, Victoria's phone rang.

"Hello, Simon?"

Victoria got up and walked towards the balcony. Beckham knew it was Victoria's manager who called, and he was not in the mood to think about the reason for the call. He was still conflicted inside.

Should he accompany his wife to the United States, or change his mind?

Twain's words still rang in his ears: your hundreds of national team games, your dream of the UEFA European Championship ... Have you forgotten all about those?

How could he forget? When he was replaced in the last game of the World Cup, he had wept at his heartbreak at the sidelines. That was only six months ago. How could he have forgotten? What was he crying about then?

He had cried for his own passing years and his long-gone youth. But his dream was still a dream. He had attained all the football club honors that were to be taken. However, the national team honor was still a blank.

He wept that he could no longer participate in the next World Cup. He could only bet all he had on the 2008 UEFA European Championship.

Who had thought that so many things would happen in half a season? He was cold-shouldered in Real Madrid. He not only lost the club's main position, but he did not even have a position in the national team's list.

Not to mention the European Championship, even if playing for one hundred games for the national team in a Class A tournament had become wishful thinking.

If he really did go to America, would McClaren, who found him disagreeable, still recruit him for the national team? It was inconceivable.

Henceforth, with David Beckham missing from the international football scene, McClaren could prove to the world how wise he was to give up recruiting Beckham for the national team at that time. He could adapt the national team to play without David Beckham's playing style ahead of time.

Are you willing to do that? David? You said you respect McClaren's choice in front of the media and are always ready to play for the national team. But are you willing to put up with cold treatment from a national team manager? He completely disregarded your efforts in the national team.

The failure of the World Cup required a person to be responsible. Eriksson was gone, but that was not enough. To show that his new English team was completely different from the former failed England team, it was necessary to banish a player prized by the former manager.

Consequently, as the former captain of the previous team, David Beckham was banished. If it went smoothly, this banishment would be far away: Los Angeles, across the Atlantic Ocean and the American continent.

Victoria came back after her call. She looked like she was in good spirits, with a hint of a smile on her face.

"Looks like you have some good news?" asked Beckham.

Victoria nodded. "Simon called and asked if I was interested in the Spice Girls reunion."

Beckham raised an eyebrow. He had not expected this news.

"I think it's funny. Us sisters have children now and performing in that capacity again... It must be exciting." said Victoria, looking radiant.

"Did you say yes?"

Victoria nodded, "Yes."

"Good." Beckham's eyebrows were unfurrowed. "I also hope you can continue your career." Then he seemed to have made a big decision. He looked up at his wife.

"Victoria, I ... I don't want to give up on football so early." He finally said what was on his mind. Victoria did not answer. Instead, she gazed at Beckham, waiting for him to finish. "This ..." he pointed to the spacious and brightly lit room with the high-end furniture and home electronics, magnificent as a palace, and said, "Everything was given to me by football. I don't want people to think I'm just a footballer who makes money on appearances. I want to prove to myself and those who underestimate me again... that David Beckham doesn't just sell jerseys."

Victoria put down her cell phone and waved her arms as if she wanted to say something, but gave up the idea in the end. She turned her back to her husband, wrapped her arms around herself, and looked out the window at the sunny sky.

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Under the same clear sky, in the middle of England, was Wilford, Nottingham.

“Tony, let’s talk about what happened to you in Madrid.” In the office of Evan Doughty, the club’s three big shots got together.

Although the three of them already knew the result, Evan was still interested in what Beckham had specifically said.

Allan sat on the side in somewhat low spirits.

Twain looked at the two men and shook his head. “There’s nothing much to say. I tried my best to get him to change his mind. But he was already prepared. He used his family as an excuse. What else can I say? I couldn’t tell him to leave his wife, could I? I would have fallen out with him on the first day. I could only take the indirect approach, but he had obviously made up his mind. No matter what I said, it was of no use to him.”

“You didn’t try to convince Victoria?” Allan interjected, seated next to him.

Twain glanced at him, knowing that he must be unwilling to accept it. “I can’t convince her, and neither could Shania. She knows the reasons she does things and what she should do in everything that she does. She thinks independently. If an outsider could persuade her so easily... then she wouldn’t be Victoria Beckham. What’s more, you think the only person who can get Beckham to change his mind is Victoria. I happen to think the opposite, Allan. I think the only person who can convince Victoria is Beckham.”

Evan cleared his throat and said, “It’s no use saying that now. Either way, Beckham is out of our plan. If he doesn’t belong to us, he doesn’t belong to us. We’re halfway through the season and our performance is not ideal compared to last season. But I believe in you, Tony. What gift are you going to bring us at the end of this season?”

Twain extended a finger and was about to speak when his cell phone rang from his pocket.

He shrugged in apology at the two men and turned to walk out to answer the call.

A few minutes later, he came back again with a smile on his face.

“Evan, you asked me just now what gift I was going to give you. Well, I can give it to you now.” He wagged the phone in his hand. “Guess who just called me?” Then, without waiting for the two men to answer, he announced the answer. “David Beckham.”

Allan sat on the sofa and did not change his position. Evan raised an eyebrow.

“He’s interested in coming back to England. Pity that Manchester United doesn’t have an interest in his return. Given that Nottingham Forest is one of the sincerest clubs in all of England, his agent will be very happy to talk to us about specific terms. If he’s satisfied, he’ll ours after half a season!”

When he finished speaking, Twain was unable to stay calm. Things had taken a new turn for the best. Just as the matter had come to a head, there was another glimmer of hope.

This time, Allan could no longer pretend to be reserved. He suddenly stood up from his seat.

Twain smiled at him. "In terms of the tournaments, my terms can satisfy him. What happens next is up to you, Allan. How high a weekly salary are you going to give your money-making machine?"

This time, it was Allan's turn to be tested.

Van Nistelrooy was currently the highest-paid player in the team with eighty-five thousand. At the same time, because of Twain's adjustment to the internal structure of the team, the players who were valued by Twain had re-signed a new contract with the club and their salaries had improved to varying degrees. It was a reflection of the Forest team's good financial position last season. But it was clear that eighty-five thousand was not going to be enough for Beckham.

Twain did not have to worry about that issue. He passed the ball to Allan and then made an excuse to leave the chairman's office.

What he should be thinking about now was what kind of adjustments he should make to his squad and tactics if Beckham did come to the Forest team.

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Beckham managed to persuade his wife, but the matter was not over yet. He needed to convince his sponsors. The American side had almost wanted to announce a deal with Beckham but had suddenly been informed by Beckham's agent that things had changed, and Beckham preferred to stay in Europe to develop his football career.

Beckham's move to the Los Angeles Galaxy team was not merely a matter between the club and the player. It also involved the strategies that Major League Soccer and Adidas had for America.

The terms that the Americans offered to Beckham were almost impossible to reject: a five-hundred-thousand-pound weekly salary! The contract was for five years. Within those five years, he could reap one hundred and twenty-eight million pounds in income. This was a daunting figure. But in fact, no matter how much money the Los Angeles Galaxy had, it was a challenge for them to raise this amount of money alone. Therefore, Adidas needed to be responsible for part of the annual salary to balance out the club's cash flow.

Hence, it was a complex matter for Beckham to go to America. Now, if Beckham was to stay in Europe, he also needed to straighten out the disruptions from all sides. He must persuade Adidas to let him go to a Nike sponsored team to play football. It was said to be the player's personal freedom to play for whichever club he wanted, but in fact, the will of the sponsors often hid behind every decision.

If Beckham were to go to Nottingham Forest, then he might—no, must—sacrifice some of his financial interests in exchange for this freedom in his choice.

As for the Major League Soccer in the United States, that was easy to take care of. Because both sides had not signed any contracts or agreements, Beckham had the right to change his mind. Perhaps this

would leave a bad impression on the Americans, but it was reasonable. The Americans could not use “default on a contract” to press David Beckham as there was no agreement at all between the two sides.

The Americans and Adidas could continue to increase the remuneration to entice Beckham. But this time, David Beckham seemed to be enraged by how the outside world viewed him. He was determined to prove to the world that he was not so down and out that he had to go to the football desert to make his fortune.

