

Champions 601

Chapter 601: Undefeated Yet

Bale's free-kick did not go in, which prompted a loud sigh from more than 20,000 Forest fans in the stadium. They had lost a good chance to equalize the score.

Three minutes later, van der Vaart's long shot was slammed into the post by Čech. Terry kicked it out of bounds when the ball bounced back.

Nottingham Forest really seemed to lack a bit of luck. Both shots were unable to enter the goal even though they hit the goalpost twice.

Twain also found out that his offensive tactics in the middle seemed to have been seen through by Mourinho. Makelele's foul against Wood was definitely not an accident or coincidence.

As long as Wood plugged in, Makelele would rush up to defend against him. It did not happen once or twice, but every single time. If Wood did not come up, Makelele would guard the defensive line next to Essien. As long as Wood came up to participate in the offense, Makelele would mark him closely whether he had the ball or not.

There were rumors before the season that Makelele would leave Chelsea because he was old, and Chelsea did not need him. In the end, due to Abramovich's clash with Mourinho on the transfer fee, Mourinho, who had little money to buy new players, kept Makelele.

Truthfully, even though Makelele was old, there was a big difference between having him and not having him on the field. With the defensive midfielder, who tirelessly ran and intercepted balls in the midfield, Chelsea's attacking players would be able to have the energy to focus on offense. The change was difficult to clarify in a few words. It affected a lot of areas and was complex in many ways. Chelsea's offense was a lot sharper and its defense was more robust with him around.

Wood came up a few times and had no way to receive the ball. He was reduced to creating gaps for van der Vaart. Since he only had one function, Chelsea's defense became easier.

The Forest team's attacks did not have a way out. When they besieged Chelsea, it caused Chelsea's defense to become more compact instead, so there was no room to attack at all.

It looked like it would not work. They had to retreat and play defensive counterattack.

With that, the problem came. The other team was currently leading with one goal. They did not have a reason to press forward and play according to the Forest team's expectations. If Chelsea had shrunk their defense and seized the opportunity to sneak attack, Twain had no good ideas. He had used the method to deal with other teams in the past, so he was well aware of the great thing about the move: if there were no other surprises, the team that won would often be the team that scored a goal first before playing defensive counterattack.

A football game was always full of all sorts of surprises, and the surprises were precisely the charm of football.

Twain still instructed the team start to retreat gradually. He did not believe that a gap would not appear in Chelsea.

※※※

Nottingham Forest retreated in hopes to lure Chelsea out, and Chelsea refused to come out, as they were one goal ahead.

The two teams appeared to be playing a game of chicken, where there was a lot of “come out if you dare!” and “come in if you dare!” posturing.

Chelsea’s attitude of clinging on with a one goal lead made the home fans extremely unhappy. Although the team they supported often did the same in the games, they did not like it when the other teams used it on them!

Organized hissing erupted in the stands. They did not boo the Forest team for trailing behind. Instead, they booed the Chelsea players for being cowards who did not dare to come out and fight the Forest team.

Therefore, when the Forest team attacked or held the ball, there was no hissing. It was all singing. And when the football fell to Chelsea’s feet, once they clearly intended to move forward, the boos would rang out instantly. No one directed it but the stopping and starting came naturally.

Up against such a clearly intended boos, Abramovich looked livid in the VIP box. Since Mourinho became a manager, his team had never been commended for “beautiful football.” When the media evaluated Mourinho’s Chelsea team, they always used words like “utilitarian,” “conservative,” “passive,” “ugly,” and so on. Abramovich did not that kind of football game.

How could he not be upset when it happened so openly in front of him?

Mourinho was unmoved in the face of the hail of boos raining down from the home fans. He stood on the sidelines with no intention of making any adjustments, his hands tucked inside his pants’ pockets, and looked at what was happening inside the field.

He knew that the game was ugly to watch and would give a sense of “passive play”, and the boss, who was watching the game in the stands, would not be pleased. But he did not care about the noises or the perception of others. He was willing to do anything to win the game, and the game being ugly was an insignificant sacrifice.

He did not want the joke that he would not beat his opponent once in his coaching career at Chelsea to become a reality.

