

Champions 511

Chapter 511: The Perilous Forest

It was not an exaggeration at all when the commentator said “long time no see, the attacking players of Nottingham Forest.” In fact, the Forest team’s offensive players had not appeared in the view of the cameras and fans for a long time.

Since they scored the goal in the Barcelona goal, they had played under pressure from Barcelona. The rare few attacks had either gone nowhere or were cut off halfway. Bendtner even had to come back to participate in the defense.

Now, the Forest team launched another attack. Would the result be the same as the previous few times?

It was unknown.

“Ribéry receives the ball and sends it out beautifully! Eastwood prepares to receive...”

Ribéry certainly saw Eastwood. It felt different being in the middle versus on the flank. His job was simple on the flank. All he had to do was to break through the opponent, and then pass the ball. But he had more options in the middle. Eastwood, who came up to receive, was a choice but he could not pass it that way.

Why? Because when he saw Eastwood, the Barcelona players also saw Eastwood pulled back to receive.

Puyol followed Eastwood. If he passed the ball over, it would be hard for Eastwood to receive with his back to the offensive direction. He could barely turn around under Puyol’s watch. It would be an irresponsible pass and a pass that was in line with Barcelona’s wishes.

He could not pass the ball like that. Ribéry bent his head and saw that Ashley Young was just running across from the flank to the middle. This was a way.

Just as the two men were about to cross paths, Ribéry passed the football to Ashley Young, who ran across diagonally. Then he ran across to the right flank without the ball. He and Ashley Young had completed a change of position from left to right.

The Barcelona’s defensive line was fast-retreating except that several players on the front line could not run fast enough. After all, they were the offensive players, and not the defensive players. Asking them to retreat immediately and defend after losing the ball was tough.

The Barcelona players thought Ashley Young would continue to dribble the ball on the left flank after he received the ball. Unexpectedly, he only ran a couple of steps before he turned and passed the football back to Franck Ribéry, who was running past.

Ribéry did not continue to dribble the ball toward the right flank. Instead, he adjusted his direction at the same time as he caught the ball and faced Barcelona’s goal head-on!

Since he and Ashley Young had passed each other and changed positions, which resulted in no one keeping an eye on him, he seized the opportunity and suddenly swung his leg to take a long shot before Márquez rushed up.

“What a fantastic long shot!”

As the football came whizzing by, Valdés dared not try to catch it. He could only jump and punch the ball out with both fists.

“In most cases, Ribéry gives people the impression that he’s a winger who relies on his speed and skills to break through on the flanks, and then passes the ball. This long shot reminds us that he is also a goalscorer who has a personal highest score of nine goals in a single season!”

Indeed, Ribéry’s highest number of goals scored was nine goals in his most successful season in the English Premier League. It was his first season in the Premier League, and it was also that season when his superb speed and sharp breakthroughs, as well as his excellent scoring ability, made him the best foreign player of the season.

He still played well in his second season. However, in his third season, after his opponents had studied his routine, he was no longer as big a threat as he had been. Furthermore, Twain had bought Petrov, who was similar to him, and many people thought that Ribéry’s once secure main position in the Forest team was gradually faltering.

In this game, Petrov sat on the bench to watch the game. The crowd had speculated if Ribéry would be replaced immediately once he did not do well.

It was time to make a change.

The football that Valdés struck out fell to the left flank of the field. Ashley Young received it, and did not hesitate to pass. Unfortunately, he was not used to using his left foot on this side, so his pass was not very good, and it was headed out by Zambrotta, who had returned to defend.

Eastwood lost the contest with Puyol, and the Barcelona captain headed the football forward with force, hoping that the returning Deco or Xavi could get it. The two of them were close in distance. It was good no matter who received the ball. It was like a double insurance.

Deco was even ready to stop the ball with his chest.

“George Wood!” As the commentator exclaimed, Deco, who was ready with his move, saw a dark shadow suddenly appear on his side from behind from thin air

George Wood flew through the air, threw his body back, and exerted all the strength in his back and core to forcefully head the football back.

Deco and Xavi had run for nothing. The football returned to Barcelona’s half of the field.

This time, it was Eastwood, not Puyol, who received the football.

After he caught the ball, Eastwood did not turn around, but directly passed the ball to Mikel Arteta, who plugged in.

Nottingham Forest's offense was fully rolled out.

Twain's instruction to the team was they must retreat fast and attack quickly. In short, one word: speed!

This point was well reflected in this game.

The Forest team attacked quickly. After Arteta received the football, he was surrounded with options for a passing route that he could use. Whether he passed it to Ribéry, Ashley Young, Eastwood, Bendtner, or even George Wood who was not far behind as well as Gareth Bale, who was charging up, he could pass the ball.

The biggest difference between Nottingham Forest and Barcelona was that the Forest team did care about how it looked. If there was a direct passing route, it had to be chosen.

Arteta looked around and decisively passed the football to the core of the team's organization in the second half — Franck Ribéry.

Ribéry had reached the right flank when he caught the ball. Zambrotta thought Ribéry would break through from the flank. The change of positions between him and Ashley Young just looked like an ordinary left and right edge crossover.

Ribéry made a feint of breaking through in a straight line and managed to fool Zambrotta. He did not really directly break through. Instead, while Zambrotta shifted his center of gravity, he took the opportunity to suddenly shift the ball toward the middle and cut inside!

His left foot cut inside from the right flank to the middle. What was the most likely and best thing he would do?

"Watch out for his shot!" Valdés yelled.

He was definitely going to do the long shot which he was good at.

As if to coordinate with Valdés, Ribéry swung his left leg as he ran crosswise. He was going to shoot.

Márquez recklessly threw himself forward to block Ribéry's long shot and completely forgot the situation behind him.

But Ribéry saw it clearly and did not shoot. It was just a feint to lure the Barcelona defensive line out and pull it apart to create gaps. Márquez rushed up and a small crack appeared in Barcelona's otherwise consistent defensive line.

The Frenchman pulled his leg back for a push instead. The football quickly rolled past Márquez's side into the penalty area.

"A beautiful straight pass!"

It was really beautiful. Before Ribéry sent the ball out, Bendtner had already moved to position himself in the gap and arrived as the ball came. Bendtner prepared to shoot at a narrow angle.

Had it not been for Valdés's quick reaction to move in time to block off Bendtner's shot angle, the running pass set piece in front of the penalty area might have really scored a goal.

The football struck Valdés's leg and rebounded out of the end line.

Loud gasps were heard throughout the stands in Camp Nou. The Barcelona fans were horrified.

When Twain saw Bendtner and Ribéry coordinate wonderfully, he stood up with clenched fists, poised for the moment when he would pump his fists to celebrate the goal, but he did not expect Bendtner's shot to be blocked and sent out of the end line by Valdés.

He almost lost control of his body with the ups and downs of his mood. He suddenly jumped up and then immediately punched the ground. "Such a good opportunity... and the shot didn't actually go in! It didn't go in!"

He was still jabbering on as he got up and walked back to his seat in the technical area.

"At least we have some good news. Ribéry's performance was excellent." Kerslake pacified him.

Dunn nodded beside him. "He's better than we anticipated."

"But that's not enough," Twain grumbled. "We need to put more pressure on Barcelona." With that, he turned around and took a deep breath as he stood on the sidelines. Then he roared, "George! Speed up when you rush in for the attack! If you can't run, I'll bring you off!"

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"Nottingham Forest's offense has picked up. This is really a treat for the eyes of our neutral audience. It's entertaining to watch, and the both offenses are high caliber. The current question is... who will be the first to break this current thorny stalemate?"

The Forest team's corner kick was headed out by Lilian Thuram. Lying in wait outside, Arteta tried a direct long shot, but kicked it high, causing Twain to slap his own thigh from his seat off the field. In the face of such situation, he did not want to see his players being hasty. He would have preferred to see Arteta slow the ball down to reorganize the attack, rather than kick the ball toward the grandstand.

Barcelona continued its offensive against the Forest team after the ball was sent out from the goalpost. The situation on the field was in a deadlock and it looked like everyone had a chance, but every opportunity seemed to brush past them. Fate appeared to be playing tricks on the emotions of fans from both teams. Sometimes it made them nervous, and other times, it let them relax. Every so often, it excited and frustrated them.

The first twenty minutes of the second were a stalemate.

Twain did not replace any players. He was waiting for an opportunity. He believed that Rijkaard would not be willing to obtain just one point at Camp Nou. He would definitely start to deploy offensive players at the last minute. That point would be his chance.

In everyone's view, Twain should have been satisfied with this situation. In fact, he had the same idea as Rijkaard: failure was unacceptable. A draw was equally unacceptable.

The game had gone on for seventy-three minutes and Rijkaard finally could not sit still. He was going to make an adjustment first.

The Brazilian full-back, Belletti replaced Thuram. This was not an adjustment in defense. Belletti had a very good assist ability and Rijkaard brought him on to strengthen Barcelona's flank attack.

Seeing this change, Twain also got up from his seat and asked Kerslake to call van Nistelrooy back from his warm-up. Bendtner was still not up to scratch. He now needed an experienced world-class center forward with remarkable awareness. Twain needed a terminator.

Bendtner was not as good as van Nistelrooy.

After calling van Nistelrooy to his side, Twain looked up to observe his expression first and found nothing unusual.

"I only have one request." Twain extended his index finger. "Do everything you can to score goals."

Van Nistelrooy nodded. He liked this. He was an experienced striker. If a manager prattled in his ear, he would just feel like he was being underestimated and did not have the trust he deserved.

"Go and terminate them!"

Van Nistelrooy was brought on and Bendtner trotted off the field. Twain grabbed hold of him and said, "You did a good job, Nick."

"Thank you, chief, but I didn't get that goal..."

Twain interrupted Bendtner's self-blame with a smile. "Even an excellent striker cannot guarantee a goal every time he shoots. If you're not willing to accept that, practice more shooting when you're back in training!"

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"Both sides have made offensive adjustments and it seems that in the final moments of the game, neither team will settle for this 1:1 draw. This is really exciting!"

After Wood was yelled at by Twain, Wood ran faster and was more resolute when he attacked. Naturally, there was more room behind him for Barcelona's offense to partake.

The balance between offense and defense had always been a big conundrum for every team's coaches and players. Twain did not expect Wood to perform spectacularly in this area. Strengthening the offense was bound to weaken the defense. The price of a solid defense was the sacrifice of a lot of opportunities to counterattack.

This was the manager's dilemma to face.

Twain chose to attack twenty minutes before the end of the game; bringing on van Nistelrooy was a clear signal.

The Dutchman was more experienced and he was better than Bendtner at cutting in for the goal. With the assist from Eastwood and Ribéry, it looked like Twain wanted to win this game at all costs.

The consequence of this was that Wood loosened his mark on Ronaldinho and as a result, Barcelona would have plenty of attacking opportunities as well.

Now it was up to the teams to be one step ahead.

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After Ronaldinho shook off George Wood's defense, he had to pass the football to Eto'o while being hindered. Eto'o played with frustration during this game. His speed was impeded under the Forest team's intense defense. Whenever he received the football, he could only attempt to shoot, or send the ball out again.

In terms of shooting, because Twain had asked the defensive line to push Eto'o out of the penalty area before this game, the farther away from the goal the better, Eto'o could only rely on long shots instead. Now that he discovered the Forest team's defense seemed a bit slack, he planned to break directly though.

With a nimble and quick change of direction, Eto'o bypassed Kompany's defense, intending to squeeze through the cracks in the crowd. Just as he was about to succeed, Piqué rushed up to fill the gap.

He kicked the football out before Eto'o got to it and then knocked into the African cheetah, who could not stop in time. The two men fell to the ground at the same time. Another deafening hiss erupted in the stands. The Barcelona fans obviously thought this should have been another penalty, but the referee did not issue the penalty and signaled for the game to continue.

The ball that Piqué kicked reached Ashley Young's foot. He did not pass it forward, because Barcelona rushed up to snatch at this point. By the time he adjusted the football, there was no room to send it forward. He could only protect the ball on the flank to either wait for his teammates to come up to support or kick the football on the Barcelona players' bodies for the ball to bounce toward the sidelines and receive an out of bounds ball.

The second option was a desperate move, because once that happened, it meant that Barcelona's defense had been successful, and they had stopped a fast attack by the Forest team.

The first option was a little difficult. Chimbonda wanted to come up to help, but he was closely followed by Eto'o. As for Arteta? His position was not very good and he himself could not confirm his location properly.

"Here!" Just as Ashley Young was ready to kick the ball out of bounds, he heard the captain's voice.

Looking up, George Wood appeared in front of him, and there was no one around him for the time being. The Barcelona players apparently did not think that George Wood would pop up here to take the initiative to get the ball and participate in the attack. Ashley Young didn't hesitate. He immediately passed the ball. Then he turned and continued to run forward, rounding the outside of the field. He would run over quickly so that Wood could pass the ball to him and they could do a penetrating two-over-one pass! After half a season or so of hands-on practice during training and competition, Ashley Young clearly understood Wood's ability for long passes. He knew that this was the best way to rip through Barcelona's defensive line.

Because he accelerated and ran, widening his distance from Barcelona's Deco, the Barcelona players also thought Wood would choose to pass the ball at first chance, making use of Ashley Young's fast

speed. While everyone was trying to prevent Wood from passing, Wood unexpectedly chose to dribble the ball himself.

Wood did not dribble quickly, but he was steady. Deco followed Ashley Young as he ran for a distance. When he found that Wood had no intention of passing the ball, he turned back to defend against George Wood.

Up against Deco, Wood did not continue to dribble the ball, but passed it on to Mikel Arteta, who had ran up with him. Arteta then passed the football to Gareth Bale, who followed up from his left back position. The Barcelona players' attention shifted to the flank according to the football. Then Bale suddenly made a cross pass.

The football passed between the players of both teams. No one intercepted it, and it ended up at Wood's feet!

He had not gone back after he passed the ball. He continued forward to provide support. When Bale saw him, he sent the football over.

By this time, Wood was only ten meters away from the edge of Barcelona's penalty arc. However, it was not easy to run this length as Barcelona had erected a barrier to block Nottingham Forest's attack.

Puyol commanded the team's defensive line to collectively press ahead to create an offside. As long as Wood passed the ball forward, either the Forest team's two forwards were offside, or no one received the ball.

Meanwhile, Deco continued to move toward Wood, intending to intercept at the first opportunity.

Should he pass the ball or dribble it himself?

Wood looked at the large swathes of emptiness in front of him and suddenly kicked to send the football to the right flank.

It was equally empty over there, but a second later, a figure appeared in front of the camera. It was Ashley Young!

He had been running, but when he realized that Wood had not passed him the ball, he had stopped. Later, when he saw Wood received the ball for the second time and was blocked by Barcelona's creation of an offside, he keenly spotted the neglected length of the flank. Ashley Young did not know if George Wood would see the empty section or if Wood would have sent the football to his side when he ran up.

However, at worst, he would have run for nothing. But if he did not run, there would not even be a chance. He chose to run ahead.

This was not an offensive routine that had been practiced in training. Wood did not turn his head to see Ashley Young's exact location, but he accurately sent the football to Ashley Young's feet.

"How did he see that?" The commentator's exclamation was also Rijkaard's question.

Everyone was focused on Wood, who had been dribbling the ball in the middle. The Barcelona defensive line unconsciously followed to concentrate in the middle, intending to completely blockade the defensive midfielder who was poor in offense and dribble.

They did not expect Wood to suddenly pass the ball to a spot that was not in his field of vision. There was a piercing sound and Barcelona's defensive line was ripped apart.

After Ashley Young received the ball on the flank, he saw empty space in front of him. He tilted to adjust the football, and then dribbled the ball as he rushed into the penalty area.

Zambrotta gave his all to return to defend. It looked like there was still some hope to stop Ashley Young before he entered the danger zone.

Young swung his foot. Whether he was about to pass the ball or shoot, Zambrotta ran over in large strides and extended his leg to block.

This was not a shot, but it was no ordinary pass either. Ashley Young let the football roll close to the ground to his side, near the penalty kick spot.

Eastwood and Ribéry did not receive the ball in front of the goal, but van Nistelrooy's professional sensitivity made him run towards the goal. He suddenly withdrew and received the ball. He did not hesitate and swing his foot.

Valdés's quick response was amazing. Although there was usually a lot of criticism about him, his performance at this moment was amazing.

When he ran to seal off the corner, he saw the football being passed back. He quickly turned and ran to the middle of the goal. He ran halfway when he saw van Nistelrooy swing his leg to shoot. Valdés immediately sprang up and pounced on the football.

Van Nistelrooy's shot did not enter the goal!

The Forest players had intended to raise their hands to cheer for the goal, which was replaced by the cheers from the Barcelona fans in the stands behind the goal.

They were ready to shout Valdés's name. But just as the first syllable had come out of their mouths, the front of the goal had a sudden change.

Valdés had tried hard to pounce on the football the first time, but he did not have the capacity to strike the football further away. The football landed in front of the goal, and Valdés himself had fallen to the ground. Just as he was struggling to stand up again, he caught a whiff of danger.

The football was right in front of him and near his hand, but the length of his hand away, and unfortunately, the danger also happened to be that far away.

Ribéry had initially intended to rush up to grab the ball but he did not expect Ashley Young to pass the ball to van Nistelrooy behind himself. He thought he had run for nothing, but, unexpectedly, van Nistelrooy's shot did not go in. Valdés had pounced. And even more surprisingly, the ball that was struck out happened to land not far from his feet!

It was a golden opportunity!

Ribéry, who was ready to shoot, suddenly felt a powerful tug coming from behind him, trying to pull him to the ground. Evidently, Márquez, the Barcelona center back who had leaned in behind him, did it.