Since he could not play as the main force in Real Madrid and was banished from the national team’s list, the Spanish media mocked him as the worst deal for a player in Real Madrid with all the major newspapers and tabloids making plans for his retirement. The people who disliked him gleefully declared that David Beckham was not a qualified player and that he might still succeed a little if he went to Hollywood to act in a movie. Those who liked him began to lament that they could no longer witness his waning on the field. Hardly anyone still had the slightest confidence in him.

Except for Twain.

Go to America! Go to America! Go to America!

They could hate him or love him, but everyone thought he was set to go to America. A five-hundred-thousand-pound weekly salary beckoned to him, and the Hollywood celebrities were waiting in line to invite him to dinner parties ... Aren’t you a man who likes to make money and chase fame and fortune? And now that these are in front of you, what reason do you have to reject them, David Beckham?

Except for Twain.

“...Before you announce your retirement someday, you’re still a footballer first before you’re anything else second.”

He was not the first to say that to himself. Ferguson and Capello had said so to him. But when those two people said that, their tone inevitably contained an underlying imperious manner that he did not like. Only Tony Twain was sincere when he said that. He did not rebuke Beckham in the role of a manager but as a friend. He persuaded him as a peer and considered things from his perspective.

How many of the people who said, “we’re looking at David’s football standard, and not his earning power,” were truly sincere? Was Florentino (the former president of the Real Madrid Club) sincere? That would be a joke.

Except for Twain.

If it had not been for him, Beckham would have just left Spain as a loser. After he came to Real Madrid, the club had not won any of the major championship trophies. The media said he was a cancer in the club and seemed justified in their claims. If it had not been for him, it would have become an iron-clad fact after he had gone, and anyone who mentioned the year after David Beckham transferred to Real Madrid would shake his head and say, “it was a failed transfer, whether for Real Madrid or for Beckham himself.”

The emergence of that man made him determined to prove himself again. Even if he wanted to leave this city himself, he did not want to appear to be a loser and get kicked out. Not only did he want to train hard to get back into the main position, but he also wanted to play with a better standard and

become a dominant player on a team. He wanted Capello and Calderon to regret not renewing the contract with him until 2009. He wanted to help the team fight for the league trophy that looked like it was already remote. Before he left, he wanted to let everyone, whether they hated or loved him, say:

Letting go of David Beckham was the stupidest decision Calderon and Capello made in their lives!

Chapter 497: A Bombshell

Beckham's willingness to enter negotiations about individual salary with Nottingham Forest was kept strictly confidential by Twain's order. No one else knew except for the Beckham couple, his agent and the three heads at the Forest team, as well as Twain's close friend, Dunn. Even Real Madrid did not know about it and still used insulting terms to drag their feet on the "tough" negotiations for the contract extension with his agent.

On the one hand, it was not December 31st yet, and Beckham's contract with Real Madrid was still in effect. The other clubs could not contact the players in private. Otherwise, if Real Madrid found out, it could be taken to FIFA, and then it would create a mess.

In addition, Twain did not want to give other competitors the opportunity to intervene. As far as he knew, there were three clubs in England that had made it clear they were interested in Beckham.

What kind of advantage did Twain have? If he had not become Beckham's friend by chance, then he would not have had the upper hand in the contest, let alone the opportunity to persuade Beckham to change his mind in person.

Allan quietly set off for Madrid to negotiate the individual terms with Beckham's agent while Twain and Dunn worked on how to arrange the team's lineup and tactical play once Beckham arrived.

Beckham could play as the right midfielder and also the defensive midfielder. Taking his increasing age and frequent injuries into account, Twain was not worried about him competing with the other two right midfielders for a position. The Forest team would certainly have to compete in more tournaments next season, so they did not need to worry about not playing. Furthermore, this was England and not Spain. No matter how arrogant the club's top players were, they could not give orders on Twain's lineup. If he put Beckham on the bench or even in the stands due to his poor form, Allan would not dare talk back other than muttering a few words in private.

After Albertini had retired, Beckham could occasionally play the defensive midfielder position. Although his defensive ability was average, his long pass could still be counted as the best in the world. A defensive counterattack would be amazing with such a kick from him.

In addition, van Nistelrooy had been close friends with Beckham while he was at Manchester United. There was no need to worry about the rapport between the two of them. With a strong center forward like Bendtner, Beckham's precise flank, pass, and set pieces would be given more room to play.

At the same time, when he was on the field with Beckham, their free kicks would also be better.

Moreover, Beckham was usually professional. Twain was not worried at all that this "celebrity" would be a bad influence on this bunch of boys. Beckham would only set a better example for the players on the

training ground. There were not many people in the world who were as famous as he was and still insisted on practicing every day.

Maybe Beckham's arrival would make Aaron Lennon a little worried. However, Twain would placate Lennon himself when the time came. After all, no matter how good Beckham was, he could only play for a few more years. The future of the team still belonged to him and Ashley Young.

On Christmas, Twain finally received Allan Adam's Christmas present from Spain: a copy of the contract in effect signed by both parties.

Under the contract, Beckham would move to Nottingham Forest on a free transfer for a two-year contract after his contract with Real Madrid expired this season. Nottingham Forest would pay Beckham a lower weekly salary of just one hundred and ten thousand pounds, a far cry from the Los Angeles Galaxy's promise of five hundred thousand pounds. In exchange, the Forest team gave up all the usage rights to Beckham's images. At the same time, Beckham's agent also said that it was because of the friendship between Beckham and Tony that he decided to take a voluntary pay cut.

But Allan did not know that the friendship was only one of the reasons. There was a more important reason Beckham did not tell anyone—just like Twain admired Beckham, Beckham also admired Twain. He thought Tony Twain, a manager who repeatedly worked miracles, would be able to change the world's impression of him. As a 31-year-old old man, he could be revitalized under Twain's hands. It was a gamble; the remaining few years of his career at stake could be the right amount of time to rise to glory again.

Therefore, he gave up a high salary for it.

Allan did not really care about the income from the usage rights of Beckham's images. After all, compared to that, the Forest team would be the one earning the big bucks as Beckham was willing to come to the Forest team. At that time, with the rise of their image internationally and influence in the global market, they would grow exponentially. With a "low weekly salary," they could also finally balance the team's wage structure and not make Beckham too prominent, avoiding some dissatisfaction. The team's internal unity would also be ensured.

The details of the contract had not yet been revealed, so Allan tried his best to suppress his ecstasy. They had to wait until January 1st of the following year to announce such important news.

Then it would be like having one bombshell after another landing and exploding among the media.

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Twain took the fax to his office and shut the door before he burst into laughter. He was not able to pretend to be serious and mature at this moment. He was really excited. Since he joined this world, everything that he did seemed to have changed the world, whether intentionally or not. However, Beckham's transfer was the first time that he had used so much personal belief and motivation to change an ending known to him.

Looking at the future that he had torn to pieces, he'd never felt better. All the stuff about Barcelona being invincible and AC Milan rebuilding its dynasty; they were all nonsense! Now, slowly unfolding in front of him, was not a wonderful picture, but a blank page.

A clean white page with not even a single ink drop on it. He could enjoy writing and painting. He could draw the picture that he wanted to see and write a future that belonged to him.

That feeling was like holding the entire world in his hands. It was like the Nottingham Forest's theme song—I've got the whole world in my hands!

Beckham was just a key to the new world. After Twain unlocked the door, he discovered what had appeared in front of his eyes this time was really a brand-new world. It was completely different from that world when he'd first joined.

Nothing could stop him from creating a new world. Tony Twain, an otherwise unknown nobody, was going to be a nightmare that no one would ever forget in the future!

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After Christmas, Allan Adams, who had returned from Spain, spent almost every day marking the calendar. As the days went by, the day he'd long anticipated—Jan 1st, 2007—was finally here.

After the arrival of the new year, Beckham only had six months left on his contract with Real Madrid. According to the regulations, any club could bypass Real Madrid at this point and talk to Beckham directly about the contract. They also did not need to pay Real Madrid for the transfer fee at all. They could just take Beckham, on whom they had spent 35 million euros by that time.