No matter how successful he was later, people would always recall his coaching experience. “Do you know who was the bane of Mourinho? Tony Twain! He never beat Nottingham Forest when he coached Chelsea!”

That would be a tragedy...

He was not going to let that happen.

※※※

Someone once said that the turf at Chelsea's home ground, Stamford Bridge stadium, was like a "vegetable plot" to describe how terrible the turf was. But the turf at the City Ground stadium was a veritable "vegetable plot." The originally green field had turned brown in a lot of place, the color of upturned soil.

The rain made the field slippery. The players' jerseys often changed color after they rolled on the ground. The dirt and pieces of grass, brought up by cleats, were scattered on the field. No one had the mind to return and fill them in again.

The field became full of potholes. The football made irregular movements on it, which caused the path of the ball to become more elusive and mistakes from the players on both sides start to increase.

Now it was up to whoever could take advantage of the other team's mistakes as much as possible, so long as they had fewer mistakes.

Twain brought off Lennon, as the pitch conditions became so damaging to break through that Lennon had made mistakes and missed the ball three times in a row when he tried to break through. Lennon was clearly annoyed by the increasingly terrible field. He was getting increasingly agitated due the fact that the team was behind by a goal and the pitch conditions interfered with his play.

Twain decisively replaced him with Beckham, who was constantly on the bench due to minor injuries.

David Beckham's appearance made the boos in the City Ground stadium disappear. Everyone stood up to applaud the big star player. His arrival had raised the international profile of the Forest team by a lot.

The team, which once defended the Champions League title, was well known in the late seventies and early eighties. However, more than twenty years later, it gradually became unknown around the world. Even as Twain led the team to its third European Champions League title, many people were still surprised — where did this unknown team come from?

The Forest fans, who were proud of their glorious past, were unhappy about the situation. Beckham's arrival helped them solve this issue. Since the media and football fans paid attention to Beckham, they could not ignore the football club he played for. The media had to take great pains to introduce the past honors of the team which was somewhat unfamiliar to people. When the list of championship titles came out, many people gasped. The obscure team actually won the Champions League twice before Twain!

This was what Evan Doughty and Allan Adams wanted to see: to bring in an internationally known football superstar to promote and publicize the new image of the Nottingham Forest Football Club.

David Beckham returned his thanks to the Forest fans who cheered for him before he got on the field. Admittedly, he was very focused on his personal image, knew how to maintain that image, and how to satisfy the wishes of the audience, but it was also undeniable that he was also a good professional footballer.

Twain did not bring him on to satisfy the sponsors and television viewers.

Beckham's play weakened the Forest team's ability to raid on the right flank, but the precise long passes to transfer the ball and flank passes had been strengthened.

Now that both sides made mistakes, Twain thought it would be better to take advantage of simpler and faster passes rather than rely on breakthroughs to seek and seize the opponent's mistakes. He believed Beckham had that ability to spot holes and then rely on his passes to combat the root of the problem.

If the pitch was in a bad condition, which was not conducive to the movement of the football on the ground, they would take advantage of the aerial space!

The change invigorated Bendtner, as his height and header shots were a beacon for the Forest team's offense, guiding the direction of each kick and pass.

Beckham assisted Bendtner in nearly scoring a goal with a flank pass less than three minutes after he came on.

Positional play required a strong center forward, and Bendtner fit the bill.

With Beckham's appearance, the Forest team adjusted the tactics. Their offense was no longer concentrated on the attacks in the middle or breakthroughs from the flank. Instead, it revolved around passes from the flanks and long shots from the middle. They hoped that the opponent would make some fatal mistakes on such a muddy field during the game.

Chelsea remained unmoved and continued to defend to the death in the front of the goal. As the game went on, their counterattacks declined, and the number of players deployed for the counterattacks dwindled.

It was clear that Mourinho was satisfied with a one-goal lead and happy with the luck Chelsea had had so far. He believed that using the 1:0 score to suppress Tony Twain was the best revenge.

To complete this wonderful revenge, he could completely ignore the chairman's murderous glare from the VIP box and the thunderous boos of the home fans, as well as the mutters from some of the players behind him. He just wanted to defeat Tony Twain by winning with the method that the man excelled in!