Valdés was also trying to get up from the ground, intending to grab the football.

How can I let you get what you want?

Ribéry did not fight with Márquez. He did not have time to compete with him on strength. He took advantage of Márquez's pulling force and threw his body out, so that he could free his feet and use them to do more important things, such as turning his body around to shoot!

Valdés saw that his hands were approaching the football. It was just half a hand's distance. But in the next moment, the football was gone, and he looked up to see fragments of grass.

"Franck Ribéry! He has scored a goal! He has fallen in front of the Barcelona goal with Márquez. Is it a foul? No, it's not a foul! The referee indicated that the goal is valid! Nottingham Forest leads Barcelona for the second time at Camp Nou! Look at Tony Twain's excitement on the sidelines. Ha, he looks as if he had scored the goal himself! Like a forest shrouded in thick fog and perils, Nottingham Forest has trapped Barcelona inside. Can Rijkaard's team escape? They don't have much time. There are only seventeen minutes left!"

In one of the camera footages, Twain swung his fists toward the sky and yelled with his mouth wide open. A little further away, Rijkaard stood on the sidelines, with his arms folded across his chest. He bit down hard on his lower lip with a grim expression.

The background for these two men was the blurry stands of Camp Nou, a roaring sea of red and blue.

Chapter 512: You're All Wrong

"Franck Ribéry — he seized the chance to shoot from the crowd! Nottingham Forest leads Barcelona for the second time! The game is still has... seventeen minutes. This situation is really bad news for Rijkaard's team. If they want to win, they have — including injury stoppage time — just a little more than twenty minutes to score two consecutive goals and make sure their defensive line does not continue to concede any goals. This will be difficult... The Nottingham Forest fans are cheering. This is a really delightful score for them!"

Fat John and Bill hugged each other in the stands. This score not only made them happy, it was also thrilling for them. The hardcore fans were obviously well aware what the win at Camp Nou meant for them. Throughout the ages, there were only a handful of teams that could take this stadium.

"Guys, let's sing!" John turned towards the back and hollered at the thousands of Forest fans in the stands.

"We've got the whole world in our hands! We overcome every attack, we're invincible! Because we're the strongest team! Oh, oh, oh—"

After a few seconds of silence, the Barcelona fans booed loudly again to drown out the singing voices of the Forest fans.

The Forest fans saw this situation and raised their volume. They only had seven thousand people, but they did not want to lose to the seventy-thousand Barcelona fans.

At the end, the Barcelona fans struggled with their booing, and the Forest fans tried harder to raise the volume. They were no longer singing but yelling out the song. They yelled at the top of their lungs until their throats were hoarse.

As the Forest fans in the stands frantically battled the Barcelona fans, the Forest players on the field frantically celebrated their goal. They celebrated heedlessly in front of the Barcelona players.

Ribéry led his group of teammates and ran across the vast tract of the field. They rushed toward the stands where the Forest fans were. A group of them waved their arms and conducted the fans' singing to make them sing louder.

It was really an opportune moment to incite the mood.

Even Tony Twain's celebration was a bit more excessive than normal. He had no intention of giving his opponent a shred of respect at the stadium. He celebrated as if he were on his home ground. He hugged all the coaches and substitutes, and turned around and brandished his fists at the Barcelona fans in the stands behind him as a show of force.

The move certainly invited more violent abuse at him. If he could have understood Catalan, the words of abuse were vicious enough to bring the dead back to life. It was a pity he could not understand. He just smiled and looked at the angry Barcelona fans. He bowed slightly, and turned around and let them see his back.

"Before the game, we thought that when Tony Twain vowed that the game was within his control, he was either just lying and it was a psychological warfare, or he really had something up his sleeves to deal with Barcelona. Now it looks like it's the latter. His team does have a way of dealing with Barcelona. The Nottingham Forest players clearly remember last season's defeat. Now they have finally found the best way to avenge that and vent their feelings. For Twain's team, Barcelona is really the best opponent for the Round of 16, the best of the best opponents."

"... An English team is different from the other national league teams. The manager is the soul of a team. A manager's character often determines the character of the team. By studying Tony Twain, we clearly know what kind of person he is. To put it in not-so-nice words, he is narrow-minded, vindictive and a sore loser. And his team is likely to be the same. Barcelona beat them in last season's final which made them unhappy. They are more motivated to play this game than any other game. It's no surprise that they were able to lead Barcelona twice..."

"Tony Twain, even though you're not my favorite manager in England, you represent England in the Champions League arena, so I'm going to say-well done Forest!"

"Barcelona dominated but ended up being led by the Forest team twice. Nottingham Forest was almost always in a disadvantageous position, and yet they led Barcelona twice. Football is such a marvelous game!"

"The game is not over yet. Barcelona still has a chance! Nottingham Forest has not won the game even though they scored two away goals. I'm sure Barcelona won't let them leave Camp Nou with three points. The people here will not agree to that!"

The various countries' commentators expressed their views in response to the situation. There were some who evaluated from an objective and neutral standpoint, there were some who professed their admiration for Tony Twain, and there were also some who encouraged Barcelona not to give up.

Compared to Twain's flamboyant display, Rijkaard looked pained as he stood in the empty space in front of the coaches' seats.

The Forest team was obviously good at playing defensive counterattack. After they had lured Barcelona out, they had launched a sudden counterattack. They were very familiar with this set piece.

But now it was not the time to think about why Nottingham Forest was ahead, but to seriously consider how to equalize the score and overtake them to achieve a big reversal in the last twenty-something minutes.

Rijkaard did not want to admit it, but it did present some challenges.

A big push meant that there would be a lot of gaps behind. The gaps behind them meant that there would be more opportunities for Nottingham Forest to carry out the defensive counterattacks they were best at.

Should they go all out to attack and overcome their loss with more goals or should they prudently watch their front and back as they waited for the final whistle to be blown?

Was this still a choice to be made?

Rijkaard walked back to the substitutes' bench and summoned the French winger, Giuly.

As Rijkaard brought on Giuly, Twain also made a substitution.

He brought off Mikel Arteta and put Petrov on the field. In this way, Ribéry was completely fixed in the middle of the midfield, in a similar capacity as an attacking midfielder. Petrov would assault on the left flank.

"Both sides have made adjustments. What excites us is that the leading Nottingham Forest has not brought on a defensive player but continues to make adjustments on their offense. Tony Twain has replaced Mikel Arteta in the middle with the swift left winger, Petrov, whose speed will be an important weapon for the Forest team's defensive counterattack. It seems that Manager Tony Twain is here to thoroughly carry out his defensive counterattack."

The commentator said it well. Twain knew that under such circumstances, Rijkaard would have no other choice. He would never accept conceding here, and that he would definitely deploy his offensive players to stake it all to fight Nottingham Forest.

As for Twain, he would take the opportunity and continue to step up the pace of their counterattack. On one hand, their defensive lineup remained unchanged, which stabilized their defense. On the other hand, they would continue to accelerate the speed of their counterattack and increase their capability for individual combat. He knew that as the game moved to the end, it was no longer realistic to ask the team to send more people during an offensive. They could only count on the players' individual abilities to fight back. Petrov was fast and his dribbling was excellent. He was good at passing and shooting. He was the best candidate to play the counterattack.

Rijkaard also knew Twain's intention in doing so. He was not a fool; he could see it. Twain followed closely every time he made a substitution. Why? Because he wanted to make adjustments according to his last change. This cunning and vile fox!

Now the Dutch manager could only curse his opponent in his head. Other than that, he had no other way... he had no choice. Even if he knew that Twain was going to do that, he could only let his team continue to step up the offensive and threaten the Forest team's goal, hoping to crack open van der Sar's fingers soon. Barcelona only had one way to go now, which was to use offense instead of defense.

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As the game went on, it entered a state whereby Barcelona frenziedly counterattacked and Nottingham Forest was battered and exhausted but defended tenaciously.

Rijkaard's thinking was sound. Barcelona's reckless drive and offense pushed the Forest team, which still wanted to play defensive counterattack, back to the other half of the field. Petrov, who was brought on, could only run back to participate in the defense, and simply had no time to strike back.

Going into the 80th minute, Twain made a substitution before Rijkaard. This was also his last replacement for the game. He replaced Gareth Bale with Leighton Baines to step up the defense in the left flank. When Baines came on, he passed on a message to Wood:

Twain wanted him to drop the offense and devote himself to the defense. He must closely mark Ronaldinho and also assist in defending Messi if possible.

Wood was entirely in his element with this task. He kept close to Ronaldinho and followed him wherever he went. He did not give him any space. He did not simply follow him. He also constantly pressed against Ronaldinho with his superior physique and persistently disrupted Ronaldinho's control of the ball so that he could not easily execute his moves. He made him so annoyed that he could only pass the ball.

Twain saw this scene on the field and snickered. Turning his head to his two assistant managers, he said, "now Ronaldinho must regret George Wood not playing in the last final. He missed the first-hand and most detailed information. Before this game, I bet his knowledge of Wood was limited to a written profile and game videos. Ah, with this sort of matter, he still has to experience firsthand to know. Haha! An actual physical experience is still more trustworthy than words and video material."

This was not the first time Ronaldinho had felt agitated. He had experienced it in the away game against Chelsea during the Champions League group stage and the first leg of the El Clásico this season. In both games, he felt this kind of relentless defense shadowing him. He was very skilled, but he needed time and space to operate his techniques. He could not just exhibit his magical skills in any situation. Wood's defense did not allow him that time and space. He kept feeling the collisions from his opponent. He had to put more energy to keep his body in balance and not to lose the ball.

Ronaldinho was the current core of Barcelona's offense. If he could not perform, Barcelona's offense would be messy.

In fact, that appeared to be the case. Barcelona became more impatient in the last few moments. Most of the players did not have the patience to meticulously coordinate with each other in front of the

penalty area to shoot inside the box. They attempted long shots continuously, hoping to score in the simplest and most convenient way.

In the face of Barcelona's long shots, the Forest players used any part of their bodies other than their hands to block. There was not much time left. As long as they held out until the end, they would be the winner and leave Camp Nou with three points and their heads held high. No matter how battered they were now and how ugly the situation looked, the feelings would vanish as long as they won the game.

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"Defend! Hold on!" van der Sar roared on the field. The current situation was critical. Barcelona began to organize precise short passes to penetrate after their frequent long shots were ineffective. They had broken through the penalty area twice and made shots at the goal.

Both Twain and the assistant manager, Kerslake, got up from their seats on the sidelines. They could not remain seated in the face of Barcelona's frenzied attack.

A thunderous cheer sounded over the Camp Nou stadium, "Barça! Barça! BAR-ÇA!" The fans were cheering for their team. This was a critical moment, and no one wanted to see an arrogant man strut around on their own turf. At that moment, their hatred of Tony Twain exceeded the sum of their hatred toward Real Madrid and RCD Espanyol.

They could lose to anyone, but they absolutely could not lose to the rotten Tony Twain and his team!

Even under such circumstances, the Forest team had not forgotten the task that they had to seize the opportunity to fight back. Petrov finally managed to seize a chance to fight back. But unfortunately, after he raced for more than sixty meters on the flank, he had to take a shot at the goal facing Valdés. The football brushed against the goalpost to roll out of the end line.

At that moment, the hearts of the fans stopped beating en masse.

"Petrov... The ball didn't go in! It didn't go in! Brushed against the goal post and rolled out... It was so close! Barcelona desperately wants to equalize the score, but their defenses are teetering in the wind. If the Forest team fights back a few more times like this... I can't imagine the results. Fortunately, not much time is left. The Forest team may not be able to strike more. It is also unfortunate that there is not much time because Barcelona is still a goal behind."

The fourth official walked to the sidelines and held up the injury stoppage time sign: three minutes.

From the sidelines, Rijkaard anxiously waved for his players to press on and abandon the defense.

Twain was also on the sidelines, but instead of yelling at the team to defend, he crossed his arms and watched the show.

The coaches basically had nothing else to do. All adjustments had long been made. It was clear in everyone's mind. What was the point in standing on the sidelines and yelling, other than putting on a show? Twain chose to quietly watch the last three minutes of the game.

No matter how Barcelona bombarded, he believed his team could hold on. Because he knew how fanatical and crazy this group was about defeating Barcelona. They were more unwilling than him to allow the victory in their grasp to slip away.

The Barcelona players were still frantically attacking and doing everything they could to seize the time. However, the three minutes of injury stoppage time passed by relentlessly. Every second took away hopes of more and more Barcelona fans.

Some of the Barcelona fans had already left the stands at Camp Nou, while the Nottingham Forest fans sang loudly in excitement in their stands.

Rijkaard was silent. The image of him biting his lips and furrowing his eyebrows appeared on the television screen. He was powerless against this situation in front of him.

The fight and confidence that Nottingham Forest had shown in this game was completely beyond his expectations.

Generally speaking, the other teams that came to Camp Nou just tried not to lose and treated a draw as a win. He did not expect the aim of the fearless Twain and his team was to win the game.

He looked at the Barcelona players who were desperately running around the field like headless chickens. They wanted to score goals and equalize the score — Barcelona's goal had gone from a reversal to an equalizer — but the reality was brutal.

Rijkaard lowered his head. He did not want to see the scene when the final whistle sounded.

Twain turned his head and looked at Dunn behind him. Dunn knew what he wanted, so he said, "there's half a minute left."

Twain nodded, took his hands out of his pockets, slowly raised them, and clenched them into fists. That action looked as if he was stretching his back, causing the Barcelona fans in the stands behind him to look on with gritted teeth.

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"The game is over!" When Eto'o missed another long shot, the referee blew the whistle to signal the end of the game. Camp Nou exploded in a deafening hiss, which was obviously meant for Tony Twain and his Forest team.

After they won the game, Twain was not as excited as his aides and players. He stood in one spot with his fists held high. The other coaches and players rushed past him to celebrate the victory with their exhausted teammates.

When he heard the final whistle, Kompany fell straight back and laid on the ground. He was too tired. Not only he was physically exhausted, but, more importantly, he was mentally tired. His nerves had been strained right to the last minute in fear that any mistake would allow the football to enter the goal.

Now it was all right. He could lie on the turf and take a deep breath.

Edwin van der Sar ran past him with open arms and was as excited as if they had won the Champions League title. As a player who had only joined in the summer, he sometimes could not understand why these people valued and clung to the idea of a victory over Barcelona. Was it not commonplace to win or lose? Who could guarantee constant victories and that all the championship titles would be taken?

But now, whatever it was, it felt good to be able to win.

He closed his eyes and listened to the cheers of his teammates around him. Even the boos from the rival fans sounded so melodious.

Twain did not rush up to celebrate this victory with his players. He politely put his hands down, straightened his clothes, and walked toward the dejected Rijkaard with his hand stretched out.

“Mr. Rijkaard, here’s to another round. I’ll be waiting for you and your team in Nottingham.”

Rijkaard took his hand out of courtesy but did not say anything.

The two men were soon separated. The first person to walk to the mixed zone near the tunnel to be interviewed by the reporters was Twain, who was stopped by a number of reporters.

“Mr. Twain, why does it look like you don’t have a smile on your face? Your team has just won at Camp Nou.” asked a reporter in puzzlement.

Twain shrugged. “Do I need to be happy? It’s not as if we got the Champions League title. I expected this outcome. I had said the game was in my orbit. Not one of you believed it before, did you? As it turns out, I was right and you were all wrong.”

With that, he turned around and left the mixed zone. No matter how many times the reporters called his name, he did not stop to look back.

Chapter 513: The Pretty Tenant

By the time Twain’s team returned to England, the airport newsstands had already put out the latest newspapers. He was on all the front pages. He bought a copy of all the newspapers and enjoyed the media’s praise on the bus back to Nottingham, which greatly satisfied his vanity.

It was truly great news that they could beat Barcelona in an away game, score two away goals and make a good start to advance into the Champions League’s top eight teams.

If they did not have to play a league game this weekend, Twain would have really wanted to give the group of hard-working players a day off and let them have a relaxing break.

The bus arrived at the Nottingham Wilford training base and the players said goodbye to Twain in succession as they left their respective cars.

Unlike the players, most of the coaches did not have cars and choose to head home on public transport instead.

The British gasoline price was high. Even though many people bought cars, they would not often take them out. The coaches’ income was of a completely different bracket than the players’. The coaches could not afford to drive the cars that the professional players could.

But Twain was not the same. He earned the same as the players.

Therefore, van Nistelrooy did not forget to stop and tease Twain as he drove past the gate, “hey, chief, waiting for the cab again? Do you want me to drive you?”

Twain kicked the air and said, "I'm walking home for the exercise!"

Van Nistelrooy chuckled as he drove away.

When van Nistelrooy was gone, Dunn also said to Twain, "I also think it's good for you to consider buying a car. You're a public figure. Sometimes you have places to go other than from the training grounds to the stadium."

Twain did not speak. Shania had mentioned this to him before, but he was only tempted for an afternoon before he abandoned it. Furthermore, he did not know if he had a driver's license or if he knew how to drive.

"Don't worry. You have a valid driver's license." Reading his mind, Dunn said, "if you don't know how to drive, you can learn."

Twain shook his head and said, "we'll talk about it when the time comes. Let's go back."

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The two men returned to their place from the training base and only took about twenty minutes to walk. This was one reason why Twain was reluctant to buy a car. He could use this time to chat with Dunn and think about problems, which did not work well with driving.

When he got home, the two men said goodbye to each other as they opened the doors to their respective homes.

When he got inside, Twain collapsed on the couch without even taking off his clothes. He just wanted to have a good rest now. He was worn out from the last few days. Could it be his thirty-something year old body catching up to him?