Real Madrid was supposed to avoid this kind of situation at all costs and complete the contract renewal with the players before the new year. But since Beckham lost his main spot during this half of the season and the new president wanted to erase the footprints left from the Florentino era when he came to power, Real Madrid was not in a hurry to renew the contract with Beckham. Therefore, Twain was able to burrow his way into the gap.

"Happy New Year, boss." Pierce Brosnan, the reporter from Nottingham Evening Post who did not need to be at work on the first day of the new year, picked up a call from his boss in puzzlement. He was woken from his sleep by the phone call. He glanced groggily at the alarm clock on the bedside table, which read 8:45 AM.

"Enough with the niceties, Pierce!" His boss's voice rang with urgency over the phone "Where are you now? Home? In a car to your vacation? Or in the bathroom?"

"Uh, I'm still in bed...."

"You're still in bed?" his boss yelled. "Get up at once!"

"But, sir, I don't have to go to work today...."

"Stop your damn nonsense. Get out of bed right now, and get dressed and get to the City Ground stadium! You only have 15 minutes!"

"What? What's going on?" His boss's loud voice woke him up completely. He sat up from his bed and put on his pants while he was on the phone.

"You'll know once you get there!" The call ended with a beep. Before they disconnected, Brosnan vaguely heard his boss's voice coming through. "I don't know what the hell's going on...."

Pierce Brosnan did not dare to waste any time. The news that made the old man so excited, it had to be big.

With a tie in one hand and a briefcase in the other, Brosnan rushed out of the house like a whirlwind with no time to comb his hair.

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When Pierce Brosnan arrived at Nottingham Forest's home, the City Ground stadium, he found that the parking lot was full of cars from the various media across the country, and even the press from other countries. He had been following the Forest team for nearly four years, and the sight of so much media gathering like this was still rare to come by. Even when Nottingham Forest advanced to the Champions League final, there were not as much media as there were today.

Besides several of Britain's leading media outlets, he briefly counted Spanish, French, Italian, American, and even Japanese and Chinese media were here. It appeared something big had happened. Baffled, he made his way to the press hall, which was specially reserved for press conferences.

He was still some distance away when he saw the busy crowd going in and out of the entrance. Various equipment for photography and videography had been moved in. The BBC and Sky TV's broadcast vans were parked at the entrance. Walking in, he was startled by the crowded scene inside. Other than the equipment, the room was filled with the reporters. The sea of bodies pressed against each other made the originally spacious room impenetrable.

Brosnan had even more doubts in his mind as he struggled to squeeze in. His ears were filled with commentaries from his peers. He planned to take this opportunity to discreetly scout out some information first. However, the people around him did not know and were just guessing. A few of the reporters he knew came up to ask when they saw him. They wanted to know if he knew why Tony Twain decided to hold a press conference at the last minute and what kind of tricks he was playing. These people thought that Brosnan was the reporter in the media circle closest to Twain. Perhaps he would have some "insider information."

But Brosnan's answer disappointed them. "I was called straight out of bed by my boss. I don't know what's going on either."

The group of disappointed people turned to walk away when a man with the BBC logo on his chest muttered, "It's not Beckham coming, is it?"

When Brosnan heard this, a thought popped in his mind. There is a good chance.

He turned his gaze toward the table already covered with microphones and recording pens. Everything could only be speculation when the leading man was not there yet.

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While the reporters made full use of their imagination to guess what big news Twain was going to announce, Twain made a call to Beckham in the room upstairs.

As someone who had already experienced it, he knew what Beckham would face in Real Madrid after this press conference. There were things that could change because of him, such as Beckham had

changed the team of his choice. But there were things that would never change, even if the Earth died out, like the old guy, Fabio Capello's character.

"I can almost see the look on Capello's face once he hears this news." Twain stood in front of the huge lattice window as he looked at the busy reporters below and said over the phone, "I think I should warn you, David, before you officially announce the news. Your move will definitely aggravate that proud Italian. He will see this as a betrayal."

"The contract is already signed. Why would I still be afraid that the announcement will infuriate him?" On the other end of the line, Beckham smiled. "I don't think I have any problems with what I did. Even if Real Madrid becomes angry, there's nothing I can do about it."

Twain kept quiet for a moment before he said, "Very well. If Capello is really angry about this and wants to eliminate you, even though I know I'm in no position to say this, I still hope you can continue to train hard to return to the main lineup as the goal of your training efforts. That guy has a stubborn temper, but he's not completely unreasonable. This may be an opportunity for you, David. If you keep training under such circumstances, he may change his mind about you, and in the last half of the season, he may even give you a chance."

"I intend to do the same as what you just said, Tony. I'm not going to give up trying to get my position in Real Madrid just because I'm going to the Forest team next season. I don't want to." Beckham was silent for a moment. "I don't want to leave Bernabéu as a failure. But, Tony, why are you suddenly so concerned about Real Madrid? It's not even your team."

Twain smiled wryly as he thought to himself. Who says that I'm concerned about Real Madrid? You just confirmed that you will do this. He found a lofty excuse. "Because I don't want my future players to be called 'a failure that fled Bernabéu.' You know, my players are very strong."

Beckham laughed. "Thank you, Tony."

"Don't thank me, David. As a welcome, I'll give you a present at that time."

"Oh? What is it?"

"It's a secret. It will not be a surprise if I say it."

"Haha, okay, I'll wait for your surprise, Tony."

At the end of the call, Twain realized that Allan Adams and Evan Doughty stood behind him.

"When did you get here?"

"Right when you said, 'my players are very strong.'" Evan smiled brightly.

"Let's go. Those people down there must be waiting anxiously." Allan could not wait to announce this piece of news.

"I think you're anxious to do so." As soon as Twain said those words, all three men laughed at the same time.

The last time all three men appeared at a press conference at the same time was when Tony Twain was announced as the new manager of the Forest team. This time it was to announce that David Beckham was to join the team.

Both times could be counted as milestone events. The first time represented the rapid rise of Nottingham Forest in tournaments. Would this time be the beginning of full economic growth in the Nottingham Forest Football Club?

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When the three heads appeared at the press conference, all the reporters quieted down. There was no other sound on the scene other than the noise of the working equipment.

It was rare to see these three men appearing at a press conference simultaneously. Some people's guesses had been gradually confirmed.

"I don't know how many people here have guessed the right answer. But it doesn't matter. I'm going to announce the answer now." Twain smiled and looked at the dense mass of reporters under the stage. This was absolutely sensational news. Who could have thought of it before? Not a single person!

"I don't want to talk rubbish, because everyone is waiting to go back and write the article. So, I'm just going to say one thing." Twain straightened his right index finger.

When everyone saw this finger, they held their breath, pricked their ears, and widened their eyes.

"We're happy to have reached an agreement with the Real Madrid player, David Beckham, who will join Nottingham Forest on a free transfer at the end of the season."

There was a rumble and the venue, which had been so quiet that one could hear a pin drop, suddenly erupted in a clamor.

The three men sitting on the stage watched the group of overwhelmed reporters below, smiles of satisfaction on their faces.

Chapter 498: Character Determines Fate

On the morning of January 1st, Twain announced at the Nottingham City Ground stadium that the Forest team would bring in David Beckham on a free transfer the next season. The news caused a sensation in both Spain and England. Previously, everyone assumed that when Beckham left Bernabéu, he would definitely go to Los Angeles because his wife liked the colorful world of Hollywood. Unexpectedly, Beckham, who had always listened to Victoria, went against his wife's wishes for once and insisted on staying in Europe and in the center of the football world.

Just a minute after the press conference had ended, the welcome page of Nottingham Forest's official website featured news about Beckham's free transfer.

Meanwhile, at the Nottingham Forest merchandise stores surrounding the City Ground stadium, the jerseys with Beckham's number 24 printed on them were placed on the merchandise shelves. The Forest fans who caught wind of it snatched them up within half a day.

This had all been prepared long ago. Twain remembered when Beckham went to the LA Galaxy, the LA Galaxy team had sold Beckham's jerseys like mad. As a result, he suggested to Allan that they could try selling the Forest team jerseys with Beckham's name in advance. Anyway, half a season later, Beckham was bound to be part of their team. It did not matter whether they sold them earlier or later. If they sold them earlier, they could make money half a season earlier.

Allan thought this was a good idea, so he made arrangements accordingly. The sales volume computed after the first morning made him beam with joy.

On the day van Nistelrooy joined, they sold 720 jerseys.

After the announcement of Beckham's signing, they sold 1,300 jerseys in half a day.

It was almost as much as the sales for van Nistelrooy. If Allan Adams had not deliberately controlled the number of jerseys, perhaps there would be more sales.

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Twain received two calls in the afternoon. The first call was from Manchester United's manager, Ferguson.

"Tony, you took my man again." Even as he said it, Twain did not detect any hint of anger in Ferguson's tone.

So he laughed happily and replied, "Don't tell me Manchester United also secretly contacted Beckham's agent?"

"That's impossible. We don't need a 31-year-old Beckham." Ferguson's words were a little heartless but in line with his usual style. Any player who was old and could not keep up with the team's requirements had to be eliminated. He only considered the issue of generational change from the team's perspective.

Twain whistled into the phone. The answer was really forthright.

"I just have one question. I hope to get your answer. I know Beckham did not want to come back to England because of his feelings for Manchester United. He once said he won't return because he did not want to be enemies with Manchester United. How did you convince him?" Ferguson admitted his surprise when he found out that Beckham had chosen to return to England to join Nottingham Forest. His interest in Tony Twain grew stronger, so he could not wait to call him.

"Very simple. I told him that he does not have to be on the main list whenever Nottingham Forest plays against Manchester United. This condition can be written in the contract as a guarantee."

Ferguson just went, "Ah." The answer was as he had guessed. However, this clause was usually used in La Liga and Real Madrid, whom Beckham currently played for. In fact, it somewhat violated the principle of fair play because it amounted to a covert weakening of the opponent's strength. Therefore, the Uruguayan defensive midfielder, Pablo Garcia, who was dumped by Real Madrid, said this was a "bullsh*t clause."

Twain was willing to do this because he really wanted to rope in Beckham by any means necessary.

"But he refused," Twain said next, taking Ferguson by surprise.

“Refused?”

“He didn’t accept this condition. Do you know what he said to me, Sir?”

Ferguson was silent for a moment before he said, “Let’s hear it.”

“I’m a professional player and since I promised to sign with the Forest team, I’m part of the Forest team. If I refuse to play because of my feelings for Manchester United, then it is unprofessional.’ Those were his exact words.”

This time, Ferguson remained quiet longer, so much so that Twain thought the call was disconnected.

After a while, Twain heard a faint sigh coming from the other end of the line.

“I’m still surprised. How did you convince him to go against that woman, Victoria?”

Everyone knew that Ferguson detested Victoria. Someone once asked Ferguson at a party, “If I were to give you a gun and a bullet, who would you shoot? Wenger or Victoria?” Ferguson only smiled and said, “Can I have two?” It was evident the extent to which he hated Victoria. Therefore, Twain was not surprised by his remark.

“I don’t think I had convinced him to go against Victoria. I didn’t even try to persuade Beckham to do so. I can see that he loves his wife very much.”

On the other end of the line came a snort. “Huh.”

Twain did not mind so he said, “It was David who convinced himself and then persuaded Victoria.”

“He convinced himself?”

When Twain closed his eyes and recalled he was still a fan, he knew everything about what had happened to Real Madrid this season. It was almost like an exciting thriller and a suspenseful movie. His only regret was not being able to watch the end of the film because he transferred before the end of the season. But he saw the turning point that changed the ending and the return of the key figures during this film. It was not difficult to guess the ending.

“Beckham’s career has not been very smooth since he left Manchester United. Even though he’s earning more and more money, he has not gained on the football field any honor.”

Ferguson replied, “I said a long time ago that without that woman Victoria he could have achieved a lot more than he has now. But he didn’t listen, he loves that woman. This bastard had been blinded by love.”

Twain waited quietly for Ferguson to finish venting before he continued, “But he still did okay at Real Madrid for the first few seasons, and his immense commercial value gave him an unshakable place in the team. He was almost never left out of the starting list. But this season, after Capello went to Real Madrid, everything changed. Beckham found himself no longer valued, and even the club, which had always supported him, intended to clear him out. The media outlets said he was the prime culprit for Real Madrid’s three fruitless seasons. The fans vented their frustration on every player because of the team’s poor performance, and even Beckham was no exception. The team is internally divisive, and the

locker room atmosphere is a mess. The manager's distrust, frequent injuries, the World Cup fiasco and being ruled out of the national team's big list. He was on the verge of being washed-up."

This time Ferguson did not speak, but waited quietly for Twain to go on.

"He's only 31 years old and has to go to a broken place like America to spend the last years of his career. I don't think there's basically any difference in going to the United States and going to Qatar—they are deserts. In fact, I did not say anything, and I failed to persuade him. He used his family as an excuse, so I did not continue to try. But I'm sure Beckham was unwilling to accept his current situation."

What was his situation? He was almost abandoned by the entire world—everyone flaunted their strength in front of him and sentenced him to death. Every gloating face stared at him, expecting him to make a mistake, looking forward to him down on his luck, expecting him to be consigned to the eternal damnation of the abyss in hell. That kind of feeling was truly awful.

When he reached an impasse, Beckham saw exactly what he really needed. Money? He had made enough money, and he would continue making it. He did not lack money. Glory? As a professional player, he had obtained almost all the championships he could get in a football club. There was no more hope for the World Cup due to his age. He was not short of glory.

So, what did he lack?

"What he lacks is respect. Not the respect for him as the world's top entertainment star or heartthrob. It's the respect as a professional player. Most people who mention him only think of him as a weakling who relies on his looks and wife to make money. They think with his mediocre playing skills; he is still able to be adored by thousands is because he has a pretty face. Didn't the Spanish media say it all? What does it take to be a successful player? First one needs a pretty face, and then train hard to improve one's skills. The face is the most important; the legs don't matter. You see, that's what everyone thinks, and Beckham will not accept it. He wants to prove again that he is still a qualified professional player and that his legs are more important than his face. But if he had gone to the United States, he would have completely validated what everyone thought of him, and even lost the chance to fight back. So, he cannot go. He wants to stay in Europe and prove to those who doubt and despise him that David Beckham is firstly an excellent player."

"So, he chose Nottingham Forest, which was willing to give him a chance to prove himself again," Ferguson added.

Twain chuckled on the other end of the line, "You can say that. I just told David that he is a professional footballer until he announces his retirement someday and nothing else."

Ferguson had watched Beckham grow up, and Sir Alex believed that Twain's remark was justified.

"If he had listened to me earlier and stayed away from that woman, he would not have been at this current juncture," Ferguson said with some indignation.

Twain cheerfully said, "Sir Alex, love is irrational. Who can clearly say otherwise?"

"You know a lot for a bachelor, don't you?"

"That's why romance novels are written. Haha!"

Ferguson laughed when he heard Twain said, "Don't be happy too soon, Tony. When Beckham comes back, that woman, Victoria will make you suffer. When is your birthday? I'll send you a gun and a bullet as a present."

"Can you send a few ammunition clips instead?" He did not expect Twain to ask this.

"What do you want so much for?"

"Because I have too many enemies." Twain shrugged.

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It was understandable that Ferguson would make a call. Twain could not have guessed the call from the second person.

"I have called to congratulate you. Why do you sound so cold, Mr. Twain?" asked Billy Woon with his peculiar accent over the phone. The owner of this voice completely dampened Twain's mood.

"Why did you to call to congratulate me when Beckham is transferring over here?" Twain replied coldly. He was not gracious about it at all.

"Aren't we all in the same boat?" Woon's peculiar accent became weirder which made Twain shudder.

"Who's in the same boat as you?"

"Ah, it's all that boy, Wood's fault. He always tells me about the loyalty to the club, and I'm tired of hearing it. Since Wood is your player and I'm his agent. Aren't we in the same boat? Nottingham Forest has done well and is famous, so my dear Wood's future is guaranteed."

"Your dear Wood?" Twain grunted. He was upset that since Woon appeared, his relationship with Wood had drifted apart. He did not know if it was instigated by Woon.

"Our dear Wood, Mr. Twain." Woon hurriedly changed his tune.