"Meow."

Lying on the couch, rubbing his temples, Twain suddenly heard a cat's meow. At first he thought he had misheard, but the sound came again, and it was clearly from his room.

He did not remember when he had picked up a cat from outside. How could he have a pet when he could barely take care of himself as a single man?

Could it be a stray cat that snuck into the house while he was away these few days?

Twain remembered that he shut all the doors and windows tight when he left. Burglaries were common in Nottingham, where the legend of Robin Hood was born, and theft was rife. He was afraid to be careless.

Was it a stray cat or a burglar?

Twain got up from the couch and looked around the living room. He did not discover any abnormalities. Before he left, he had hired a part-time cleaner to clean the house, so everything was in place as it should have been. There was no trace of things being rifled through.

After he confirmed that the first floor was the same, Twain began to inspect the second floor. As he heard the cat's meows, he focused on checking those corners.

He did not find anything out of place when he opened the door to his room.

The big picture still hung on the opposite wall and the bed was well made. There were no traces of any disturbances by a small animal.

Everything was also normal when he opened the bathroom door to check.

After he checked almost all the rooms on the second floor, there was only one room left in front of him — Shania's guest room.

Although she rarely visited, Twain still left her a bedroom.

Twain did not know why he did it. Shania was now an internationally famous model. She had luxury residences in Milan and Paris and stayed in famous hotels. She was so busy she had no time for herself. How could she still come here to stay? She was no longer the little, homeless thirteen-year-old girl she used to be.

Twain opened the door. He saw the Totoro toy that he had given to Shania sitting quietly on the bed, and everything else was as normal.

Standing at the door and looking at the empty room inside, Twain shook his head and smiled.

How could Shania still come back here to stay? It was not] easy to even meet up with her nowadays.

At the thought of Shania, Twain thought of her bright smiling face, and the voice that called him "Uncle Tony." Although he used to be opposed to Shania addressing him like that, he later felt that it was quite nice. It was better than calling him "Mr. Twain."

Twain leaned against the door frame and looked at the bedroom in front of him. He would come in and clean the room every once in a while. It was usually locked. The part-time cleaner would not be able to get in. Twain did not want outsiders to clean in there. Even when Dunn lived there before, he did not go in.

It was a restricted zone for other people. Twain had stopped short of hanging a "no trespassers allowed" sign.

Seeing that everything was fine, Twain was relieved. He shook his head as he closed the door. Maybe I just misheard.

"Meow."

Twain was startled. He jerked around. Leaning against the door was a marmalade kitten looking at him strangely.

This cat was being held by someone. A pair of fair arms held the kitten's two front paws. It was only when Twain snapped back to himself that he saw who was standing in front of him.

"Uncle Tony, you're so timid."

Who else could it be?

"Sha— Shania?" Twain was surprised to see the girl in front of him.

Standing in front of him with the cat in her arms and smiling at him was the world-renowned model, Judy Shania Jordana.

Twain's mouth was wide open for a long time. After a long while, he eventually asked a question that made Shania roll her eyes. "Am I dreaming?" He reached out to gently pinch Shania's face. "It feels warm... It's a real person."

"Uncle Tony!" Shania screamed with annoyance.

"Huh... It looks like the real thing."

"Hey!"

When he saw Shania's frown, Twain snickered. "This is to get you back for scaring me just now. You know I'm very petty."

"Heh heh, Uncle Tony, you're such a bad guy."

Twain smiled. "All right, enough of this. Why are you here, and what's going on with this cat?" He pointed to the kitten in Shania's arms.

"I've decided to come back to England." Shania replied as she played with the cat in her arms.

Twain did not understand. "What?"

"I have decided to settle in England."

"Your career..." Twain understood her this time, but he still had a lot of questions.

"It doesn't affect my job if I live in the UK. I always need to fly around anyway. Anyway, London is an important fashion capital."

"In that case..." Twain wanted to ask Shania if she would live in London.

"But I don't want to live in London. I don't like big, noisy cities. I prefer smaller places. I don't like Paris, Milan and Madrid. I bought a house in Nottingham's Lace Market." Shania casually stated her decision, and Twain shrugged. She was really a famous model that made a lot of money. That was where Nottingham had the most expensive houses. The houses were at least a million pounds, but she said it so casually.

"The Lace Market... That's not too far from here." Twain nodded. He thought it would be convenient for him to go to see the little girl.

Shania smiled when she saw Twain nod. "But I don't want to live there."

"Eh?"

"Or I should say I'll just live there once in a while." Shania put the cat on the floor, walked through the open door, and lay down on her bed and stretched her back. This movement exposed her small waist and belly button. "I will live here," Shania said, as she sat back up and looked at Twain.

Twain was completely taken aback by this remark.

"I've decided to live here, Uncle Tony. That house is too big for me. I'm afraid to live alone."

"This..." Twain did not know what to say. He waved his hand, opened his mouth and closed it again.

"What? Am I not welcome, Uncle Tony?" Shania asked with a grin.

"No, that's not what I mean... I mean, uh, if you live with me, aren't you afraid of the... the reporters?" Twain asked carefully.

"Is Uncle Tony afraid that those people will know I live with you? Don't they all know about our relationship?"

What's our relationship? Twain wanted to ask, but he held back.

"I live in my Uncle Tony's house. What's wrong with that?" Shania stood up and walked up to Twain. Their faces were close together.

Twain unconsciously leaned back. "Uh, no, no. Nothing's wrong... What about your aunt in Newcastle?"

"I don't want to live there, even though my family would love me to stay there. But I don't like them. Besides, I have decided to live in Nottingham, and my parents agreed too. Do you want me to call them and ask them to tell you?" Shania pulled out her phone, and Twain hurriedly stopped her.

"No, there's no need. I believe you..." He actually wanted it to be true. "Where's your luggage?"

"I have already put it away." Shania flashed the key in her hand. When she had first lived there, Twain had given her the keys to the house. Later when she was dragged away by her parents, she did not have time to return them. And much later, when the two met up again, Twain had forgotten about it.

"What's going on with this cat?" Twain pointed to the kitten crouched between the two of them looking up curiously at both of them.

"I picked it up on the side of the road outside." Shania crouched down to pick up the kitten. "It's still young. Isn't it cute?"

Twain did not like dogs and had little interest in keeping a pet, but since Shania liked it, he could not object. He nodded. "What's its name?"

Shania turned and smiled. "I haven't named it yet, but I'd like to call him Toto."

Twain cleared his throat. "I think Jor is also a good name."

"Toto!"

"Jor!"

"Toto!"

"Jor!"

"Toto!"

Twain raised his hand. "Are you being cheeky to your elders again?"

“Hmm, you’re only older than me by twenty-something years.” Shania was not afraid.

“Only?” Twain widened his eyes. Ah, age is his eternal agony. “If your father had married and had a baby early, or your mother had had a child out of wedlock, I could have been be your father!”

“Do you want me to call you daddy?” Shania’s retort almost made Twain choke.

“Ahem, this, this, we can forget about it...”

“So what if you’re older. We’ve known each other for so long. Do we have any barriers because of our age difference?”

Twain shook his head.

“That’s just it. There are a lot of young models in my world looking for white-haired old men to be husbands. Do people find it strange?”

Twain shook his head again.

Shania smiled and looked at Twain. “So, even if I suddenly fall in love with you one day, you shouldn’t be surprised, Uncle Tony.”

Twain admitted that his heart had stopped beating. He thought he was confused and heard wrong. He very much wanted to ask, “What did you say?” But eventually his lips only quivered a little and he did not ask the question.

To cover up the awkward moment, Twain chuckled. “You’re a real jokester, Shania... Have you had dinner yet?”

“It’s not time to eat yet, Uncle Tony.” Shania hugged the kitten, and the kitten nestled comfortably in her soft and warm— Twain stopped himself with a soft groan.

As Twain looked at it, he asked, “Is it a tomcat or a female cat?”

“Toto is a male cat.”

He grimaced.

Although this cat was forcibly named “Toto” in the end, Shania’s return was the most gratifying thing for Twain. He felt it was worth it even if he lost the argument over the cat’s name.

Watching Shania having fun with the cat, Twain gently called her. “Shania.”

“Yes?” Shania was busy playing with the kitten and did not look up.

“Umm... Welcome home.”

The cat tilted its head to look at its female owner, whose face was filled with a bright smile.

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That was how Shania came to live at Twain’s house. Although she claimed she was not afraid of the media finding out that she lived here with ger Uncle Tony, no one wanted the house to be surrounded

by a swarm of paparazzi all day long with their camera lenses aimed at the windows. Shania also did not want to her life to be disturbed.

"I can't be here every day." Shania laid on the couch, eating cake. She constantly exposed her calves, which were as fair as the cream on the cake.

"Of course, you still have to work..." Twain pointed to the door.

"No, I mean my time outside of work. I don't want the press to know that I'm here."

Twain smiled. "Are you afraid of the press finding out that you live with me?"

"Are you willing to let those paparazzi block the door all day long, aim their cameras at your windows and doors, keeping an eye on your every move, with even all your... sleeping postures captured in the papers for strangers to see?" Shania popped the last small piece of cake into her mouth.

Twain hurriedly waved his hands. "I'm not a flasher."

Shania laughed happily when she saw Twain was flustered. "That's right. I don't want to disrupt your quiet life, Uncle Tony." With that, she jumped off the couch and brushed away the cake crumbs on her hands.

"It's time for me to go."

"You're not going to be here this evening?" Twain felt strange.

"Not today. I'm going to attend a dinner party this evening." Shania gave Twain a charming smile, and picked up her tiny bag. "Bye, Uncle Tony." She waved gently to Twain, turned around and opened the door to leave.

By the time Twain said goodbye, Shania had already closed the door and left.

He gave a whistle at the closed door.

Just after that whistle, the door was pushed open again. Twain thought Shania had changed her mind again and came back. He did not expect the person who came to be Dunn, who was holding a videotape.

He rolled his eyes.

"Shania was here?" Dunn asked, "I just saw her leave..."

Twain nodded, "She's moving in with me."

When he heard Twain, Dunn was shocked for a long time. He put the videotape on the table and mumbled, "It's going to get busy..."

Twain nodded. "I think what you said makes a lot of sense."

The two men glanced at each other.

Chapter 514: Kill

Twain was woken up by someone, which was a treatment he had not enjoyed for a long time.

While he was having a sweet dream and nestled within a warm bed, his blanket was suddenly lifted up and someone shouted in his ear. "Get up!"

He blinked open sleepy eyes. When he hazily saw the person standing by the bed was Shania, he was suddenly wide awake. He only wore a pair of underwear while he slept.

"Hey!" He sat up and covered his body with the blanket.

Shania had a good laugh next to him. "Uncle Tony is still in good shape. Would you like me to introduce you to modeling?"

Twain glared at her, "Why are you here? You weren't here last night."

"I came here this morning to make breakfast for you. Get up!" Shania waved her hand, and Twain saw a wooden spatula in her hand.

"You know how to cook?" Twain honestly had never seen Shania in the kitchen. He was skeptical that this girl who lived in a wealthy household could do housework.

"You'll find out when you try it." The curtains were blown open by a gust of wind, and the sun spilled on Shania's face.

Twain became even more alarmed.

He reached for his trousers and muttered, "we'd better head out to eat..." When he looked up to see that Shania had no intention of leaving, he pointed to his pants in his hands and asked, "do you intend to watch me get dressed?"

Shania pouted and ran out.

Twain jumped out of bed. Wearing only a pair of underwear, he stood by the window and gazed at the sunny morning outside. He thought everything was wonderful.

Shania had inexplicably become his tenant again and lived with him under one roof. Most of the time, there were only the two of them in the house.

He shook his head with a wry smile and began to get dressed.

After he washed up in the upstairs bathroom, Twain went downstairs and saw that two table settings had been placed on the table in the dining room, along with plates of bacon and fried eggs, glasses of juice, and an apple.

It looked presentable.

But!

Just like a mushroom, the brighter its appearance, the greater its toxicity.

Shania had sat opposite him and looked at him with a grin.

He really wanted to propose that they could just head out for breakfast together and do some shopping. All girls like to shop, right? But seeing the smile on Shania's face, he swallowed his words.

Twain still hesitated. Shania leaned over to cut the bacon for him and smear some peanut butter on it. She pushed it back towards him with a smile. "Try it, Uncle Twain!"

"Uh, Shania... Actually, you can wait for Uncle Tony to make breakfast for you. You don't have to go through all that trouble... to make breakfast for me..." Twain made his final attempt.

"It's not the same. I'd like to personally make breakfast for Uncle Tony." Shania propped her chin up with her hands, tilted her head, and looked at Twain.

Twain sighed, speared a piece of bacon with his fork, and put it into his mouth. It just tastes a little awful, that's all! I just have to try!

He misjudged. It was not a little unpalatable, it tasted terrible. He could clearly tell the kind of home environment that Shania grew up in. She had never touched these kind of household chores.

His first impulse was to spit out what was formerly known as "food," but when he looked up to see Shania's look of anticipation and heard her eagerly ask "How is it? Is it okay?", he changed his mind.

He did not dare to continue to chew and swallowed it with much difficulty. Then Twain said to Shania with a smiling face. "Not bad!"

He forced himself to eat the breakfast and not leave a scrap behind.

It was the first day after the league tournament and the team was on a break. Twain was able to have a good night's sleep but did not expect to have to eat such a meal. Watching Shania's back as she hummed a song and put away the tableware, Twain suffered in silence.

While they cleaned up after breakfast, there was a knock at the door. Twain was going to open the door himself, but Shania had already skipped over. Dunn, who stood outside, looked a little surprised to see Shania.

"Good morning, Dunn!" Shania, who was in a good mood, greeted him enthusiastically.

"Ah, good morning, Shania." Dunn entered and saw Twain, standing in the living room, smiling bitterly at him.

He understood it well.

"I've tidied up the video of yesterday's game against Wigan Athletic." He held up the videotape in his hand.

"Put it on the table." It was clear that they could not study the game video.

After Dunn put the tape down, he turned to leave. Even though Twain was keen to keep him, he was adamant. "It just occurred to me that I have something else to do, so I have to go. Goodbye, Shania."

Shania waved. "Bye, Dunn."

After the door was closed behind Dunn, only Twain and Shania were left in the house.

They suddenly quieted down, and the atmosphere was a little awkward.

Twain picked up the tape on the table and fiddled with it. He wondered what to say and do next.

“Uh, Shania, is there anywhere fun you want to go?”

“What’s fun to do in Nottingham?”

“There are the castles, the place where Robin Hood once fought...”

“It doesn’t sound interesting.” Shania pouted.

“Uh.” Twain knew that these things were not that interesting. He and Shania were not the kind of people who liked to travel around and see the sights.

“I don’t want to go anywhere.” Shania shook her head. “I’m not here to tour Nottingham. I’m here to see Uncle Tony. We don’t need to go anywhere.”

Twain was stunned by Shania’s remark.

When someone traveled to an unfamiliar city to visit their old friend whom they had not been seen in many years, the old friend would warmly arrange an itinerary for the guest, such as visiting a certain scenic spot one day, a certain landscape the next and a certain shopping street the day after... But the visitor just shook her head and said, “I came to see you, not to see the sights.”

As he thought of this, Twain smiled. “Oh, my life is very boring...”

“I don’t care.” Shania sat down on the couch, “You can do whatever you want, don’t mind me. I’ll be fine here.” With that, Shania opened a magazine and flipped through it.

Twain looked at the young girl and said nothing.

He knew that there would be more of these days in the future. It was clear that this would be Shania’s long-term base of residence.

All right, all right, just let her be as long as she pleases.

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Twain was still somewhat worried about letting Shania live in his home. Although there were no reporters lying in ambush around his house, who could guarantee that a reporter passing by would not see the world-famous model going in and out of the Nottingham Forest manager’s house?

The good thing was everything was peaceful these days. Shania also made good preparations and did not let the media discover any faults.

Only Dunn looked at Twain with a strange expression in his eyes. Twain couldn’t care less what Dunn thought — It would not be a good thing anyway.

Other than the pretty tenant at home, Twain’s life and work were normal. He led his team in training, prepared for games, and dealt with the media on occasion. Of course now, in the face of the media, he was a little nervous, for fear that the omnipotent paparazzi would suddenly ask him questions about Shania’s appearance in his house.

In fact, Twain was overly concerned.

Shania was usually very busy with work. She did not spend much time in Nottingham during a week, much less at Twain's house. Most of the time she needed to be in London, Paris, Milan or Madrid. She even worked in the United States.

If she was not in Nottingham, then Twain would receive daily text messages from Shania. Whenever she landed somewhere, she would take a lot of pictures of where she was and send them to Twain.

Thanks to modern technology and methods of communication, even two people thousands of miles apart could still chat face-to-face.

Obviously, these were the small adjustments in life. Work was still most important. Shania was hard at work, and so was Twain.

After the away win over Barcelona and the 2:2 away draw with Wigan Athletic in the 28th round of the league tournament, the Forest team had another away victory over Newcastle United on March 3rd.

A draw and a win were considered good results.

Next was another Champions League round of 16 match. This time it was on Nottingham Forest's home ground and their opponent was Barcelona.

Having won two away goals and beaten Barcelona at Camp Nou, Nottingham Forest's morale was strong. Barcelona's trip to England boded ill.

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Before the game, there was a brief press conference attended by both managers, which was to announce the preparations both teams had done for this game. The media had already plugged the results of the last game, so there was nothing interesting. The real show would be after the game.