But Woon's attitude was quite strange today, which was not as tough as before.

Twain felt there must be something behind it. It was certainly not as simple as a congratulatory call. Suddenly an idea flashed in his mind.

"Mr. Woon, you're not coming to me again to talk about Wood's salary, are you?"

Woon laughed on the other end. Goosebumps formed along Twain's arms. "You're so clever, Mr. Twain. Ah, but I'm just here to give you a reminder. I don't really want to negotiate with you. After all, Wood and his mother are against me coming to you to talk about money. I'm just reminding you that if you're going to reorganize the team's salary structure in the future, be sure to keep George Wood, who has given so much to the team, in mind."

"It's really strange that an insatiable wolf knows how to restrain its appetite," Twain replied sarcastically.

“Oh, it gets even weirder. Don’t tell me the close-fisted Mr. Twain is going to take the initiative to talk to me about Wood’s salary? To be honest, I think seventy-five thousand is still too low.” He did not expect Woox to turn the table on him, which dumbfounded Twain.

“No, I don’t intend to talk to you,” replied Twain, gnashing his teeth. This person was more shameless than him. Give him an inch and he would take a mile. He did not consider the consequences.

Woox sniggered on the other end as he topped Twain, “But I think Beckham will be a good teacher for Wood, so I’d like to congratulate you, Mr. Twain.”

“Beckham is the right midfielder, and George Wood is a defensive midfielder, Mr. Woox. You really don’t know football.”

“Who says they will have a teacher and student relationship on the football field? Don’t you think Beckham can help open a door for a blockhead like George to the entertainment and fashion world when he comes?”

Twain was really stunned to hear Woox say so. He really did not think about the impact of Beckham’s arrival on other people off the field.

“So, I want to thank you, Mr. Twain. You’ve been a big help to me. I was worried that no one would be able to be an example to George and tell him how wonderful the rest of the world is.” Woox hung up the phone, tittering.

Twain froze in the office with the cell phone in his hand after the call had ended.

For now, George Wood was still a qualified professional player. However, if what Woox said came to pass, he did not know at all what would happen after the arrival of Beckham, this commercial superstar. He could not do anything now except to pray that George Wood was a piece of wood from head to toe like his name and that he would not be interested in or think about anything except football.

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While Twain was on the phone with Ferguson and Woox, Capello responded to this matter at a regular press conference during Real Madrid’s training in Spain. It happened exactly as Twain expected. This old man announced Beckham’s days at Real Madrid had come to an end, because this was a complete betrayal.

“How can you publicly announce that you’re going to play in another team after half a season while you still have a contract with your team? That’s the biggest disrespect to the team you are playing for. Since he doesn’t think of himself as a member of Real Madrid anymore, I’d be happy to oblige. For the next half of the season, he won’t be playing for Real Madrid for even a minute!” After the Italian manager said these words with a grim expression, there was an uproar with the exception of Beckham and Twain.

There had been a lot of discord between coaches and players in the world of football. However, Capello might be the first to do it so extremely and announce so publicly.

What did it mean that he could not play for half a season? He could not maintain his condition. No one would know what kind of player Nottingham Forest had bought Beckham as. Consequently, the English

media analyzed that Capello took revenge on Nottingham Forest and made them pay a high salary to support a 31-year-old “senior” player whose condition was completely without guarantee.

On the other hand, the Spanish media argued that this was not really Capello’s decision alone, but more likely an order from the upper echelon of the club, and Capello just carried it out. Because the team needed to do a massive purge now, it was perfect that Beckham did the opposite which could intimidate the players and show Real Madrid’s renewed determination to usher in new blood.

It was a great strategy.

Twain made a phone call to Beckham after he saw the news. He found out that David had not been affected, and that he had anticipated everything. Twain was finally relieved. It seemed that some things might have changed, but other things would never change.

The media was thrilled. They twisted Capello’s declaration into a provocation to Nottingham Forest, and eagerly looked forward to how Tony Twain, this idiosyncratic manager, would hit back at Capello, who was also equally distinctive.

As a result, Wilford was surrounded by a lot of media the next day. At the team’s regular press conference, the reporters completely did not care about the Forest team’s recent competition record and training situation. They just asked Twain his views on Capello’s remarks.

Everyone thought that Twain would smack the table and throw out some abuse, or taunt Real Madrid with the sarcasm he was good at.

Surprisingly, Twain’s response to this disappointed everyone.

Instead of aiming at Real Madrid and Capello, he targeted the media that hyped this matter.

“I find this strange. I’m not the manager of Real Madrid or their club president. Why are you asking me about the decision of that club? What inside story do you think I know? I will tell you this. I know as much as you do, maybe not even as well. From Capello’s perspective, I understand this decision. But I also believe that Mr. Capello will surely see David’s qualities that will impress him, just as David has impressed me in the first place. It won’t take long, ladies and gentlemen, I promise, it will be within the rest of this season.”

Twain did not say this because he foresaw the future. It was because, at that moment, Twain deeply understood the strength of Beckham’s beliefs and determination, so he dared to vouch for him in front of the media.

After all, the future he was familiar with was likely to change, but a person’s character would not. It determined a person’s words and deeds, and these words and deeds determined his fate.

David Beckham’s destiny was to win back the respect, then leave Bernabéu with pride and start a whole new future at Nottingham Forest.

Chapter 499: Demetrio’s Farewell Game

No matter how Capello decided to punish Beckham, the news from Nottingham Forest Football Club about Beckham was over. Beckham was still a Real Madrid player and Forest had no right to order another club on how to treat Beckham.

Twain decided not to talk any more about Beckham under any circumstance. He did not want everyone to focus too much on a player who had not even joined yet; it was disrespectful to the current players. He did not want Beckham to establish any enemies in the locker room before he even arrived.

Therefore, he tried to play down the impact of Beckham joining next season within the team to allow the players to focus all their attention on the current competition.

During the Christmas period, Nottingham Forest did well despite an intense competition schedule. With the exception of tying with Aston Villa on December 11th and Liverpool on the 16th, they won all their games. During their final game of the year, they beat Arsenal at home 1:0 and avenged the defeat of the away game from the first half of the season.

At present, the Forest team had accumulated forty-seven points. They were ranked third in the league below Ferguson's Manchester United and Mourinho's Chelsea, who had fifty-seven points and fifty-one points, respectively. Manchester United's rise this season had broken Mourinho's wishful thinking. After three seasons of nothing, Ferguson planned to rule the English Premier League again.

After the baptism of the World Cup, Cristiano Ronaldo, who previously only knew how to dribble the ball on the flank while showing off his fancy footwork, matured a lot. He and Wayne Rooney formed the backbone of Manchester United and were the core figures in Ferguson's plans for the future.

The other rival, the Chelsea manager, Mourinho, was reluctant to be robbed of his throne by Manchester United, but he also had to deal with the relationship between the club chairman and the locker room, which exhausted the famous Portuguese manager.

Twain's strategy for the league went well. He did not want to waste his energy competing with Manchester United or Chelsea for the league title this season. He was clear about his limitations. He was content to be able to get back to the third place in the league now.

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Since George Wood's return, Albertini was back on the bench. However, even if it were not for Wood, he still would not have been able to get through the intense Christmas schedule. His body was not what it used to be.

Now, He put all his energy into teaching Wood how to master the pace of the game and how to get the team to follow his command. He could tell Wood was very interested. The kid liked to direct everything and hated letting others dominate him.

That kind of inclination showed that he was suitable to be the core of the team.

Twain was busy with matters regarding Beckham during that time. The entire club seemed to be busy with it. Albertini did not care, but not because he disliked Beckham and did not want David to join the team. He just had his own business to take care of.

Just a few days after Christmas, he received a call from Galliani.

Ever since he'd left AC Milan, the general manager of the Milanese club had only called him once. This was the second time. Both calls were about the same thing.

When Albertini had announced his retirement at the end of this season last season, Galliani had called to convey President Berlusconi's compliments and then stated that before his retirement, AC Milan would hold a grand farewell ceremony for him to let him end his career gloriously.

The mild-mannered Albertini thanked the Milanese club for this care and did not mention the way the team treated him when he was expelled from Milan by Galliani.