During the interview, Twain spoke highly of Barcelona and acknowledged that they were superb and played gorgeously. He stated that they were representative of the art of football in today's football world, as was tradition at Barcelona. He paid tribute to the Barcelona club, which had always adhered to this tradition. Because in increasingly utilitarian professional football, it was not easy to stick to the art of football. The price was likely to be a few years without a championship title in a row.

These words surprised both the media and Rijkaard.

Was Tony Twain abducted by aliens? How did he suddenly change?

Rijkaard deeply considered this issue. He suspected that this was Twain throwing a smoke bomb. He deliberately praised his opponent to make the opponent relax their guard. He knew Twain was a very cunning man. The more he praised the team, the more cautious he had to be.

Just as Rijkaard decided to be wary of Twain, Twain finished praising Barcelona. He said to the media, "You see, Barcelona is so great, like the aristocrats who have inherited their titles for generations, looking grand and gorgeous, talking about art and literature every day. They are well-dressed and have countless honors that are unimaginable to other people. Is there any objection to my analogy?"

Nobody shook their head and nobody questioned it. Twain's analogy was quite suitable, and compared to most "civilian" teams, Barcelona was "noble."

Twain was glad at everyone's response. He turned his head and looked at Rijkaard, who was still confused, and smiled. "And our Nottingham Forest... compared to Barcelona, is much scruffier. We're not some kind of aristocrat, we're just a bunch of Robin Hoods."

As soon as he said this, the reporters who were quick on the uptake laughed at once. At first, everyone wondered why Twain would deliberately compliment Barcelona. Was it to deliberately show weakness to make the other party relax its vigilance? Now the answer was revealed.

What did Robin Hood do? He was dedicated to stealing from the aristocrats.

Twain was not showing weakness. This was clearly a provocation and a threat.

Rijkaard was not an idiot. He was aware of Robin Hood. Most of the reporters at the press conference were tickled by Twain's remarks, even if those who did not react at first, also laughed after they listened to the explanation. The Dutchman felt humiliated.

After the disruption from Twain, there was nothing else to do at the press conference. Rijkaard and Twain parted in discord. They would settle the feud on the field.

Twain was not going to let him get what he wanted.

Advancing to the Champions League final this season was his minimum requirement and he would not allow Barcelona to become his stumbling block.

If they are a stumbling block, then I'll kick them off!

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The next day at the City Ground, the stadium sat the highest number of spectators since it had been remodeled after the 1996 UEFA European Championship. The stadium, which could accommodate up to 30,000 people, was full. There were still countless fans lingering outside in the square. They did not want to leave, hoping to wait until there was a cancelled ticket.

When Platini drew this opponent, the Forest fans collectively looked forward to the match. They wanted to give Barcelona one of the grandest "welcomes" at home. They wanted to make the Barcelona players remember the atmosphere of this game for years to come.

Fat John stood in the front row of the grandstand and turned around to holler at the diehard fans — it actually sounded more like howling — and yelled, "guys, this is our chance! Two weeks ago, these Barcelona scumbags pressed on us on their turf because they had more people. It is time for our revenge! We'll show them the tradition of our English fans! Let these people see who the real fans are!"

"Sing louder, don't stop!"

"Shout our chant, don't let the voices of those Barcelona people drown us!"

The atmosphere at the scene was brought up by the fans in the stands and it became louder and more widespread. From one stand to the entire stadium, all the Nottingham Forest people sang loudly and

shouted their chant. The game had not yet begun, and they had already made the Barcelona players fully feel the away game.

They could not hear the cries from their own fans or see them. There was only a sea of red as far as the eye could see, like a bloody sea with furious waves slamming against the railings on the stands. It appeared as if they would break through the obstruction and come pouring down to turn the green field into a red ocean.

Camp Nou was a supersized stadium that could accommodate up to 90,000 people. With 90,000 people shouting in unison, the momentum was admittedly powerful. But the smaller City Ground stadium had its advantages. The narrow space shortened the distance between the players and the fans. Their every abuse and song sounded as if they were in their ears. It not only hit these people's ears, but also struck their hearts.

They also needed to shout even if they were talking face to face, otherwise they could hear clearly at all. They had never seen this situation even at the home of their nemesis, Real Madrid.

It was said that the atmosphere in a stadium with the English fans was feverish and indeed it was worthy of its reputation...

However, now was not the time to exclaim about this.

Twain stood on the sidelines and was pleased with the home atmosphere. It was said that the fans were the 12th player on the field and the fans who gave this performance truly deserved it. He was grateful that God had given himself such a group of loyal fans that would give him a nudge at such a critical moment.

He suddenly felt like he was a general, commanding a magnificent army with thousands of men and horses, destroying a powerful enemy and capturing territory. The men gathered with a wave of his hands.

—Your Majesty, kill, don't kill!

—Your Majesty, kill, don't kill! Kill, don't kill!

—Kill, don't kill! Kill, don't kill!! Kill, don't kill!!!

Twain reached out his right hand and yanked.

“Kill!”

Chapter 515: Thirty-Two Seconds of Heaven and Hell

This situation in this game was very simple for Rijkaard or Tony Twain.

Without too many calculated and ever-changing complicated tactics, the situation was clear — Barcelona needed to attack and score in the away game and they had to make sure they won the game. Only then could they qualify to advance.

By all accounts, if Nottingham Forest lost to Barcelona 0:1, they would also be guaranteed access to the top eight, but this clearly would not sit well Twain's character. A team with this kind of mentality would surely perish in the end. He used to be a Chinese football fan. That kind of thing had happened so many times to the China football team that it had become a cliché. Therefore, Nottingham Forest's mission was simple: win the game at all costs and advance to the top eight.

This was Barcelona's away game and Rijkaard did not choose to use defensive counterattack. He knew that Twain would play conservatively at his own home ground and use the defensive counterattack which he was best at, to deal with him. They would lure Barcelona out for the offense and then wait for a sneak attack. The problem was clear, but what could the solution be? The option to choose was out of his hands. The home defeat in the first leg had pushed him to the brink. Damned if they attacked and damned if they did not.

Amid the endless boos and abuse in the City Ground stadium, Barcelona tragically launched a frenetic attack on the Forest team's goal.

Nottingham Forest had the upper hand. Twain kept the team firmly in defense and then took the opportunity to fight back. Over the years, no matter what, he had not given up on establishing the requirement of "defense first" for the team. This instilled requirement had saved his team and him in many critical moments.

He used to like to watch offensive football, with the teams attacking each other and explosive matches, but that was because he was a fan. Now that he was the manager, he needed to take responsibility for his team and for the fans who supported him. He did not have Professor Wenger's talent to let the footballers play beautiful partnerships and still be able to win. Therefore, he chose the most utilitarian way to win. He did not care what kind of blackened name he had to bear. He had never been the type that cared what other people said.

The defensive counterattack, stabilization of the defense first and defense were the basis of offense, like laying a foundation to build a house. Without defense, there could be no offense. The logic was actually very simple. Why were there so many people in the world who could not understand it? It was understandable that the fans did not comprehend it. But surely, a manager would understand, wouldn't he?

After Barcelona's re-emergence due to their offense over the past few years, Rijkaard seemed to forget about defense. Most of the time, there was not a defensive player in Barcelona's midfield. When they competed, their tactics always relied on their own strong offense to score a few goals and make their opponents quickly lose their fighting spirit. Then the game would fall into their orbit.

Their powerful offense and gorgeous star player lineup could make most teams lose their fighting spirit when they went up against them. However, once Rijkaard's strategy became familiar and was studied by a growing number of rivals, he found it harder to play as the season progressed. Why was that? Because his tactics lacked change. Once the opponent studied them through, Barcelona would face great danger. Everyone realized that Barcelona was not the incarnation of the invincible battle god. Even though they had many star players, it did not guarantee they would always emerge victorious. They also had their weaknesses that could not be overcome. What was even more lethal was that their defense was not

much better than Real Madrid's. As long as their tactics were on the right track, they could beat Barcelona.

After La Liga had entered the second half of this season's tournament, Barcelona faced growing resistance, and their previously time-tested offensive tactics had become increasingly useless in the face of their old rivals. However, Rijkaard was unaware of the crisis was slowly approaching him and his team. He believed that Barcelona was currently progressing at a high speed on the right track. He was the only one. The Barcelona players, fans, and out-of-touch directors thought so, too.

The saying "life springs from sorrow and calamity; death comes from ease and pleasure" was a perfect match for the future Barcelona. No — the saying applied to all successful teams in the world.

Twain did not have to worry about this as the Forest team was still not in what was considered an "easy" environment.

As mentioned earlier, Barcelona's biggest weakness was defense, and Twain intended to make the most of that during this game.

Nottingham Forest's most powerful ability was defense. Their kind of defense did not depend on one player or a defensive line made up of four defenders. The Forest team's defense was the entire team. On the contrary, Barcelona's defense comprised only of four defenders and one goalkeeper. The others were not responsible for any defensive tasks.

Currently on their home ground, Twain's strategy was to get the team to compact the defense and lure the Barcelona attacking players out, and then take the opportunity to counterattack, which was to pinpoint against Barcelona's weak defense. Thuram was already old. Even though Zambrotta was an all-rounder, he had not adapted to Barcelona and Spanish football since he went to Barcelona. Valdés' performance had many ups and downs. Sometimes his inexplicably low-level mistakes would ruin the team's ninety minutes of effort. Puyol, the only player on the defensive line who could undertake the task, was helplessly alone and found it difficult to achieve anything without support.

Twain took aim at that, and the frontline deployed Anelka, a striker who played rapid counterattacks and worked as van Nistelrooy's partner. He hoped to use his speed and skills to deal a fatal blow to Barcelona.

For the game, van der Vaart replaced Arteta in the starting lineup. Twain needed his long shots and organizational ability on the offense. Franck Ribéry was still on the left flank while Aaron Lennon replaced Ashley Young on the right flank.

For the defense, the left-back, Gareth Bale, was replaced by Leighton Baines who was better at defense. The players remained the same for the rest of the positions.

Barcelona repeatedly launched fierce offensives against the Forest team's ground, but Nottingham Forest held fast with the support from its overall defensive tactics.

Barcelona dominated the game most of the time, but it was all bark and no bite. They only had a handful of shots that threatened the goal. Although the Forest team was shown to be at a disadvantage in all the technical statistics except for fouls, a few of their counterattacks were quite threatening, and they made the Barcelona people break out in a cold sweat each time.

Rijkaard certainly knew that it was dangerous for his goal area to be struck like that. But what could he do? Learn to be solid in defense like the Forest team and then strike when the opportunity arose? In that case, Tony Twain would be happy because he could hold the game up with no worries and waste game time. A draw would be considered a failure for Barcelona.

Rijkaard did not have the upper hand. He had no alternative but to attack desperately in hope of scoring a goal soon and breaking the deadlock. Our defense is terrible? Well, if we concede a few goals, the frontline will just score more goals to beat that number!

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Before coming to Nottingham, Rijkaard and the entire Barcelona team did a careful study on how to deal with George Wood's defense. They envisioned several plans of action in response to someone being completely frozen by George Wood.

But this time, Twain did not ask George Wood to specifically mark a certain player. His mission was... freedom in his movements.

He could go wherever he was needed, and he would provide support wherever the situation was dangerous.

Wood's stamina was good, and he could run quickly. He could run back and forth in the backfield, and there was no worry that he would suffer physically and collapse because of muscle cramps.

Rijkaard originally wanted the trio of strikers to get rid of George Wood with frequent changes of positions, but he did not expect Twain to let Wood play defense in the backfield with no fixed position, rendering Rijkaard's strategy completely ineffective.

Barcelona was up against an immovable defense, which would not change due to their frequent switch in positions. The defensive power they faced on the flanks and in the middle were the same, which was frustrating.

To put it bluntly, the purpose of offense was to use one's positional play to find the holes in the opponent's defense, and then to take advantage of these holes to create an opportunity for an attack. The current situation was that no matter how Barcelona passed, cut, or positioned, the Forest team's defense stood as if it were a mountain and could not be moved.

The first half came to an end. The 0:0 score did not satisfy the neutral fans, but it made the Forest fans happy.

During the halftime interval, Twain gave high praise to the team's defense, but he also asked the team's offense to be stronger and to not let a single chance for a counterattack to slip. As long as they had another chance, they could eliminate Barcelona!

Meanwhile over on Barcelona's side, Rijkaard was not satisfied with the team's offense. There had been many chances within the last forty-five minutes, but they did not score, which was letting down the name of Barcelona. They had to step up their offense in the second half and not slack off on their offense. The reason Forest had not scored until now was because Barcelona's offense had put a lot of pressure on them and prevented them from taking care of their offense. Once Barcelona could no longer sustain that kind of pressure on its offense, the Forest team would have a chance.

Anyway, it was impossible for Barcelona to stop now.

After the start of the second half, the Forest team still held fast to their ground to challenge Barcelona. Barcelona also did not change its intent to attack.

As time went on, Rijkaard rose from his seat and walked to the sidelines. The players could hardly hear his shouts in the noisy stadium. He tried to remind the players to keep pressing. As a result, he was immediately inundated with boos. He could not even hear himself, let alone the players. He could only wave the players over and brief them close to the technical area whenever there was a dead ball.

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If Barcelona's bombardment and Forest's tight defense could be counted as a sort of balance, then in the 68th minute of the game, the balance was finally broken.

Barcelona organized an effective attack, which, through a series of passes, finally ripped the Forest team's impenetrable defensive line open and exposed a gaping hole.

Ronaldinho once again created a diversion, pretending to break through, but unexpectedly passed the ball through that crack. Eto'o moved quickly and received the ball behind the Forest team's defensive line. The Forest players thought Eto'o was offside, but the assistant referee did not raise the flag.

"How can that not be an offside, you bastard!" Twain bristled and jumped off the field.

George Wood chased him with all his might, trying to stop this goal.

He was still too late in the end. Eto'o kicked his foot to shoot before Wood could intercept the ball.

At that moment, Twain's heart almost stopped beating. He was not the only one. The boos in the City Ground stadium seemed to stop as everyone held their breath and stared at the football flying through the air.

Even the Barcelona fans, whether at the stadium or in Barcelona, were afraid to take their eyes off the ball.

The football flew from Eto'o's foot and evaded George Wood's feet which came to tackle and tore past van der Sar's incoming hands to fly straight into the goal behind him.

Was it going to score?

There was a crash and the football hit the goal beam, only to smash towards the ground, bounce up again, and fly back out. Edwin van der Sar's reacted quickly the second time. He jumped up and plucked the football from the air.

Did the ball go in or not?

The Barcelona players jumped with their arms raised high at the first instance to celebrate the goal. Even Eto'o ran to the corner flag with open arms, Ronaldinho, Messi and the others close behind.

The Catalan commentators also did not wait to roar "GOOOOOOOOOAL—!"

The televised broadcast also showed captions that Barcelona was at 1:0 against Nottingham Forest. It looked like this ball went in.

But... but!

The ecstatic expression on Eto'o's face suddenly froze on the television camera. He pushed Ronaldinho aside and looked at the assistant referee standing next to them in puzzlement.

After the goal, the assistant referee was supposed to run to the center line, while the referee would whistle and point to the center circle to show that the goal was valid.

However, this time, the assistant referee did not run. What about the referee? The Barcelona people turned their heads to look at the referee, only to see a heart-stopping scene—

The Nottingham Forest players had already taken the football to the center circle and were clearly playing their customary quick counterattack...

The referee did not stop this act, but ran along with it. What did this mean? It meant that the Forest team did not foul, and Barcelona did not score a goal!

Puyol had wanted to run up to celebrate, but halfway through, he saw Edwin van der Sar throw the football forward and van der Vaart launch a quick counterattack immediately after he received the ball.

The Barcelona captain ran halfway before he hurriedly withdrew and shouted at his teammates to return to defend. Unfortunately, the field was so noisy that his teammates, far away in front of the corner flag, could not hear it at all.

The more responsive Barcelona players began to turn away from the confused Eto'o to return to defend.

Van der Vaart knew he was slow at dribbling and it was bad for times like this, so instead of dribbling more than necessary, he passed the football to Anelka, who could run faster.

"Ah... This is a surprising turn of events. Eto'o's shot did not result in a goal. Instead, it gave Nottingham Forest a chance to fight back! Because the football wasn't out of bounds, it is not a dead ball. Barcelona is in big trouble!"

The commentator was right about that Barcelona was now in big trouble.

Because they had been busy celebrating the goal, most of the Barcelona players were not in their positions. The Forest team's counterattack was also very swift. They completely did not give Barcelona the opportunity to regroup for their attack. With two or three passes, the ball reached Anelka's feet. Once the French striker got the ball, he immediately sped up and dashed towards Barcelona's goal.

After he forced a breakthrough by speeding by Puyol, Anelka was in the penalty area. Valdés could only abandon the goal area to strike, which eased the way for what happened next.

Anelka made to look like he was going to pass the ball in order to fool Valdés into leaving the goal. Once he opened up the angle, he did not hesitate to shoot, and the football unsurprisingly flew into the net.

The City Ground stadium finally stopped booing and cheered instead.

This time, the whistle finally rang as the referee confirmed that the goal was valid.

From the moment the Barcelona players thought they had scored to the moment Nottingham Forest really scored a goal, only thirty-two seconds had passed. Everything happened too fast. Many people had not fully reacted yet.

Rijkaard, who had wanted to jump with open arms to celebrate the goal, now looked on disbelievingly at everything that happened on the field with his head in his hands.

Twain would have been upset, but he was now jumping up and down, cheering endlessly.

The “before and after” in the two managers was a clear illustration of the two team’s situations.

“This... is so dramatic. Who would have thought that Barcelona would be so happy with the goal that no one even confirmed if the ball had gone in. Nottingham Forest was also really cunning and did not give Barcelona any chances. Their quick counterattack was so well-played that everyone was left speechless.”

The people of Barcelona snapped back to attention and surrounded the referee to protest. They were convinced that Eto’o’s shot must have been a goal.

In that case, did it really go in? Thanks to modern technology, the audience could watch the replay clearly.

The slow motion of Eto’o’s kick began to play repeatedly on the television screen: The football hit the crossbar and rebounded. The next scene was the key: was the football inside the goal line when it landed?

The slow-motion scene played over and over again, from many different angles, so that everyone could see more clearly. This was not the unresolved case in the 1966 World Cup final; the slow-motion frames were clear. The football landed outside the goal line, so it was not a goal.

No matter how unwilling they were, Barcelona could only accept the result. They were deceived by their own ideas, and they suffered a big loss.

“It only took thirty-two seconds for Barcelona to go from heaven to hell. Judging from the lost look in their eyes, this huge drop was really unacceptable.”

The blow from this goal was not as simple as being behind by a point. They had thought they were in the lead and, instead, it became their opponent taking the lead in a flash. They could have equalized the total score and now they were two goals behind. In order to reverse the game, they had to score at least two goals to equalize the total score so that both teams had the same number of goals going into overtime.

However, with the Barcelona players in their current state of mind, could they really achieve that?

As for Nottingham Forest, Twain “graciously accepted” the advantage that the Forest team had gotten without ceremony. After taking the lead, the Forest team’s tactics remained the same. They still adhered to playing defensive counterattack. The trailing Barcelona’s attack would naturally become more frenetic, and the Forest team’s defensive counterattack could be employed more easily.

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The rest of the game continued as such. Overly eager to equalize the score, the Barcelona offense became unruly. The star players all intended to rely on their personal skills to save the losing battle. As a result nothing was gained except time wasted.

On the contrary, the Forest team's counterattack was sharp, which kept Valdés busy.

In the 85th minute, the Forest team once again scored a goal via van Nistelrooy through a quick counterattack into Barcelona's goal, which declared the end of the game.

"The game's over! After one hundred and eighty minutes of heavy fighting in two games, Barcelona, the winner of the last season's Champions League, was defeated by the last runner-up, Nottingham Forest. To be honest, the result was not at all surprising after watching the first game. Only the first goal of this game came in a dramatic fashion."

"Tony Twain completed his vengeance, and Nottingham Forest not only eliminated Barcelona, but also dominated in both games!"

On the television camera, Twain was seen standing on the sidelines, holding up his arms to wave to the Forest fans in the stands, thanking them for their support. A bright smile bloomed on his face like a flower in the sun, and this time he did not rush to shake hands with Rijkaard first. Compared to shaking hands to show respect to his opponent, Twain felt it was more important to thank his supporters.

George Wood walked over and saw Twain, who was thanking the fans. He had intended to directly walk past to go back to the locker room, only to be stopped by Twain who said, "George, how did you feel about the final?"

"Unfortunately, there's no trophy to be won," Wood said.

Twain chuckled happily, "We'll soon have that." He extended his hands and counted. "There will be two games for the top eight to become top four and another two game for the top four to become the final two. And then, the final. With five more games to play, you will be able to pick up the trophy with your own hands."

Wood looked at Twain's outstretched five fingers and said nothing. He just turned to walk into the tunnel. Twain raised his hands to continue to thank the fans who called out the name of Nottingham Forest in the stands.

He clenched his fists and pumped them hard in front of the fans.

Those fans who were unwilling to leave the stadium shouted along with Twain's gesture.

Looking at the fans' faces contorted with excitement, Twain smiled contentedly.

Chapter 516: Almost

As the winner, Twain received more attention than usual at the post-match press conference, while Rijkaard sat next to him and watched expressionlessly as he answered the reporters' ceaseless questions.

He used to be familiar with the setting, but the person who answered the reporters' question non-stop was usually Rijkaard himself, while the man sitting next to him in silence was Tony Twain.

That was after last season's Champions League final.

At that time, Twain had just given away the silver medal. Everyone thought that with his character, he would not attend the final press conference, which had almost been the case. When the press conference began, only Rijkaard was there to answer questions, and Tony Twain's seat was empty. Halfway through the press conference, however, Twain suddenly entered the venue and sat in his seat with a dark face as he watched the beaming Rijkaard answer questions.

Rijkaard thinking of Twain as ungracious was due to the end of that press conference. Shouldn't the loser congratulate the winner? Even if it was insincere, someone's behavior also reflected on their personality and would win everyone's favorable impression.

Twain had no such intention. He bluntly stated that the championship title should have been given to the team with the best performance, and the best performing team was Nottingham Forest. He also added, "I'm sorry that Barcelona could only beat a Nottingham Forest team of ten players."

This remark maddened Rijkaard, who still brooded over it to this day. That was why he had been unhappy with Tony Twain. Rijkaard did not like to be confrontational with people and was a very low-key person. If Twain had not repeatedly insulted his team, why would he be bothered?

Unexpectedly, he and Twain actually swapped places in less than a year. Twain became the victor, and he became the reluctant loser.

He suddenly understood Twain's mood — at the moment, he very much wanted to get away.

Regrettably, he was not Twain and could display that sort of "graceless" behavior.

Since he was unable to do it, he could only continue to be here to accept this disguised form of insult.

Twain certainly knew what it felt like to be a loser. While he enjoyed being in the media's limelight, he was also laughing internally. "Every dog has its day, Mr. Rijkaard."

Barcelona may have considered losing this game a disaster, but in the long run, it might be a good thing.

Real Madrid had a few lean and painful years. The current season, they had brought in the top-notch manager, Fabio Capello, and Real Madrid's revival was around the corner. Barcelona was currently experiencing the pain that Real Madrid had had. The "dynasty of the second Dream Team" was a deformed product. With only a Champions League title and two leagues titles under its belt, how could it be labelled a "dynasty"?

Twain did not see it that way. If a team really wanted to build a dynasty, that was not enough.

If the loss of today's game could calm Barcelona's upper levels down and make them rethink the road ahead, then the failure would become a valuable asset. On the other hand, if the people at Barcelona could not see that and just focused on the outcome of the game, then they would suffer a lot of pain in the future.

It was up to Rijkaard and Laporta on whether or not they could realize that they were walking on the same old path as Real Madrid's "Galácticos." As for the outcome of that situation, even though Twain had joined the football world before it, he could picture it perfectly in his mind.

Sometimes he thought it was rather strange. Real Madrid's lessons were right in front of them to be learned. Were Barcelona's top people fools? They could not see it and were still doing their utmost to go down that path. Or was the lure of commercial interests so powerful that they would pursue it at all costs?

His defeat of Real Madrid at the Bernabéu stadium disheartened Florentino so much that it directly led to his resignation. The "era of the Galácticos" in Real Madrid came to an end. Could this time end Barcelona's illusory "dynasty of the second Dream Team?"

He looked forward to it.

Finally, a reporter threw a question at Rijkaard, who had nothing to say about their elimination from the Champions League. It was a fact that they lost to Nottingham Forest. What made it worse for him was being destroyed in both home and away games. He very much wanted to be like Twain now and stubbornly refused to concede defeat.

But if he had really done so, wouldn't he be very ungracious?

All the microphones were placed next to his lips, and everyone's eyes were on him. Even Tony Twain gave him a sideways glance. He had to say something.

Rijkaard cleared his throat and slowly approached the microphones.

He intended to act more graciously. But when he was about to speak, he heard Twain's laughter coming from the side. There was a sudden swoosh of anger in his heart.

I lost to you, but it doesn't mean I have to accept your insults!

"We've lost, and there's nothing more to say. No one is willing to be eliminated. Also, I'm looking forward to next season's Champions League. I really want Barcelona to be picked with Nottingham Forest again."

With that, he got up and left. This was the first time he'd ever left a press conference early as a manager.

Twain looked at Rijkaard's unbending back, shrugged his shoulders, and whistled.

While Rijkaard had not yet left, he said to the astonished media, "look, when it was eleven players against eleven players, Barcelona couldn't beat Nottingham Forest. I'm not talking big."

Rijkaard, who was just about to walk out the door, suddenly paused for a moment, and then quickly continued walking.

"Well, ladies and gentlemen, I don't want to do a one-man show." Twain also stood up, "Goodbye." He gave a wave and followed behind Rijkaard.

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A few days later, various media reports were still making a fuss about this game.

Twain's few remarks were quoted prominently. His feud with Rijkaard looked more irreconcilable with the media adding fuel to the fire.

He did not know if it would be possible for them to sit together for a drink when they all retired from their coaching positions one day and said goodbye to the world of football altogether.

He did not hate Rijkaard at all, but they were currently serving for their own respective teams. They would naturally consider things from whichever position they sat in. When he had been a fan, he did not even dare imagine he would be the arch rival with one of the Netherlands Three Musketeers.

Mourinho, Benítez, Ferguson, Wenger, Capello... These people, whom he liked or respected in the first place, had become rivals and enemies. This was truly a wonderful world.

Therefore, Rijkaard was not the first enemy of his coaching career and would not be the last.

With his obnoxious character, it would be surprising if he did not have enemies.

The only thing that pleased the Barcelona people was that on that night after the game, their nemesis, Real Madrid, was also tragically eliminated. This news slightly settled the hearts of the Barcelona people.

However, they did not know that this was the beginning of Barcelona's nightmare...

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The Forest team scoring a major victory did not mean that they could breathe a sigh of relief and celebrate. Tony Twain and his Nottingham Forest team would have more opponents to face.

Just after the Champions League game against Barcelona, Tony Twain would lead the team to London and their opponent was not just any team. It was one of Twain's other enemy—Mourinho-led Chelsea.

Mourinho had been frustrated this season. He wanted to lead the team to defend their league title for the third year in a row but had been strongly crushed by the resurgent Manchester United. They had been suppressed to the second place on the league table. Nottingham Forest had been lying in wait behind them like a tiger watching its prey. Mourinho certainly would not think that Twain would kindly let him take a breather. If his team was not careful, the others could catch up with them and swallow them, bones and all.

Professional football was brutal. No matter how famous someone was as a manager, once the team's results were dissatisfactory, they would soon be forgotten.

As the end of the season approached, everyone had to start to power up, whether it was to maintain their position in the league or to compete for the title. Twain was well aware the road ahead was perilous, so he made full preparations in Nottingham.

Every time he went to Stamford Bridge, he and his team faced a flood of deafening boos. He had just let Rijkaard and his team taste this and now it was their turn to taste it.

The tactics that Twain had developed for the team were simple — defend to the end. They had to defend continuously in the away game. If they could hold fast to one point, everything would be okay.

He did not demand three points, because as a visiting player, one point was a victory to him. With eight rounds left in the league, Chelsea had six fewer points than Manchester United. They could only keep the pressure on Manchester United and still hope to turn the tables at the last minute by taking down Nottingham Forest.

If Mourinho could not get three points, what kind of state would he be in?

Would he fly into a fury? Would he turn and leave abruptly with a dark face?

Twain looked forward to playing against Chelsea and was particularly looking forward to seeing his “old friend,” Mourinho.

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Stamford Bridge was full, which was the case every time Chelsea and Nottingham Forest played. Due to the feud between the two managers, both teams attracted a lot of media and fan attention.

They wanted to see the two managers oppose each other measure for measure on the field, on the sidelines, and during and after the game. After Ferguson and Wenger, the media were delighted that such a pairing had emerged from the English Premier League again, since they had been worried that when Ferguson retired, there would be no gossip or interesting topics to report about.

Before the game, a reporter unkindly brought up the record that embarrassed Mourinho — the losing record he had maintained against Tony Twain’s Nottingham Forest while he helmed Chelsea.

It made Mourinho furious. His face immediately darkened, and he attempted to refuse to answer the question.

The media watched his unhappiness with delight. But if he did not answer the question, the media would also not get any valuable information, so they tried every means in hopes that he would answer it.

Eventually, he was forced into a corner, and Mourinho gloomily said, “I never pay any mind to those records. Arsenal had set a record of forty-nine consecutive unbeaten games. Did they finally win that season’s trophy? I do not deny that my team has not beaten his team. But you also cannot deny that the past two seasons’ league titles belonged to my team and not Nottingham Forest. Of course, you can turn this question around and ask Tony Twain. You can ask him why his team can stay unbeaten against Chelsea and not even win one championship title?”

These remarks were so lethal because he had cleverly turned the reporters’ attention in a different direction.

What was more important: to maintain an unbeaten record or win a championship title? Any fool knew.

As a Nottingham Forest fan and a reporter from Nottingham, Pierce Brosnan felt the need to take the man down a notch, so he stepped forward and said, “but Mr. Mourinho, you can’t deny that Tony Twain has done well these two seasons as a newly promoted team and a team manager who had been underestimated before...”

Mourinho interrupted him and nodded. “That’s right. He almost won the league title, almost won the Championship League. Unfortunately, in my football credo, ‘almost’ is the same as failure.”

His remark left Pierce Brosnan speechless. A championship title was the only measure of success in professional football, and since the Forest team had not won a championship title, they had to admit that they were inferior to Chelsea.

Brosnan was not someone who was eloquent enough to debate with others, so he grudgingly accepted his defeat.

It was not the end of the matter. Mourinho had left the interview area after that, but a few minutes later, Twain got off the bus.

Someone relayed Mourinho's remarks to Twain in the hope of seeing Twain's reaction.

Twain listened very carefully to the reporter's recap and nodded with a laugh instead. "Mourinho's wording is very interesting. Almost won the league title, almost won the Championship League. This is a good wording for the loser to conceal his failure. I am delighted to play against Chelsea because we will be fortunate to have Mr. Mourinho have a taste of 'almost' winning the league title at the end of the season."

With that, he smiled and waved goodbye to the other reporters and quickly entered the visitors' locker room.

Brosnan looked at Twain's back and sighed. It turns out I do not have to take my own shots to defend against an injustice. There's a more powerful character here.

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When the players returned from their warm up on the field, Twain had already been waiting in the locker room for a long time.

"Defense." When everyone settled down, he clapped his hands and said, "if we want to fight to the death against Chelsea using offense, believe me, guys, it will be our death instead. I'll briefly analyze the situation for you. Chelsea is in desperate need of a victory and three points to catch up with Manchester United. With eight rounds left in the league, it's better for them to win every game. A six-point difference is not a small gap. We just have to force Chelsea to a draw in this game and it will be a big blow to Mourinho. Playing defense in an away game is the safest strategy, anyway, but if you have a chance to score, don't let it go either." Twain shook his finger. "A goal can overturn everything. But I want you to keep in mind that under any circumstances, defense comes first. Make sure we don't concede the ball first, and then think about how to get into their goal!"

Just as Twain said in the locker room, Mourinho had to win the game. He sent the strongest attack lineup to play. Drogba, Shevchenko, Ballack, Lampard and all the other attacking players who could be deployed.

In response to this situation, Twain used the 4-5-1 defensive counterattack lineup to counteract.

He used five midfielders to deal with Chelsea's world-class midfield.

The effect was quite good. Most of the game, both teams had a closely-fought contest in the midfield. The Forest team's tight defense and completely shameless roguish play made Chelsea miserable. Both

teams' mistakes kept increasing. The Forest team often lost the ball due to mistakes and Chelsea made errors during passing immediately after they got the ball which sent the football back to their opponent.

The Forest team was not afraid of making mistakes, but Chelsea could not afford to make mistakes. They wasted and squandered their chances to attack.

The game was a mess. There was no high quality offense from either side. The Forest team did not intend to play any high quality attack and use beautiful collaboration to pass the football into the Chelsea goal. Chelsea was keen to lay a high quality offense but were always blocked by the Forest team's disruptive play at a critical time.

That was how the game passed.

Obviously, there were still a few chances. Chelsea created three of the most threatening opportunities in the game, especially one before the end of the game. After a series of amazing teamwork, Chelsea managed to rip apart the Forest team's defensive line. But Drogba's last kick overshot the crossbar because he used too much strength. That nearly caused Mourinho to hurl his suit jacket to the ground, while Twain heaved a sigh of relief and nearly collapsed against his chair when he saw the football fly out. If the opponent managed to get a goal in at the last minute, his team's ninety minutes of efforts would be all in vain.

Ninety minutes later, Mourinho's face was as cold as the South Pole when he looked at the 0:0 scoreboard and listened to the final whistle ring.

As if he had been given new life, Twain beamed. He took the initiative to walk towards Mourinho with his hand outstretched as he said, "my friend, you almost beat us." He deliberately highlighted the word "almost." "It's a pity that it was only just 'almost'."

Mourinho did not want Twain to be too smug. He knew that if he looked frustrated or angry now, it would be what the jerk wanted to see most, so he definitely would not let him get his way.

As a result, he plastered a smile on his face and said, "there are still seven rounds left in the league tournament, Mr. Twain, but one thing is certain. Do you want to hear it?"

Twain made to look like he was all ears.

"My team still has a chance to compete for the title, and your team won't even have a chance to 'almost' win the league title."

Twain's face changed when he heard this, but he quickly returned to normal and said to Mourinho with a laugh, "then I wish your team good luck and strive to 'almost get the league title' as soon as possible."

The two grim-looking man let go of each other's hands at the same time and turned to leave the field.

Brosnan saw this scene at the side and shook his head. The two of them...

Chapter 517: A Good Opponent

Forced into a tie, the point difference between Chelsea and Manchester United widened to eight points. With eight rounds left in the league, these eight points were not easy to make up.

The only good news for Mourinho was the competition for the final eight rounds. Manchester United would be hosting Nottingham Forest in the thirty-third round, followed closely by the thirty-fourth round where Manchester United would play against Chelsea in an away game.