Galliani had patted his chest to reassure that Albertini's farewell game would be a football event and Albertini could rest assured that he would arrange everything.

Half a year had passed, and Galliani had called to fulfill his promise.

"Demetrio, I have promised you it will be a football celebration. Now is the time to deliver on that promise," The Italian baldy, Galliani said over the phone. "Do you still remember Athens on May 28th, 1994?"

When Galliani mentioned it, Albertini recalled the event. It was the final game of the 93-94 season UEFA Champions League. At the time, he had still been AC Milan's main player. He and his teammates had taken down Barcelona by 4:0, which named the team the "Dream Team" since they won the brilliant championship title.

"Of course I remember," Albertini said.

"We'll recreate that day for you." Galliani laughed. "Barcelona will be your opponent for the farewell match. How do you feel?"

Albertini was not as excited as Galliani had imagined. He was startled when he heard the name. He had thought AC Milan would invite Nottingham Forest. After all, other than AC Milan, he had played there the longest, and he had had his second glorious phase in his career with the team.

Without waiting for Albertini to answer, Galliani continued, "the first half will be played Barcelona's senior players versus AC Milan's senior players. We have invited most of the players who had participated in that final. It will be a night of football gentlemen like Marco van Basten, Ruud Gullit, Frank Rijkaard. All the star players you can think of will come because of your rally. I sent the invites in your name. Like I said, this will be a celebration."

"You're right about that," Albertini said. "Is the date confirmed?"

"The tenth of January."

Albertini thought about it. There was no league game that day and he really could go. "I'm fine with the date, but, Mr. Galliani, can I invite another person to attend? As a spectator."

"No problem, anyone can attend," Galliani, who was in a good mood, agreed wholeheartedly. However, he soon regretted it, because the person that Albertini wanted to invite was not just anyone, but the petty Tony Twain, who had just lashed out at AC Milan for looking down on people half a season ago

“Is there a problem, Mr. Galliani?” Albertini asked when there was no response on the other end of the line.

“Ah, no. There’s no problem at all. As I said earlier, you can invite anyone you want. After all, this is your farewell game. You’re the host of the day, my dear Demetrio.”

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During the training the next day, Albertini told Twain about the game. He obviously did not say that AC Milan did not even consider the Forest team at first. Twain gladly accepted the invitation. He did not express any doubt about the fact that AC Milan invited Barcelona, but not Nottingham Forest.

On one hand, it was in line with the future that he knew, even though the game was a year late. On the other hand, Twain also wanted to take this opportunity to participate in that celebration. It was not common for so many football greats to come together.

Seeing that Twain was looking forward to it, Albertini did not say anything else.

A few days later, the Italian media began to report on the news related to Albertini’s farewell game and introduced the star players that were going to attend, what kind of event it would be, Albertini’s career as a whole, and took great pains to evaluate Albertini as an important player for AC Milan.

If he were that important, why did he leave early? Why did he not stay at that time? Last season, Albertini flourished in the Forest team and eliminated Inter Milan and a number of strong teams, leading the group of young men to advance to the Champions League final. The Italian media lamented. Was it Demetrio Albertini, the one who was dumped by AC Milan due to his age?

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Time passed quickly. The appointed day arrived in a blink of an eye.

Albertini left Nottingham in the morning and travelled to Milan to prepare for the evening’s farewell game and also to meet his old friends. In addition, the Italian Footballers’ Association and the Italian Football Federation wanted to celebrate him. The former wanted to thank him for his contribution in the Italian Footballers’ Association for many years and throw a send-off party for Albertini. The latter wanted to discuss the direction of his development after his retirement.

Before he went abroad, Albertini had previously been the president of the Italian Footballers’ Association. Even though he resigned from the position after he left the country, it allowed him to retain deep connections in the Italian football circle, make many friends and stay popular.

The Italian Football Federation hoped to have better working relationships with the players by hiring Albertini to hold a position in the Federation. They wanted Albertini to be a bridge between the two sides.

Twain tried to persuade Albertini to stay and work with the Forest team after his retirement, starting as an assistant coach. He could both help Twain and accumulate experience as a coach. However, Albertini rejected the offer because he wanted his children to grow up in Italy. Britain was nothing more than a way station. He was still Italian after all.

Twain was unable to persuade him when it came his family. He could only send Albertini off himself.

Albertini returned to Milan and was greeted with flowers and the laughter of his friends. It did not look like a farewell game. It was more like a gathering of old friends who had not been seen each other for years.

Twain flew to Milan in the afternoon, after training ended for the day. He did not have any other plans there. He was just in San Siro as an honored guest invited by Albertini in the VIP box to watch the farewell game.

Shania was in Paris. Otherwise, Twain would make time to see her.

After dinner, Twain quietly went to San Siro alone. Other than texting Albertini when he arrived in Milan, he did not make other contact. Albertini wanted to bring Twain with him, but he refused. Galliani, that old guy, had said something right. The day belonged to Albertini; he was the host of the night.

Twain did not want to appear in the reporters' lenses.

Due to the recent matter with Beckham, he had been exposed more than enough.

Twain still wore sunglasses at night and blended with the entering fans, intending to stay hidden in the crowd.

But he miscalculated.

Galliani, whose bald head was very obvious under the glare of the light, saw Twain coming and had already extended his hand with a warm smile. "Mr. Twain, why didn't you let us know when you arrived? If I hadn't seen you by chance in the surveillance video, I wouldn't have known you were already here."

Due to the matter with Albertini, Twain did not like the bald man, but he was the host today and Twain was the guest. He had to show the necessary etiquette.

"Hello, Mr. Galliani. I didn't know you spoke such fluent English." Twain was surprised that Galliani spoke English, but he quickly smoothened his face. "I am sure that your club must have done a lot of preparations for Demetrio's farewell game, and you will certainly be very busy this evening. Since it's inconvenient for me to bother you, I came on my own." Twain reached out and the two men shook hands.

"You are the honored guest invited by Demetrio. If we do not take proper care of you, Demetrio would not be happy. He is the host here tonight." Galliani gestured to San Siro behind him.

Since the host was determined to serve Twain, Twain did not refuse. He followed Galliani to another tunnel that was completely closed off to the general public.

"This leads directly to the box and you will not be disturbed by the media at all. We all know that Mr. Twain must be tired of being harassed by the media lately, right?" Galliani chatted with Twain while he led the way. "By the way, I forgot to congratulate you for the successfully signing on Beckham. This will certainly increase your club's influence on a global scale greatly, won't it?"

Galliani mocked Nottingham Forest as a "small rural team" without batting an eyelid.

As the kind of dark person who liked nothing better than to think of others as imaginary foes, Twain could discern this kind of implied meaning. He chuckled. "Not at all. We are a small team; there is nothing more to it. Even if we buy eleven Beckhams, we still can't be compared to giants like AC Milan. I can recite the glorious history of AC Milan..."

"Ah, it's amazing. Don't tell me Mr. Twain is a fan of AC Milan?" Galliani asked with a fake smile.

"No, I'm just used to learning every detail of each opponent." Twain stopped and said seriously, "that way, when I meet them on the field, I can easily defeat them."

The word "easily" provoked Galliani, causing his eyebrows to twitch, and he looked at Twain with an unfriendly expression in his eyes. Twain did not avoid his eyes and met Galliani's gaze.

The uncomfortable moment lasted only a few short seconds before the two men laughed.

"I understand why the Forest team has been able to achieve such excellent results under your leadership, Mr. Twain. You are a brilliant manager."

"Haha, thank you for the compliment."

"But I wonder if Mr. Twain will be interested in changing the environment in the future?"

Galliani's question put Twain on guard and he smiled. "Who can say what is going to happen in the future? But to be honest, I don't like being controlled by other people."

That was as good as a rejection. Everyone knew who AC Milan belonged to. It was not Arrigo Sacchi, not Fabio Capello, and not Carlo Ancelotti. It was not even Galliani's AC Milan. AC Milan was just Berlusconi's. The style of English football clubs did not apply to the Italian teams.

If Twain wanted to maximize his power at AC Milan, he was bound to emerge bloody and battered because there was a tougher man above him: Berlusconi.