These two games had a bearing on the survival of both teams. If Manchester United could score two consecutive wins, then Manchester United's points advantage would widen to eleven points with four rounds left and Chelsea would almost only have a chance of winning in theory.

But if Manchester United lost to Nottingham Forest and then to Chelsea, then the point difference between the two teams would likely to narrow to two points. An outcome of a game would lead to Chelsea's turnaround.

The league tournament officially entered the home stretch. Now that the championship title was within sights, no one was going to show any mercy.

Nottingham Forest was not in a secure position either, so it was unlikely that Forest was expected to make a big reversal when they played against Manchester United.

The point difference between Arsenal and the Forest team was only six points. Liverpool and Forest only had a seven points gap. This difference was not wide enough to make Twain rest easy.

Liverpool's home win over Arsenal in the following thirty-first round had squeezed Arsenal to the fifth spot in the league tournament and the Reds remained at fourth.

Nottingham Forest beat Bolton Wanderers 1:0 after much difficulty in the away game. Manchester United won big at home with 4:1 over Blackburn Rovers while Chelsea defeated Watford by 1:0.

Several teams had won, except for the luckless Arsenal.

The situation had not changed, and Twain had to temporarily pull his attention off the league tournament and cast it towards another battleground.

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The UEFA Champions League quarter finals was about to kick off. Compared to several other teams, the Forest team's luck was exceptionally good. Their opponent is one of the weakest team, Eindhoven, another one of Twain's "old acquaintances."

Eindhoven had loaned the Chinese full back, Sun Xiang, for three months from Shanghai Greenland Shenhua F.C..

Before he transferred, Sun Xiang was on loan to Eindhoven in January. At that time, he was hailed as the first Chinese man in the Champions League because he represented the team in the UEFA Champions League.

The moniker was quite good, but Twain was sad. The Japanese and South Korean players had long appeared in the Champions League. Park Ji-sung had even played as the main force on a powerhouse team like Manchester United. And the Chinese player? So much publicity was created for just one

appearance in the Champions League. The gap between Japan and South Korea and Chinese football could no longer be described with a few words.

However, in the world he was now in, the moniker “the first Chinese man in Champions League” had been given to Sun Jihai.

Having been on the Forest team for more than two years, Sun Jihai really benefited from the advanced football environment. He had access to the most advanced training and was suddenly significantly above everyone else when he was back on the China national team. This also caused another kind of trouble. On the national team, Sun Jihai and his other teammates had trouble cooperating. Coach Zhu Guanghu agonized over the matter. It was evident that Sun Jihai’s standard was very good. But his cooperation with the team had always been a problem. The AFC Asian Cup was the upcoming summer. It had become Zhu Guanghu’s secret worry whether to use Sun Jihai or not. The football fans clamored for the use of Sun Jihai, but Zhu Guanghu was a little hesitant.

Putting aside these matters regarding the national team, in Nottingham Forest’s game against Eindhoven, the evil originator of this hype “the China Derby in the Champions League” publicized by the Chinese media was not just anyone but Twain’s “old friend,” Tang Jing.

Twain had always detested that type of meaningless hype. Tang Jing did not even know if Sun Xiang would appear in Eindhoven’s big list when she had eagerly pitched the stunt like the “China Derby.” Furthermore, he had not stated that Sun Jihai would be on the starting list of the game on any occasion. He very much wanted to see what Tang Jing was going to say if Sun Xiang did not even make it to the big list or did not get a minute of playing time.

Even while Eindhoven was the weakest out of the eight teams, Twain did not take it lightly. He and the coaching staff did plenty of research before and it happened to come in handy at this time.

After Dunn joined the coaching unit, Twain began to value the pre-match preparations and Dunn was clearly better than Twain at that side of things. The coaching unit would study every detail about the opponent, and then analyze the opponent’s tactics based on the information and details to develop multiple contingency plans. They would target their tactics according to their opponents.

After everything was ready, Twain took the team to the Netherlands.

The Eindhoven manager, Koeman, decided to use offense at home with the Forest team. He certainly knew how his fellow countryman, Rijkaard, was defeated, but his pride prevented him from playing like Tony Twain. Defend to the end? There would be boos thrown at him in the stadium. Dutch fans were idealists who would rather see their team use gorgeous offense and lose the game rather than get an ugly win by defending to the death.

Twain was delighted to be able to meet such an opponent in the quarter final. He very much wanted the opponent to play offense against him.

What was Nottingham Forest’s favorite kind of team? The powerhouse team that wanted to press hard and defeat them with offense. Their biggest headaches were the weak teams that compacted their defenses and holed up in their areas.

Twain had stumbled in the matchups against the weak teams this season but was not at a disadvantage against the strong teams. After the game against Everton, Twain let the team start their transformation, even though it was a long undertaking. In face of a powerful utilitarian champion during the knockout stages, Twain still restored the team to the defensive counterattack that they were best at.

The away game with Eindhoven began as scheduled, and Eindhoven actively sought to attack the moment they came on the field. As for Nottingham Forest? The commentator, who was familiar with them, could also see their defensive counterattack stance at a glance.

Sun Jihai did not play, and Sun Xiang also sat on the bench. In the press box, Tang Jing looked at Twain, standing on the sidelines, with disappointment.

“You just won’t do what I want!” She muttered to herself viciously.

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Eindhoven’s offense was effective in the first twenty minutes, which also gave the Eindhoven fans hope of a home win over Nottingham Forest.

With two attacks, they almost entered the Forest team’s goal. But as Mourinho put it, “almost” on the field was tantamount to failure.

Eindhoven’s morale declined amid the situation whereby the successive siege of the Forest team goal always resulted in just brushing past the goal.

It was an opportunity for the Forest team. Twain whistled on the sidelines and waved for the team to press forward. No opportunity for a counterattack should be spared.

The Forest team’s counterattack emphasized the word “fast.” They usually withdrew in the back-field to lure their opponent to come forward to attack. Once the ball was intercepted, the Forest players, who were still cruising, immediately became the vanguard.

In the English Premier League, Nottingham Forest’s counterattack was probably the fastest because they had Ribéry, Petrov, Ashley Young and Aaron Lennon, all of whom could be ranked in the top ten of the English Premier League’s fastest players.

Because Twain had such a squad, they could counterattack skillfully, whether it was an individual player or the entire team. Their speed could leave their opponent flabbergasted.

Twain spent two seasons working to get his team to that level. Now that they were facing Eindhoven in this away game, he was confident to make Koeman suffer.

Eindhoven orchestrated an offensive, but their passes were too obvious. Up against such a penetration in the middle, George Wood secured his position in advance and intercepted the pass.

What happened next was simple. Wood passed the football to van der Vaart at first chance and van der Vaart decided the direction to quickly attack. When van der Vaart received the football, the Forest team’s two wingers and the two strikers quickly changed direction.

The left, middle, and right, were all available. Van der Vaart looked at the situation and decided to take the left flank. He passed the football to Ribéry.

After he received the ball, Ribéry did not sprint along the flank. He planned to let the Eindhoven player, who blocked him on the flank, to pounce for nothing first. Ribéry dribbled the ball straight to the middle and van der Vaart ran to the left flank, making a simple switch in positions.

Seeing Ribéry coming to the middle, Phillip Cocu, ran over to defend, and followed Ribéry closely to keep him from having a chance to shoot.

Eastwood saw Ribéry running in the middle and instantly knew what to do. He stopped running forward and turned to assist Ribéry. Ribéry passed the football to Eastwood, and the Eindhoven defender, Alex, followed Eastwood tightly to keep him from turning around.

Eastwood did not plan to turn around. After he passed the ball, Ribéry ran without the ball, and Cocu turned his attention onto Eastwood, who took the ball. He intended to tackle the ball once Alex came up for them to attack from the front and back. He did not expect that once he pressed up, Eastwood would suddenly pass the ball instead.

The football was back at Ribéry's foot, who was in front of the penalty area with no one to keep an eye on him.

Without hesitation, the Frenchman swung his leg and shot...

"Franck Ribéry — and the ball is in! What a beautiful long shot! Heurelho Gomes could not save it in time; it was almost a dead corner!"

The noisy Philips Stadion suddenly quieted down. The Eindhoven fans did not expect their team to besiege for so long without scoring a goal and the opponent to succeed with one counterattack.

Twain got up from his seat and held up his fists. Ever since Ribéry had been consciously placed in the middle by the coaching unit, he became an even greater threat. He was an all-round midfielder and should not be confined on the flank.

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After the deadlock was broken, things became much easier.

Eindhoven, who had conceded a goal, desperately tried to fight back, which meant the Forest team's defensive tackle had more room to play.

The first goal came. Surely, the second and third goal would not be far behind?

In the second half, it was easy to compete again. Van Nistelrooy and van der Vaart each scored a goal for the Forest team. By the time van der Vaart scored the Forest team's third goal, the fans at Philips Stadion had already left the stadium early. Manager Koeman looked at the score on the scoreboard with an ashen face.

What did it imply to have the opponent score three goals in his own home game? The opponent's one kick had allowed them to enter the semifinals. If it had been just 0:1 or 0:2, then they could still stake it all in the next round. Now that they had conceded three goals, the odds of a turnaround in the away game were too low.

Looking again at the glaring score, Koeman lowered his head.

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Six days later, Eindhoven arrived somewhat wretchedly in Nottingham from the Netherlands. They had to score at least three away goals and keep Nottingham Forest from scoring in the game before they had a chance to play overtime. If they wanted to directly be promoted, they had to score more than four goals. It was just too hard for Eindhoven.

Indeed, it was just too hard.

The Nottingham Forest fans gave Eindhoven a taste of what Barcelona had tasted before. In an almost feverish home atmosphere, the Forest team unexpectedly did not choose to play defensive counterattack. Instead, they held up the banner for offensive football and played offense again Eindhoven, which on its deathbed.

Perhaps it was because Twain felt that his team's promotion was already a foregone conclusion, so it did not matter if he did not use defensive counterattack. It was better to use offense to please more spectators, but also to put the team's full attack force to test. The score of 3:0 was really reassuring enough.

The game was entertaining to watch. Both teams sparred measure for measure and the attacks were very lively. The fans enjoyed themselves immensely. Both teams scored goals in succession. With a steady stream of goals, Koeman's mood oscillated between heaven and hell. When Eindhoven scored, he rallied, feeling that the situation was moving in the direction he wanted. When Nottingham Forest scored, his face immediately darkened as his hope for advancing slipped further away from him.

Eindhoven scored a goal first. After all, with the entire Forest team in attack mode, its defensive line could not be as solid as usual. This goal gave Eindhoven a glimpse of hope, but just five minutes later the Forest equalized the score. As everyone was attacking, both defensive lines had a lot of holes. It all depended on which side could seize as many as possible.

Next, the Forest team persisted and scored another goal. The total score was 5:1 with Eindhoven trailing behind. Basically, it had declared that the game was already over ahead of time.

Eindhoven did not give up. They were still working tirelessly to find a chance to score.

Towards the end of the first half, they took advantage of a passing error in the Forest team's back field and intercepted the ball to launch a counterattack. They managed to turn the total into 5:2.

During the halftime interval, Twain criticized the performance of the defensive line. In his view, even if the team was focused on offense, it was not an excuse for the defensive line to make errors.

In the second half, the two sides continued to attack, but this time, the Forest team's defensive line performance was slightly better. They did not give Eindhoven any chances. In the 80th minute, Bendtner, who substituted van Nistelrooy in the second half, scored a third goal for the Forest team with a header and locked in the total scores for both teams at 6:2.

Although there were still ten minutes before the end of the game, Koeman had no other way in the face of such a score.

He knew that he had already failed.

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When the final whistle blew, the City Ground stadium erupted in a huge burst of cheers. The commentator had to raise his volume in this noisy environment, “What an unforgettable game! Nottingham Forest has advanced to the top four for two years in a row! This is a remarkable achievement! Tony Twain seems to be a manager adept at playing in the Champions League. The first trophy he had won was the ELF Cup. Last season, they advanced to the Champions League final and nearly became champions. This season, they have another shot at the final! But first, they have to beat Chelsea, their opponent in the semifinals!”

“Chelsea? That’s a really good opponent to have,” Twain said to Dunn and Kerslake next to him after the game. “We have a psychological advantage playing against them.”

Kerslake chuckled and Dunn also smiled. Everyone knew what this psychological advantage was.

With that, Twain set his sights on the grandstand. He knew Mourinho was watching the game in the stands, even though he did not know whether Mourinho was still there.

Meanwhile, in the stands, Mourinho and his aides were queuing up to leave the stadium. He did not forget to look down.

He saw Twain looking up.

“Nottingham Forest...” He hissed the name under his breath. “That’s truly a good opponent.”

Chapter 518: Meet New Friends and Encounter Old Enemies

All of a sudden, Twain was a busy man again. Quite a number of local media outlets in Nottingham — such as television, newspapers and online sources— were lining up to interview him. As a manager who had led the team to advance to the top four in the Champions League for two consecutive years, he deserved this treatment.

Last season, Twain had led the team to advance to the Champions League final. They were still seen as a dark horse, and perhaps some people had sneered that they were just “lucky bastards.”

This year, they had advanced to the top four again and eliminated the defending champion, Barcelona. Perhaps the people who thought that Twain was a “lucky bastard” had nothing to say anymore.

One time could be a fluke. Could twice be considered flukes, too?

There were only a handful of good managers in English history, and the excellent managers were more often from Scotland. In the early days of modern football, the Scots were the first to innovate football tactics when there was little tactic to speak of. The offense was to have the striker dribble the ball in the direction of the goal and then kick it in. The playing was no different from the way a current beginner who could not play football. It was the Scots who changed all it. They reformed the senseless tactic into a constant passing to press ahead, which now looked easy to do. But as American astronaut, Armstrong said when he first landed on the moon: “one small step for man; one big step for mankind.” A simple change had widened the horizons of people engaged in football. Passing became an indispensable technique and tactic in football.

As a pioneer in the football tactical reform, Scotland had not produced any of the world's best players. Instead, it had churned out many world-class managers. The current Manchester United manager, Ferguson, was Scottish.

The achievements of the English were more limited than those of their northern neighbors. While there were also great men like Herbert Chapman, they were behind the Scots in overall numbers.

Moreover, since the 1966 World Cup, there was basically no true world-class manager in England.

For example, the England team's current manager, McClaren, was the result of picking the best out of a mediocre bunch. Due to the laughable pigheadedness of the English Football Association and general public, they wanted to look for an Englishman, since they believed that only an Englishman would give his all for his country's team and would have so-called loyalty. It truly worried them to hire a foreigner like Eriksson who only thought of money.

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"Tony Twain is now the hottest manager in England. Since the Nottingham Forest manager took over the team three seasons ago, he has led the team to be promoted to the English Premier League in a season to and even winning the title in the EFL Cup. During his second season, he steered the team to qualify for the Champions League. In his third season, he commandeered his team to advance into the Champions League final and almost win the title with one player short."

Twain lay on the couch while he watched the television program about himself, which compared him to the four managers Ferguson, Wenger, Benítez and Mourinho. Although he had only won one EFL Cup title, to be able to lead the team to advance into the top four of the Champions League for two consecutive years was not something that any manager could do. The Argentinian manager, Héctor Cúper, who once led Valencia to the Champions League finals for two years in a row, had cemented his place in the football world despite not getting any of the championships titles in the end.

Twain's goal was certainly not to end up like Cúper and considered it done by just advancing to the final. This time, he was going to win no matter which team waited for him in the final.

"What interests us so much is that Manager Tony Twain is not even forty years old. Although the European football is currently ruled by young managers, he is still quite young compared to van Basten, Rijkaard, Deschamps and Ancelotti. Furthermore, this young manager always seems to be surrounded by a mysterious aura. Peter Shilton once commented that his mentor, Brian Clough, had a mysterious X-gene. I think Tony Twain may have the same gene. An accident at the sidelines created this young and promising manager..."

A scene on the screen showed Twain standing on the sidelines and directing the game with rich body language, which was entertaining for Twain to watch. He had been just an ordinary fan and now he was a famous person with a television feature on him. Who did not want to be famous?

While Twain was intoxicated with admiring himself on the television, there was a beep and the screen in front of him went dark.

He looked up at Shania, who stood behind him and said, "hey, Shania, give me the remote."

“Don’t dilly-dally, Uncle Tony. I’ve changed my clothes, and you’re still in your T-shirt and lying on the couch and watching TV?” Shania threw the remote a little further away on the couch, and Toto, the cat, immediately pounced on it.

When Twain saw the scene, he yelped, “is the damn cat in cahoots with you?”

Shania looked on proudly, and then snapped at Twain, “all right, Uncle Tony, you gotta get dressed!”

“It’s easy to change into men’s clothes. Isn’t it just a suit?” Twain muttered as he climbed up from the couch and went upstairs to change.

After Shania, who had already changed into her evening dress, watched him go upstairs, she grabbed Toto to take back the remote control, and secretly turned on the television. The program was still on and she laughed as she watched the high-spirited Uncle Tony on the screen.

Today was a day off after the previous day’s league game. There was a soiree being held by Armani that evening in London. As the model representing Armani, Shania was invited, and she planned to bring Twain along with her. She had spoken to Twain some time ago about improving his image and getting him further from looking like a “country bumpkin.” Shania thought that the soiree was a good opportunity. With the rise of Nottingham Forest’s performance, Uncle Tony’s popularity among the celebrity circles was also growing. When everyone talked about football, they would ask Shania about her “Uncle Tony.” Everyone was aware that there was a young and brash, but handsome and promising manager in Nottingham, England. Furthermore, due to his friendships with Judy Shania Jordana, Clarice Gloria, and the Beckhams, he had a close relationship with the fashion and entertainment circles.