"What a pity." Galliani shrugged.

"I don't think it's a pity. Not all managers are suited to a powerhouse club with connections like AC Milan. If I came to coach this team, I'll constantly be abused by the media for 'losing the dignity of the powerhouse clubs,' won't I?" Twain burst into laughter.

During their conversation, the two men reached the entrance of the box. Galliani opened the door for Twain. There was no one in the box.

"Your room, Mr. Twain."

"Mr. Galliani, thank you for leading the way." The two men spoke cordially for a while before Galliani left. He had more guests that he needed to look after.

The box was not big, but there were still a few seats left after Twain sat down. Perhaps there would be more people coming. Twain did not think these few seats would remain empty during the game. With the popularity Demetrio had in the Italian football world, there would be a lot of people coming to support him this evening.

Of course, it could not be ruled that other people would take this opportunity to make friends with the big shots, establish contacts, and build networks of connections.

None of these had anything to do with Twain. He just came to watch the game and root for Albertini.

This small box was part of the top floor of San Siro's grandstand. It was a little far from the central part and naturally further away from the important VIPs.

Twain believed that the most important places were left for the important people, such as Berlusconi, Leonardo Araújo, Galliani and other club executives, as well as AC Milan's VIP guests. He did not get an invitation to enter that box. Apparently, AC Milan was still a little reluctant that Albertini invited him. After all, the two sides did verbally spar through the media half a season ago.

Twain did not care. Even if he had been allowed to sit with Galliani and Berlusconi, he did not want to.

Twain focused his attention on the football field. He usually preferred to watch the game in the stands like a fan. He felt closer to the feverish atmosphere.

The players had yet to make an appearance, but the fans took their seats in droves. A number of giant flags with Albertini's face fluttered in the stands, along with the faces of other Milanese star players who had been retired for years. Red fireworks, the symbol of the Italian Football Federation, were even lit in a few corners. Twain could not help laughing as he took in the familiar sight.

Ignoring the story of Albertini being betrayed by his dearest, this was quite like a festival.

The television set in the box was showing a special program broadcasted by the Italian television for Albertini's farewell game. It was currently showing the part where they looked back on Albertini's brilliant career.

Twain looked up at the television. He had watched all these scenes before he joined this world, but now he was watching it live and it still felt good.

The only pity was before his transfer, when he watched the show online, the show host spoke Italian and there were no Chinese subtitles. He could not understand anything except the images.

This time, it was still an Italian program, and he still could not understand anything.

The door behind him was pushed open and the sound from the hallway came in. None of these interrupted Twain, who was not interested in the people who entered. He did not have any friends in Italy. It would be the same no matter who came in, so he continued to look up at the television screen.

The door was soon shut again.

There was no other sound in the box except for the Italian language that came out of the television.

At this moment, a nice-sounding female voice suddenly rang in Twain's ear, "Would you like me to translate for you, sir?"

Twain was startled, and was even more surprised when he looked clearly at the woman who whispered in his ear.

"Clarice!"

Chapter 500: Drunken Babble

“Sir, would you like me to translate it for you?” A nice-sounding female voice suddenly rang in Twain’s ear.

Twain was startled, and was even more surprised when he looked clearly at the woman who whispered in his ear.

“Clarice!”

The person bent down in front of him with a somewhat intimate posture was indeed Clarice Gloria, whom he had not seen in a long time.

“Hello, Tony, we meet again.” When Gloria saw Twain turn his head, she got up and held out her hand to him. Twain could finally not look at the spectacle in her low-cut blouse.

“Why are you dressed so professionally today?” Twain’s first words were not to say hello, but to ask about Gloria’s outfit.

Gloria laughed. “So it looks like Mr. Twain is gazing here.” She deliberately stuck out her chest.

Twain stood up with some embarrassment. He could not be seated while chatting with a lady who was standing, could he? “Can’t blame me, Clarice. People’s eyes will always unknowingly focus on the most prominent point...”

Clarice sat down with a smile. “Please have a seat, Tony.”

Twain followed suit and sat down. “What are you doing here?”

“The AC Milan football club has invited me to...” Gloria pointed to the stadium below, “discuss the matter of making a commemorative feature for Demetrio Albertini. And also because of you, Tony.”

“Because of me?” Twain was baffled.

“Remember that special feature I did on you? The people at AC Milan became interested in me because they saw it and they thought of this idea when they wanted to send Albertini a retirement gift. But it’s a lot simpler than the film I did for you. My job is to assemble and edit the images provided by the AC Milan club.”

Twain grunted. “What a cheap gift.” There was one more thing he did not say—as compared to the gift I prepared.

“You’re still the same, Tony.” Gloria smiled and said, “you always have that arrogant and superior look. It’s so annoying sometimes...”

Even though she said it, Gloria did not really find it annoying.

“Do you detest me then?”

Gloria looked at Twain. She could not detest this face. She smiled and shook her head. “No, I’ve seen too much hypocrisy. I suddenly feel that an egomaniac like you is kind of adorable.”

Twain smiled and then found another question. "If you're an invited guest of AC Milan club, why are you here? Aren't you supposed to be in there?" Twain pointed to the main stand. "Why did you come here? It feels like you're being cast out."

"In that case, Tony, does it mean that you have been banished?"

Twain shrugged and said, "I'm not someone who was welcomed by them right from the start, am I? Last summer, I had a war of words with AC Milan. The reason I can still sit here is because Demetrio and I have a good interpersonal relationship. What about you? You don't have a spat with AC Milan, do you?"

"No, I told them I needed a quiet place to be able to observe the game peacefully and prepare for the job. So, I'm here. I didn't think you'd be here, too."

"It looks like we really were destined to meet," Twain said with a chuckle.

Only he and Gloria were currently in this small box, so they could talk freely without any concern for how any surrounding people would view the two of them. The atmosphere was subtle, somewhat awkward and, yet, a little exciting.

When they realized that there were only two of them in the room, Twain and Gloria became silent for a moment. This silence seemed to be an ordeal, and Twain broke it first.

"Well, Clarice... How are you doing in America?"

"Fortunately, my career is going well. I have connections in Europe, and Hollywood needs the European market as well."

"Then I must congratulate you. Are you going to stay in the United States to develop your career for the future?"

"Not really, I'm shuttling between both sides, thanks to well-developed air travel." Gloria shrugged, and then she glanced at Twain with the corners of her lips curled. "Do you miss me, Tony?"

This flirtatious woman! Twain laughed and scolded internally. "Of course, I certainly miss my friends that I have not seen for a long time."

"We're just... friends?"

"If we're not friends, what else can we be?" Twain shrugged. He could certainly hear Gloria's overtone, but the implied meaning was risky. He could not work out whether this woman was serious about him or this was just a harmless joke between friends. Gloria was a clever woman, perhaps too clever. Twain did not like a woman who was smarter than him to share his bed long term. He had a tendency to be a bit of a male chauvinist and did not like successful, career driven women, such as Gloria and Tang Jing, that much.

The difference between these two women was that Gloria was smarter than Tang Jing and knew how to mask her cleverness so that she usually looked less imperious, and more capable of gaining men's favor. Perhaps due to the fact that Tang Jing was younger, she was too sharp and headstrong. While she made herself stand out among the crowd, her brilliance also stung a lot of people who wanted to approach her, so that no one dared to approach her again.

Gloria was really smart enough to see Twain deliberately avoid this topic and did not want to continue. She just pointed to the field and said, "It's starting."

Twain's attention instantly turned to the field. As expected, the middle of the field had been fully prepped. A retractable canopy also extended from the tunnel in the corner of the field. A lot of people surrounded the exit. The live broadcaster had already begun to mobilize the mood of the fans, and then he began to announce the names of those who were famous more than ten years ago and each of them elicited thunderous cheers.

The two people in the box stopped talking and quietly watched as those former heroes returned to the football field.

Albertini was the last to come out, holding his son with a smile and wearing a red and black vertical striped jersey as he set foot on the turf of San Siro once again.

At this moment, Albertini was AC Milan's number 4 again.

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Nothing much could be said about the farewell game. If someone wanted to see a fierce confrontation here, then they came to the wrong place. Just as the AC Milan Football Club had publicized: this was a gathering of old friends.