“Shania!” Twain’s voice came from upstairs. “Tie or bowtie?”

“Bowtie!” cried Shania. “I put it on your bed!”

After a while, Twain came down the stairs, dressed in a black suit with a black bow tie around the collar of his white shirt. “I think I look silly. I’ve never tied a bow tie.” He stood on the stairs and opened his arms to show Shania.

Shania got up from the couch. She looked him up and down carefully and said, “you look much better with a little bit of cleaning up.” She nodded her head.

“Like the waiters in an Indian restaurant?” Twain bent slightly. “What would you like to have, beautiful lady? Our chicken curry tastes horrible here. I suggest you try the Kung Pao chicken at the Chinese restaurant across from us.”

Shania covered her mouth and laughed, “A waiter like you will be fired by the boss. We’d better get going, Uncle Tony. Mr. Fasal should be here.”

With that, the sound of a car horn came from outside the door.

“Good timing.” Twain reached out to Shania, “Shall we?”

Shania took Twain’s outstretched hand with a smile, and the two of them opened the door to go out.

Fasal’s car was stopped on the side of the road. When he heard the horn, Dunn opened the door to poke his head out. He saw Twain and Shania, who were about to leave.

“Ah, Dunn, did you record that program just now?” Twain suddenly remembered when he saw him.

Dunn nodded.

“Well done, I knew you’d videotape it. Show it to me when I get back.”

Dunn nodded again.

“In that case, Shania and I will leave first.” He pointed to the car that had stopped at the door.

Dunn continued to nod.

“Do you have something to say?” Twain was peeved with Dunn’s silent manner of just staring at him.

“Goodbye.” With that, Dunn closed the door.

Feeling displeased, Twain was dragged into the car by a smiling Shania.

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“The teeming world of London...” Twain muttered as he looked out at the streets in London. “Compared with this noisy big city, I prefer a small city like Nottingham.”

“The British people do like their countryside.” Fasal, who was driving, said with a smile. “I don’t like big cities either. I have an estate in Scotland. You can come with Shania for a holiday.”

Twain turned his head to look at Shania, and then said to Fasal, “in that case, thank you in advance.”

They arrived at the hotel where the soiree was held during their chat.

The car park was filled with cars and there was a steady stream of cars stopping at the entrance. The invited guests got out, and the cars were driven to the designated parking lots.

Both sides of the entrance were packed with media and eager groupies who rushed over when they heard the news.

“What a spectacle.” Twain whistled.

“An intimate affair is not in line with Armani’s fame.” Shania said.

Someone had already come to the door to open it for them. Twain was the first to get out, and then he stood outside to help Shania out of the car.

When Twain led Shania and appeared in front of the public, the camera flashes started up again after a brief pause, flashing everywhere.

Fortunately, Twain and Shania were both veterans and did not become dizzy because of the sudden light. Shania even smiled to acknowledge the media.

Twain did not smile. He stood beside Shania with a straight face. He did not look like Shania’s companion. If he had worn a pair of sunglasses, he would have looked like her bodyguard.

After waiting for Shania to finish her poses, which took a while, they were ready to go. Then another car came in behind them. Twain was a little interested in who would come next, so he turned to take a look. Unexpectedly, what he saw made him stop in his tracks.

The man who got out of the car was his “old friend,” none other than the Chelsea manager, José Mourinho.

He turned around and saw Mourinho just as Mourinho looked up and saw him.

“Tsk, what a small world...” Twain mumbled softly.

Shania saw this scene, and immediately understood. She said to Twain, “he’s also a signed by Armani, so he’s definitely on the list of invitees.”

“Mr. Armani’s taste is uneven...” Twain said as he reached his hand to walk towards Mourinho.

“Aha, my friend, I didn’t expect to see you here,” he greeted him enthusiastically.

Mourinho appeared unprepared for Twain to appear there. He froze for a moment before reacting. He shook Twain’s hand. In front of the media, both men insincerely greeted each other with smiles as if they were good friends.

While they shook hands, he said in a low voice that was inaudible to the media, “Fancy meeting you here, Mr. Twain.”

“I’m here with Shania. It shouldn’t be a surprise.”

Mourinho looked past Twain and saw Shania behind him. He greeted her with a smile, but this smile was immediately gone when he faced Twain.

“Can you let go of my hand, Mr. Twain?”

“Ah, of course.” Twain loosened his hand and said goodbye to Mourinho with a grin. “We’ll see you later, Mr. Mourinho.”

With that, he turned around and walked towards Shania.

“Your greeting looks fake,” Shania said to him. “Neither of you is a professional actor. I think the media is more than happy to see you guys wrangle here.”

With a grin, Twain held out his arm for her to hold, and then said to her, “Mourinho and I have at least one thing in common, and that is neither of us wanted the media to get what they want.”

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Twain was not interested in things like a soiree. It was Shania who brought him to chat Mr. Armani for a while. As a football fan, Armani was interested in the legendary rocket-like rise of Nottingham Forest, and he certainly was more interested in the manager who created this legend: Tony Twain.

“You’re younger than the Twain I saw on TV, young man,” Armani said with a smile. “You’re also younger than Mourinho.”

“Mr. Armani, the two of them are going to play against each other again soon, in the Champions League.” Next to him, Shania reminded Armani that the two men were competitors.

Armani nodded. “Of course, I know that. I think it is very interesting and I look forward to the matchup between two excellent but idiosyncratic managers. Mourinho is also my friend. I worry about who I should support.”

Twain could only chuckle beside him. He did not know how to answer this question either.

“Just support whoever wins.” Mourinho’s voice sounded from next to him, and Twain turned his head to see his opponent standing beside him with a glass of wine. When he saw Twain looking at him, he raised his glass in acknowledgement.

Was this a challenge? Twain looked at Mourinho and then said, “I also agree with what Mr. Mourinho said. I think whether it’s Chelsea or Nottingham Forest that breaks into the final, there will be a high chance of winning the Champions League. I wonder if Mr. Mourinho agrees?” He picked up his glass and tipped it in return.

“Of course, my team is not in the final to just almost get the Champions League title.”

The air between the two men seemed to crackle with electricity. Any fool could see that the two men did not have a good relationship.

Armani was the one who stepped out and broke the moment. He put his left arm around Mourinho and hugged Tony Twain with his right arm. With a smile, he patted them on the shoulders and said, “no matter who wins or loses, I’m just as supportive. You’re all my friends, aren’t you?” When he said that, the two men could not continue to pit against each other through the air.

Following that, everyone chatted casually for a while before Armani went to greet the other guests, and Mourinho went to look for his friends.

“Men can be so hypocritical. You guys clearly do not like each other, but you still beat around the bush during the conversation.” Shania looked at Twain and smirked.

“What do you know, kid? All gentlemen are like this,” Twain stated as he glanced at Mourinho’s back.

Shania scoffed.

“Getting to know Mr. Armani was the one good thing to come out of today.” Twain retracted his gaze and said to Shania only after Mourinho was completely lost in the crowd.

Shania laughed. “Do you know why I introduced Mr. Armani to you?”

Twain thought for a little bit. “Well, Mr. Armani and AC Milan’s Brazilian star player, Kaka are close friends. Through him, I can get to know Kaka, and in the future if... That’s right! Maybe we can bring Kaka to Nottingham from Milan...” He struck his left fist in his right palm with a look of sudden realization.

“You’re so boring, Uncle Tony.” Shania rolled her eyes.

“Ah, what else can it be?”

“Forget it, I’m not going to tell you. You’ll find out when the time comes!” Shania ignored Twain and turned to say hello to the celebrities she knew.

Twain stood in the middle of the crowd with his glass of wine, looking around. Most of the faces were unfamiliar to him, and Mourinho was surrounded by a group of women in the distance, appearing to be very popular. Twain viciously thought that when they next ran into each other, he would switch to calling Mourinho “the middle-aged and elderly women’s idol.” But he did not know if Mourinho would understand the joke.

Shania were together with a group of girls who looked like models, happily chattering away.

Mr. Armani was greeting his guests, and it looked as if he was friendly and warm towards everyone. This realization disappointed Twain a little, for he thought he was “the special one.”

“A soiree...” Twain picked up his glass and drank the rest of the wine. “...is like a tavern in a fantasy novel. It’s a great place to gather intelligence, meet new people, and encounter old enemies.”

Chapter 519: Woox’s Secret

“A soiree...” Twain picked up his glass and drank the rest of the wine. “...is like a tavern in a fantasy novel. It’s a great place to gather intelligence, meet new people, and encounter old enemies.”

“It’s also possible to meet an old friend, Mr. Twain.” A voice from behind took Twain by surprise.

He turned around suddenly and saw another familiar face looking at him with a grin.

“Mr. Billy Woox,” he said with gritted teeth. “Can I put you in the category of ‘an old enemy?’”

Billy Woox, George Wood’s agent, laughed. “You’re funny, Mr. Twain. If we’re not friends, what else can we be?”

Twain shrugged. “Who knows.”

Woox obviously did not want to be entangled with this kind of pointless bickering. He knew that bickering with Twain was a waste of his breath. “I didn’t put Mr. Twain as someone who reads fantasy novels. Lord of The Rings or Harry Potter?”

Instead of answering the question, Twain asked Woox, “why are you here?”

“Have you forgotten, Mr. Twain? I was an agent in the entertainment and fashion industries before I became George’s agent. I’m friends with most of the people in this circle.” Woox pointed to the guests in the hall. “Of course, I count Mr. Armani as one of them.”

So, he was another friend of Armani’s. Twain smirked and whispered, “Mr. Armani really has indiscriminate taste...”

“What did you say, Mr. Twain?” Woox did not hear clearly.

“Ah, I said Mr. Armani has good teeth, and with a good set of teeth, his appetite will be good too...” Twain blurted out the first thing that came to his head. He looked at Woox standing in front of him and

was reminded of something unpleasant. "You're not here to talk to me about George's salary again, are you?"

Woox smiled, "Do I look like such a greedy man?"

"What if I said yes?"

"Then you're judging me by my cover, Mr. Twain." Woox suddenly winked at Twain. The action gave Twain shivers. He felt that there was something wrong with the other man, who was fastidious about his clothes like a woman, spoke with a peculiar accent, and was a little obsessive about cleanliness.

"But there is something that I came to you for." Woox raised his glass and pointed to the empty balcony. "Want to hear a banal story, Mr. Twain?" With that, he did not wait for Twain to agree before he turned around and walked away first.

Twain hesitated for a moment and then looked around. He found that the balcony had two wide doors through which he could easily escape if the situation was not right. So, he followed.

A little further away from the noisy hall, it was quieter in the balcony. Woox went straight to the railing to feel the breeze, and Twain tried to stand closer to the door.

Woox turned his head back to see Twain looking slightly nervous and smiled again. "Is the fearless demon still afraid that I'm going to eat him up? We're standing so far apart. How are we doing to have a tête-à-tête?"

Twain awkwardly moved forward a few steps and the distance between the two men was finally more normal.

"Well, what banal story do you want to tell me? If it has nothing to do with me, I will turn around and go." He spoke harshly.

"Ah, well, it has nothing to do with you. But..." When Woox saw that Twain was about to leave, he hurriedly stopped being coy and said directly, "but it's related to George Wood." He saw Twain turn back again, and asked with a grin, "are you interested now, Mr. Twain?"

"You know I care a lot about George."

"Of course, your affection for him probably goes beyond the feelings between a manager and a player... I'd say it's more like... father and son?"

Twain did not comment on Woox's remarks.

Woox pulled a note out of his pocket and handed it to Twain.

Twain took it and went to the door to read it with the light in the hall. The edge of the note was fuzzy and looked heavily worn. The note looked old. When he unfolded the note, he discovered that it was a loan note.

It was stated on it that a certain person had borrowed 240,000 pounds from Mr. Billy Woox and promised to pay it off within ten years. Twain did not know the name of that borrower, but he was familiar with his last name, Wood. And the date was...

“1987? This happened twenty years ago?” Twain looked up at Woon in astonishment.

“The cliché simply goes like this: a certain broke man who got a girl pregnant borrowed a large sum of money from a very distant relative, promising to pay it off within ten years. But ten years later, that relative did not receive the money which was supposed to be paid back. And now that another ten years had passed...” Woon spread his hands.

Twain interrupted him, “that penniless good-for-nothing is George Wood’s father, and the very distant relative who lent the money is you, Mr. Billy Woon? You don’t look that old.”

“I keep myself well maintained.” Woon stroked his face and the action caused Twain to have the impulse to run for the door.

“But you know, Mr. Twain. I’m not a philanthropist who will take out a lot of money and give it to society for no return.” Woon removed his hand and waved in the air, “Naturally, I want to collect the money back, with interest added... 400,000.”

“Are you a loan shark?” Twain spoke through gritted teeth. Woon was also considered Wood’s relative. Even though he was not clear how they were related, surely they were still a family? Was he taking things too far by settling the accounts too clearly between relatives?

“Oh, Mr. Twain, you misunderstood me. I adjusted the amount annually according to the bank’s interest rate,” Woon said proudly. “It’s a pity that I can’t locate George’s deadbeat father or ask George’s mother, Miss Sophia, for the money — she did not even have the money for her own treatment — you can see how kind I am being. Luckily, I’d like to thank you here, Mr. Twain. If you hadn’t made George a pro player, how could he have made so much money?”

Twain really did not expect that there was such a story behind Wood. As Woon said, it was really a cliché.

“So, you planned all this by repeatedly trying to get close to George to be his agent?” It was really perplexing when Twain recalled Woon’s unusual enthusiasm for Wood at that time.

“If George was still the young stud who was a hard laborer at the moving company, who would care about him? Thanks to you, he became a star player, and as for me... Because of my years of working, I saw another potential in him. I thought that since I couldn’t find his father and his mother did not have the money, then it was acceptable for a son to repay his father’s debt. Yes, that was what I thought at the time. So, I got close to him with this idea in mind... Wait, are you going to say I’m mean next?” Woon pointed to Twain just as he was about to open his mouth.

Twain shook his head and said, “no, I wanted to harsh on you for being shameless.”

Woon shrugged. He did not care how Twain judged him. He took the loan note from Twain, and scrutinized it in the light that shone from the door. The ink on the note was a little blurry and looked like poor registration in the dim light.

The old man just looked at it wordlessly.

Twain stood on the balcony for a while. Feeling a little bored, he was about to turn to leave when he heard Woox calling him from behind, "Mr. Twain, you know, I never smoke, so... do you have a lighter on you?"

Twain pulled a Zippo out of his pocket and tossed it to Woox.

Woox took the lighter and lit the loan note on fire. Twain raised his eyebrows; he was a little surprised.

"Are you surprised, Mr. Twain?" Woox asked as he stared at the burning note in his hand.

"Do you want me to praise you for suddenly developing the conscience of a philanthropist?"

Woox smiled slyly. "I just received a check for 2,000,000 pounds a day ago, signed by George's deadbeat father. It's amazing. I always thought he lost his life on the rough seas."

When the flames burned toward Woox's fingers, he dropped the note. The last piece of paper burnt to ashes in the night sky and was blown away by the light breeze. The brief light on the balcony disappeared.

"It seems that he is doing well," Twain said with sarcasm in his tone. "But why did he not come back and see his precious son?"

"Would you like him to return and acknowledge his son?" Woox stared at Twain.

Twain was confused by the sudden question. He looked at Woox without answering.

"I think he was ashamed to come back. After all, he abandoned the mother and son and took off. If he thinks money can make up for his regrets..."

Twain thought Woox would say "then he must have thought wrong."

He did not expect Woox to say, "that would be great. I hope to receive a check for 2,000,000 pounds from him every day." This time he laughed and even showed his teeth. He looked like a vampire in the dark.

"Well, since you don't need to George to make money to pay you back, can we have less interaction in the future?" Twain felt this was his biggest concern. George's mysterious background, the family power behind Woox, and the adventures of George's deadbeat father had nothing to do with him.

"Oh, I'm afraid I can't do that, Mr. Twain. Even though I don't need those 400,000 pounds anymore, you won't mind if I fight for better living conditions for George and his poor and admirable mother, will you?"

Woox's dignified words silenced any of Twain's rebuttals.

"I have no objections on the condition that you don't go crazy." He sighed helplessly.

"Crazy?"

"For example, opening your mouth to ask for a weekly salary of more than 100,000..."

"As far as I know, Mr. Twain, you gave George a goal before he became a First Team player on the Forest team — a weekly salary of 120,000 pounds, right?"

Twain was dumbfounded. He had said this to Wood and said it more than once. It used to be just a nice goal for Wood to strive toward, like a carrot hanging in front of a donkey, to be his driving force to keep moving forward. He did not expect it to be seized upon by Woox as a reason to demand more.

“120,000... Yes, I did say that. But it also depends on the club’s financial situation. The club is not mine. If I were as rich as Abramovich, forget 120,000, I would give 200,000.” Twain put the responsibility on the club and even gave a vain promise to show his generosity.

“But the team belongs to you, and you’re in charge. Oh? Don’t tell me that’s not the case?” Woox took a step forward and considered Twain. “Doesn’t your word count on the team?”

“Of course, I’m in charge of the team, but Allan Adams is in charge of the finances. We work together to settle my funding for transfers and every season’s budget. Do you know cooperation? The Nottingham Forest Football Club places great importance on the cooperation between various departments.”

That said, Twain sometimes felt that Allan was in the way and that he would refuse to sign players that he had his eye on because the budget was inadequate, while he would use the excuse of huge market potential to push for the signing players he was not keen on. Who the hell is in charge of this team? Does Evan support him more, or does he support me a little more?