Therefore, everyone came to play for fun. The most important thing was to play happily. The outcome of the game was secondary. Albertini first broke through the goal of Barcelona's senior team with the free kick he was best at. Then Basten also scored, sparking huge cheers at San Siro.

In the second half, it became a contest between the current AC Milan and Barcelona teams. Albertini still appeared on the field wearing the red and black vertical striped jersey.

When he saw this scene, Twain snorted.

Were Galliani and Ancelotti treating Demetrio as a member of the current AC Milan team? This was truly ironic. Demetrio once begged the club to keep him there. He was even willing to stay as a substitute. But no one met his "lowly" entreaty, and he was heartlessly ejected from AC Milan. Had it not been for Twain, he might have had to go to Atalanta B.C. to end his career and spend his final years in a team in the lower level of Serie A.

And now they did this in the farewell game, which made Twain feel that this was more like a handout. Demetrio had once implored, hoping to spend his final years fighting for this team and yet now he was easily in their grasp with an irrelevant farewell game? Was this respect? How much did that AC Milan jersey currently worn by Albertini weigh on him now? How did Albertini feel inside? Was he thankful to the club for fulfilling his dream at the last moment? But what was the use of this? He was already going to retire! After today, he would never have a chance to put on his favorite jersey again! Did he want to play in an exhibition game, where the outcome of the game did not matter, wearing this jersey?

"For a professional player, it's battle gear, not some fucking 'fashion!'"

Twain was a little agitated. His lips quivered noiselessly as he muttered when he thought about all this. In the end, he could not help but simply say his thoughts aloud. Next to him, Gloria listened with rapt attention.

Gloria looked at the profile of an angry Twain and felt that this man's enraged manner was really charismatic. No wonder his players could be stirred up with a few words from him and play to death.

He never hid his emotions. Whether he was happy or angry, he always showed them. This was very different from the hypocritical men that Gloria came in contact with. They always pretended to be refined gentlemen in front of her, but who knew if their eyes were staring at her legs or breasts? They could even be thinking about how wonderful it would be if they had a roll in the sack with her.

Twain would not be like this. He would admit his innermost dirty thoughts. He could be quite nasty. Therefore, most people did not like him, but Gloria was one of the few people that decided otherwise.

The second half was not over yet, and Albertini was more than twenty minutes away from saying goodbye in front of the fans in Twain's memory. He no longer wanted to watch any further, suddenly feeling upset.

He got up from his seat.

Gloria asked, "Where are you going? Tony."

"I'm sorry I can't stay with you, Clarice. I think it's time for me to go back to Nottingham."

"The game is not over yet." Gloria pointed to below.

Twain squeezed out a smile. "It's not even an important final game where you will not know the outcome 'till the last second. The important thing about this kind of game is not the outcome, but the process." He glanced below. "Moreover, I'm actually quite a... melancholic person. I'm afraid when I see Demetrio say goodbye later, I will cry in front of you. That's not going to work. I want to keep my dignity intact."

Gloria knew Twain was lying about the excuse, but she did not point it out.

"In that case, I'll walk with you." She was about to get up when Twain pressed down on her shoulder.

"It's okay. You'd better get on with your work."

Twain turned and walked out of the door under Gloria's watchful eye.

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Once Twain was out of the door, he did not have the slightest bit of reluctance to leave. He put on his sunglasses and hurried out of the glittering San Siro stadium in the dim of the night. He was taking the last flight back to England. Initially, Albertini hoped they would return to Nottingham together the next morning, but now Twain had changed his mind at the last moment.

While waiting for his flight at the airport, he estimated the game should be over based on the time. Twain sent a text message to Albertini, and then turned off his cell phone, ready to board the plane.

Albertini only read the text message late that night after he returned home. Before that, he had been out celebrating with his friends.

It was very late when he got home. His wife and children had gone to bed. Just as he was about to take a shower, he took out his phone to find a text message.

“I’ll head back first, Demetrio. But I’m going to give you a truly exciting farewell game. It’s not time to say goodbye to the football field yet! Tony Twain.”

Looking at this text message in his hand, Albertini tilted his head and lightly chuckled.

He agreed with Twain’s last sentence – it was not time to say goodbye to the football field. I still have half a season left. I bade farewell to AC Milan tonight. I did not say goodbye to football.

Anyway, he was now a Nottingham Forest player and had a contract with the Forest team. He must finish this contract before he said goodbye.

However, he was not going to have a farewell game of his own. Today was enough for him.

He wanted to return the message to thank the boss for his concern, but looking at the time, Twain would be back in Nottingham getting ready to rest. He should just forget about it. He could thank him in person when he returned to the team training tomorrow afternoon.

Albertini put his cell phone on the table and went into the bathroom. His cell phone screen emitted a blue glow in the dim room and gradually faded to dark.

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Albertini guessed incorrectly. At that moment, even though Twain was back in Nottingham, he did not go to rest. He went to Kenny Burns’ Forest bar. Since he moved out of his place with Dunn, he had started going back to this bar more often.

“I’m sorry we’re closed... Tony?” Burns was surprised to see Twain open the door and enter. “Why aren’t you in Milan?”

“I came back early.” Twain patted his thighs with both hands.

“Why? You’re not interested in an event with so many superstars?” Kenny Burns joked with Twain as he wiped the glasses.

“It’s nothing. I just suddenly felt it was unfair to Demetrio. Give me something strong.” Twain sat on the high bar stool in front of the bar and tapped the bar with his fingers.

“You’re still like that... We’re closed for business.” Burns pointed to the empty pub.

“If you don’t take my money, it won’t be business, would it?” Twain grinned.

Burns filled up the glass and pushed it toward Twain. “Sure, you can pay me the next time you’re here.”

Twain took the drink and downed half a glass of whiskey in one shot.

Kenny Burns took the empty glass from Twain and wordlessly filled it up again for him.

Even though it was late, Twain did not go straight home, but instead came over for a drink, so Burns knew that Twain was looking for someone to talk to. All he needed at this point was someone who would listen and not talk nonsense.

Sure enough, after he downed his second glass, Twain told Burns what he had seen at San Siro tonight, and what he had thought at that time.

“Tony... Maybe Demetrio doesn’t think so? Everyone has a different perspective of the same matter. You may hate it but maybe others like it. You think that it was a handout. Maybe Demetrio really appreciates it? While Clough was around, many people thought he was resentful that he had not been knighted by the Queen, but the chief did not care at all. The glory that some people thought was more important than anything else, he felt could not be compared to the joy of winning a game. After passing, the media even speculated that the Queen would award him with a posthumous knighthood. But I have to say,” Burns laughed, “the chief would jump out of his grave to refuse.”

“You can’t change how everyone thinks about something, but you don’t have to change your mind because of others. That’s all there is to it.” Burns took the glass that Twain handed over for the seventh time, but he did not fill it. He set it aside and looked at Twain. “This time I’m really closing up for the night, Tony.”

Twain slid off the bar stool. He felt light on his feet.

“Thank you for the drinks, Kenny. To thank you...” Twain burped. He pointed to Burns behind the bar and said, “I’ve decided to give you a present!”

“I don’t need your gift.” Burns shrugged. “Just don’t forget to pay me for the drinks. This is a small business. It’s not easy to make money.”

As if he did not hear Burns’ words, Twain said to himself, “I will definitely give you a present, a big present!” Standing in the middle of the bar, he spread his arms wide. He stood unsteadily and turned in a circle to keep his balance.

“Hey, you’re drunk. Go home. Do you want me to call you a cab?” Burns smiled and looked at Twain, who was showing off.

“Kenny...” Belch. “Do you think... think... the Champions League trophy is worth the few drinks that you gave me just now?” Twain asked as he stared at Burns.

The smile on Burns’ face froze when he heard Twain say that.

“You’re drunk, Tony.”

“No, my head is clear. Bye, Kenny.” Twain easily made a turn and walked toward the door. As he walked, he muttered, “one plus one equals two, one plus two equals three, two times three is six, three times three is nine... nine times nine...”

Burns watched Twain leave before he shrugged his shoulders and continued to wipe the glasses.

“He’s really drunk...”