As Twain muttered to himself, Woox took his leave. He returned the lighter to Twain and waved as he walked into the hall.

Twain stopped him and said, “I’m a little confused. Why did you come to me and say all those things?”

Woox looked back at him and replied, “because I didn’t want to tell George and his mum.” Then he waved goodbye again.

Twain’s gaze followed him, and saw Shania and her agent, Mr. Fasal.

To his surprise, when Woox ran into the two, Fasal stopped and politely greeted him. Shania also stood to the side nicely, her naughty expression instantly gone.

This scene made Twain frown again. What kind of man is Woox?

The three people chatted briefly before they parted. Woox pointed to the balcony for them before he left. Twain saw Shania and Fasal walk toward him.

“It turns out you’re here, Uncle Tony.” As soon as she entered the vacant balcony, the lively Shania came back.

“Were you chatting with Mr. Woox?” asked Fasal.

Twain nodded. “I saw that you were being... well, very respectful towards him?”

Fasal smiled. “He used to be my boss, Mr. Twain.”

Twain was surprised by his answer.

“The modeling company Shania belongs to is under Mr. Woox’s name. I have been working for Mr. Woox since I became an agent in the industry. It was only later that he renounced his share in the company and went to be George Wood’s agent. And you know the rest, Mr. Twain.”

After he listened to Fasal's brief introduction, Twain broke out in a cold sweat. Even Shania was a contracted model for the company he owned. It looked like he and the abominable old man would still be entangled for quite some time.

"Mr. Woox is a very good man, and he is polite to everyone," Shania added. "He is a real gentleman."

Twain glanced at her. He worried that Shania only saw the outer appearance of the old man. "I'm polite to people too. I'm also a gentleman."

"'Fucking son of a bitch.' Is that something a gentleman would say, Uncle Tony?"

Twain coughed.

"Kids should not use such filthy words!" He could only bully her using his age as an excuse, but the result was conceivable. However, for the grown-up Shania, the effect was getting weaker.

"I'm seventeen years old, not a child anymore!" Shania retorted, hardly showing any weakness.

Fasal discreetly snuck away and left the empty balcony to them as they started to bicker.

"I know some models who are not even seventeen years old and have slept with god knows how many men."

Twain turned his head and looked at Shania. Did the young girl even blush when she talked about such things? It was a pity that the night was too dark for him to see clearly.

It occurred to him that George's poor mother, Sophia, was also seventeen when she ran off to England from Jamaica with George's deadbeat father, got pregnant with George, and was alone wandering in a foreign land as she raised her child. She was also seventeen years old...

"Jor." Twain suddenly called Shania by her pet name.

"Yes?" Shania, who was leaning against the railing overlooking London's night view, turned her head and looked at Twain.

"Be sure to find a good man in the future..." Twain murmured as he looked into the distance.

Shania did not immediately answer. She just looked at Twain's side profile and observed him quietly for a moment. Twain did not seem to know that Shania was looking at him. He was lost in his thoughts as he looked into the distance.

"Well, when I find him, I will definitely introduce him to Uncle Tony. If Uncle Tony is not satisfied with him, I will immediately tell him to take a hike!" She replied with a grin, and then skipped back to the hall.

Twain did react at first, but he soon realized what she meant.

"I'm not your father!" He turned his head and complained to Shania's back.

Chapter 520: The Sleeping Beauty

A soiree, for a common man like Twain, was only interesting if he regarded it as a gathering of all kinds of characters in a tavern in a fantasy novel. Therefore, he spent most of the time on the balcony enjoying the breeze. Occasionally, other people would come to have a private moment. After they were surprised to find Twain hidden in the dark corner, they would hope that Twain would tactfully give up the space, but Twain was too lazy to move. So, instead, he leaned against the railing and met their gazes. In the end, the other party could finally not take it and would retreat, leaving the balcony empty again for Twain to enjoy alone.

This evening, he had to compete with a number of people like that. There were strangers who intended to rendezvous hidden away from the others, men in suits who wanted to talk business, as well as chattering women who wanted to gossip behind other peoples' backs. Twain drove them out of the balcony again and again, just like a lion king on the African plains guarding his territory.

Why did he not want to go to the brightly lit hall and party with the other people and take the initiative to get know the strangers? Twain blamed it on his antisocial and bizarre character. But...

"It's really strange that I clearly like the stadiums with tens of thousands of roaring people together, but surprisingly I hate this level of hustle and bustle." He murmured as he looked across the hall.

When it was time to say goodbye, Giorgio Armani personally saw each guest off at the door. As he observed the master of the fashion world, who had no airs at all, Twain thought he somehow understood why this man was so successful.

"Tony, it looks like you did not enjoy yourself." By the time to say goodbye, Armani had already switched to calling Twain by his name. Their relationship progressed quickly. "I did not take good care of you as a host."

Twain hurriedly waved his hands and said, "no, no, not at all... It's just that..." He did not know how to put it. Could he simply tell Armani that he actually hated this kind of event? That would be rude.

"Mr. Twain must be worried about the Champions League semi-final." Mourinho seemed to be omnipresent. As long as there was a situation that would embarrass Twain, he would immediately appear and stab him in the back.

But at the sight of Mourinho, Twain quickly reacted. "Aha, my friend, Mr. Mourinho, I can't agree with you on that. There's nothing to worry about the semi-finals. Either I win or you lose; the result will still be the same anyway."

Mourinho froze for a moment before he understood the meaning of Twain's remark. He had brought it upon himself. After saying goodbye to Armani, he reached out to Twain and said, "when we shake hands again the next time, it won't be in such a relaxed environment, Mr. Twain."

Twain took Mourinho's hand and smiled. "Do you mean before or after the game?"

Mourinho did not bother to answer his meaningless question. He politely said goodbye to Shania and turned to walk away.

Once Mourinho left, Armani could continue his conversation with Twain.

“Jor has complained to me more than once about what terrible taste her ‘Uncle Tony’ has in clothes.” Armani grinned at Twain.

Twain was a little uncomfortable under his scrutiny. He fidgeted and said, “a man only need two sets of clothing all year round. One for the summer and the other for the winter.”

Giorgio Armani was very interested in Twain’s “brilliant opinion” and asked, “Where did you hear that, Tony?”

“Well, I came to the conclusion myself.”

The old man smiled brightly and said, “I half agree with you on that view. A man’s wardrobe does not need to be filled with all kinds of seasonal clothing like a lady, but it does not mean that a man can only wear one suit all year long. If that were the case, when you went out on the streets, your eyes would soon get tired of the world, and you would only see dark suits and more dark suits... just like the weather in London. In fact, a man can dress as he wishes, as long as he knows how to coordinate. No matter what he wears, he will look fashionable and unique. Because everyone’s build and appearance is different, the same style of clothes will have very different effect on a stout or skinny wearer.”

Twain wholly agreed with that point. “Unfortunately, I lack the eye and taste to choose clothes.”

“That doesn’t matter. Just wear what you feel good wearing. Do you like the bowtie, Tony?”

Twain shook his head. “If I don’t need to wear a tie, I won’t. This is my first time wearing a bow tie.”

“Very well.” Giorgio Armani suddenly reached out to untie the bow tie and handed it to Shania next to him. He then unbuttoned the two top buttons on Twain’s shirt, leaving the collar open. “Relax, don’t feel so restrained and proper in front of your friends.” Armani clapped his hands and took two steps back as if he was admiring a signed model and cocked his head to the side to re-evaluate Twain.

“Not bad, Tony. You’ve kept your body in good shape. Interested in becoming a spokesperson for my brand?” The eighty-one-year-old man winked at Twain.

Twain was stunned.

The face of Armani?

He’d never thought about modelling — before or now, he had never considered it. In his mind, Armani had always been a representative of the world’s luxury fashion brands. Wouldn’t a popular singer or mega movie star be the face of such a brand? When would it fall to a football manager like himself?

“Is it making things difficult, Tony?”

“Ah, no, no, no. I’m just a little surprised. Mr. Armani, I don’t understand why you would want me to be... a spokesperson.”

“Because I like you very much, Tony. You have an air that fascinates me.”

This old man also spoke like he sung the same tune as Woot... Did people in the fashion world like this kind of thing? Twain shuddered.

“Unlike my other models, you’re irrepresible wild horses. No one can put reins on you and tame you. You’re free and liberated. You say what you think, you show the side you want to show and never care what the public and media say about you. You live freely. It is very much in line with Armani’s brand values. You know, my fashion design only pursues one principle — simple, free, relaxed. You’re a good match, Tony.”

Twain did not expect to receive this type of assessment from Armani. He froze a little and then nodded. “Well, it’s good to make more money.”

Armani laughed. Next them, Shania and Fasal also laughed along. Shania’s efforts finally paid off.

As they were about to leave, Armani gave Twain one last piece of advice. “Tony, you say you lack the taste and eye to pick out clothes. I’ll teach you an all-purpose method.” He mysteriously put his mouth next to Twain’s ear and whispered as if his “secret recipe” had to be kept secret.

He hurried to look like he was listening attentively as a sign of respect.

The silver-haired Giorgio Armani leaned next to Twain’s ear and he looked past towards Shania and Fasal behind Twain. He smiled slyly at the two people and said, “if you really do not know what to wear, just wear Armani and you can’t go wrong!”

Twain, who was being teased, was not angry, and laughed alongside the old man. “That really is a good all-purpose method.”

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It was getting late, and they had to rush back to Nottingham because Twain had to go to Wilford for team training the next morning. Although it was late, Shania was still in high spirits. She sat with Twain in the back of the car, constantly humming along with the car radio.

Twain was a little tired. He leaned his head against the seat and closed his eyes. A lot had happened that evening. Mourinho, Giorgio Armani, and the story behind Billy Woon and George Wood.

That loan note, which had been set on fire, and Billy Woon, who smiled behind the flame. Having dealt with the damned agent for two years, Twain felt that for the first time, he did not know him at all.

He actually turned out to be Wood’s relative...

He was not sure if it was George’s and his mother’s luck or misfortune to have a relative like him?

Twain raised his hands to rub his temples, only to find that his right hand could not move. He opened his eyes and found that Shania, who had been humming, was leaning on his side. She had fallen asleep with her head resting on his arm and both her arms wrapped around Twain’s body. Her face had a peaceful smile and was docile like a kitten.

Looking at Shania, who slept so sweetly, Twain carefully freed his right hand and gently stroked her hair. A burst of refreshing fragrance permeated the air in the small car.

It was Shania’s favorite shampoo. Even as a model, where many hair stylists and others would style her hair, Shania only used a specific brand of shampoo with this distinctive fragrance. It had almost become her signature fragrance.

From the first time he met her and carried her to the hospital for treatment, her hair already exuded the now familiar scent.

Twain could not help but take a deep breath.

Fasal looked up at the rearview mirror and the corners of his mouth curled up before he lowered his head to focus on driving.

The music from the stereo had long been turned off by the considerate Fasal and the windows were closed. The cars on the freeway could not be heard, and it was quiet inside the car. Only the sound of Shania's breathing while she slept could be heard.

It sounded gentle and melodious.

Listening to the sounds next to his ear, feeling the warm breath coming out of Shania's nose, and then letting the scent fill his nose, Twain leaned back and closed his eyes again.

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It was already past one o'clock in the morning the next day by the time they returned to Nottingham. Twain did not wake Shania up, but gently carried her out of the car. After he said goodbye to Fasal, he turned back to his home.

He carried Shania from the car to her bedroom on the second floor, and then gently put her on the bed. Due to propriety, he did not take off her evening dress; he simply pulled the blanket over her.

After doing all that, Twain was tired and sweaty. He breathed heavily. This was only the second time he had carried Shania. The first time he carried her was when she was thirteen years old and thin like a dandelion that would drift away when the wind blew.

And now...

"Damn..." Twain took a breath and sat down on the floor beside Shania's bed. "She really has grown up. Sleeping like a pig, you're killing me. Hoo hoo—"

After taking a break, Twain's breath gradually became even again. He turned around, knelt on the floor, and leaned over the bed to look at Shania, who slept sweetly. The girl's beautiful face was covered by a few strands of scattered hair. Twain hesitated for a moment before he reached out to gently sweep her hair aside and then leaned over the bed again to observe her.

Looking at Shania in front of him, Twain suddenly thought of a fairy tale he had read as a child — Sleeping Beauty.

"Sleeping Beauty, Sleeping Beauty... Who will be your Prince Charming who rides a white horse, cuts through the brambles on the dangerous path, and finally kisses you to save you?" murmured Twain.

"Be sure to find a good man and be happy..." Twain took Shania's arm, which had come out from under the blanket, and put it back under. He then got up to dim the lamp on her nightstand and quietly left the room.

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The next day, Twain did not let Shania be his wake-up call. He got out of bed himself and went downstairs after he washed up.

“Good morning! Uncle Tony!” Shania poked her head out of the kitchen and waved a spatula with an egg in her hand.

“Good morning...” Twain gave a feeble hello at the thought of eating the devil’s breakfast provided by Shania.

Toto sprang out of the kitchen. With breadcrumbs still on its mouth, it rubbed its head against Twain’s pants.

“Don’t wipe your mouth on my pants!” Twain very much wanted to kick the stray cat out, but he reckoned he would be kicked out by Shania for doing so, so he just shook his leg hard to try to deter the cat. He did not expect Toto to use its teeth and claws to hook onto Twain’s pants. Twain could not shake off the cat no matter how hard he tried.

When Twain was tired from the shaking, he looked at the wicked cat, who was still rubbing against his pants and said through gritted teeth, “Very well, you’re not getting off, are you? You vile cat!” He began to unbuckle his belt to remove his pants.

Shania came out of the kitchen with the breakfast just at that moment and Twain was also right in front of the kitchen door. He stood up just in time to see Shania, carrying a tray and staring at the area between the bottom of his shirt and above his knees...

Frozen for only a second, Twain quickly bent down again to pull up his pants with Toto still hanging onto them.

Shania saw there was nothing to look at and pulled a face as she took the breakfast to the table, and then said to Twain, “Uncle Tony, are you going to be a spokesperson for Armani’s underwear line? You’re outstanding in that area.” She pointed between Twain’s legs.

That was when Twain realized he had just woken up, and that meant certain things.

This is so embarrassing. No wonder she did not move her eyes when she saw it just now!

Twain reacted and hurriedly pulled his pants, with the cat still attached, up the stairs.

After a few minutes, he came back down again. Although the cat was still on his pants leg, his embarrassing “wake-up” state was gone.

“All good?” Shania asked without lifting her head as she ate her breakfast and read the day’s newspapers, which she had collected from the outside.

“The little brother was disobedient, so I slapped him a few times to keep him in line.” Twain casually sat across from Shania and began to tuck into his breakfast.

Shania sprayed the imported milk that she had just drank all over the newspaper in her hands and began to cough. Twain did not understand why and just stared blankly at Shania who collapsed on the table and laughed very hard.

After a while, Shania slowly composed herself while she looked up at Twain and said very seriously, "come on, Uncle Tony, can you give me a heads up the next time you plan to tell a joke?"

"What? Ah! You twisted it in your head. At such a young age, your mind is already so complicated. The fashion world really corrupts your mind, turning red into yellow, black into white..." Twain did not argue with Shania. He just shook his head to poke fun at Shania, unfolded the napkin and began to eat. Having eaten so many days of Shania's breakfast, his stomach was completely used to it... Luckily I'm not a foodie, or I'd have starved to death in a place like England.

"Hanging out with an old man all day long, there's no way to be innocent." After living with Twain for a long time, Shania had also learned to talk glib. "Ah, poor me, I'm still a seventeen-year-old young girl~~~~~"

Twain rolled his eyes and ignored Shania acting silly.

After breakfast, Twain went out to knock on Dunn's door and said goodbye to Shania with him and walked to Wilford to "go to work."

Shania happily waved goodbye at the two men at the door and did not return into the house to clean up until she could not see Twain and Dunn anymore.

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"She looks like a wife," Dunn who had been silent, suddenly blurted out, confusing Twain.

"What?"

"I meant Shania. You and her, when she walked you out of the house just now," Dunn added.

"What do you know? You're a virgin who has never touched a girl's hand," Twain retorted disdainfully. He did not buy into Dunn's nonsense.

"Are you talking about yourself? This body is yours, virgin boy." Dunn was another person who was corrupted by Twain.

Twain rolled his eyes and twisted his head around to look at Dunn. "Okay, you tell me the truth, Dunn. This body." He pointed to him and asked, "was it a virgin before me?"

Dunn hesitated for a moment before he nodded.

"Then we're even. Then... it's no longer a virgin, so I'm ahead." Twain laughed with great pride.

It was too awkward for Dunn to go deeper into this topic. He frowned and interrupted Twain's laugh. "Don't discuss this pointless topic so early in the morning. Don't you want to think about our semi-final opponent, Chelsea?"

Twain stopped laughing but he was still smiling when he said, "speaking of Chelsea, yesterday when I accompanied Shania to Mr. Armani's private party, guess who I ran into?"

Dunn responded with a straight face, "I'm not interested in playing a guessing game."

"You're such a boring man! I ran into Mourinho."

Dunn's expression changed at the mention of this name.

"He challenged me in front of so many people." In reality, there were not as many people as Twain said. There were just three people, Armani, Shania and Fasal. However, he liked to exaggerate.

"Dunn, I don't have to think about Chelsea at this time. I've been studying Chelsea since a long, long time ago. You know that. I haven't lost to Mourinho before and I won't lose to him now." He said the last remark resolutely, with no sign of his previous impish expression.