※※※

The game time decreased and the number of shots from the Forest team increased, but the success rate was not high. A single pass routine from the flank could easily be prevented by the opponent, and Twain had run out of tricks and was at his wit's end in the face of the "roguish tactic."

He could only step up the offensive to crush Chelsea's defenses and hope that the luck that he could not find in the entire game would be on his side at the most critical moment.

He did not believe in God, Gautama Buddha, or any other gods like Allah, the Greek Titans, the Sun God, the Jade Emperor, Taishang Laojun. He did not believe in any gods from the galaxy, extragalactic star system, parallel universes, and other dimensions, but in that moment, he asked for support from the gods.

I don't care who you are. I just ask this favor from any one of you!

If there were truly a God in the world, then the gods would surely think that this human being was shameless for asking for help when he did not believe in them.

They thought right. Tony Twain was a shameless person.

As shameless as he might be, there could be a certain God who was extremely bored that heard Twain's plea.

As the game entered the final ten minutes, Beckham began to try more long shots in addition to his passes from the flank. The Forest midfielders could change positions, so Beckham sometimes appeared in the middle. His long shot was of a high standard, and due to the addition of spin, it resulted in an arc that made it harder for the goalkeeper to guard against.

This was a more terrifying place for Beckham's long shot than his average powerful shot.

In the 84th minute, when it was only six minutes from the end of the ninety-minute game, the commentator began to repeat, "Mourinho had beaten countless opponents since he started coaching Chelsea. He also has a record. His team has never lost to Barcelona in any eleven against eleven game. But he also has another record that causes him endless embarrassment. He has encountered Tony Twain's Nottingham Forest teams numerous times in the league tournament and in the Champions League, but not once has he won... But those things are in the past. In this game so far, Chelsea is likely to take the three away points. The three points are of not much help to Chelsea's current situation, but it is an end to one of Mourinho's worries."

The televised broadcast gave a close-up of Jose Mourinho's profile. He still looked serious with his straight face and pursed lips. No trace of joy could not be seen on his face... Of course, it had something to do with the game not being done yet.

Twain also stood on the sidelines, still frowning. But his expression was a real reflection of his heart, completely different from Mourinho's cool exterior.

※※※

Beckham appeared again in the middle and he received a pass from van der Vaart. George Wood plugged in at high speed. The game was almost over, and yet the kid's stamina and speed was still in good form. Makelele followed him as he retreated and created a brief void in front of Beckham.

Beckham seized on this fleeting opportunity to shoot straight ahead, barely running. He played like he had a free kick with his body leaning back and his right leg kicked an arc directly to the top corner of the goal!

Čech's view was blocked by the wall-like crowd in front of the penalty area. When he found that Beckham's kick was not a pass, but a shot to the goal, it was too late for him to jump and block. Beckham's ball speed was rapid, so he did not even have time to jump. He just turned his head to look at the direction of the football.

The ball smacked into the net and made a plop!

It was not the side of the net, it was... a goal!

"David Beckham!" The commentator could not help laugh. "A goal in the 85th minute! Nottingham Forest equalized the score at the last minute! This is his second goal back in the Premier League! He has spoiled it for Mourinho!"

Standing on the sidelines like a sculpture, Mourinho finally moved when he saw Beckham score the goal. He waved his arms angrily, turned around and walked to the technical area. He walked around in front of the group of people, jabbering as he complained. He personally overturned the “cold” image he had just built up.

On the other hand, Twain calmed down. He did not celebrate wildly. He just turned around and high-fived Dunn and Kerslake in celebration.

Beckham ran to the corner flag area with open arms to greet the tsunami of cheers from the fans. Despite his repeated minor injuries and having to miss the last few games, he still proved his ability to the fans. There was a deep meaning in scoring. He sent a signal to McClaren: that there is nothing wrong with my form, bring me on and I will never run away when England needs me!

“I really hope that McClaren is watching this game,” the commentator shouted as the stadium erupted in thunderous cheers. “With Ashley Young busy chatting with naked women, did he forget that we still have David Beckham? McClaren only let him play during the garbage time! Someone once said that Beckham gave up going to the United States and chose to return to England just so that the manager of the national team could observe his form from nearby. Why not put our trust in this man again when we are facing the scenario where we may not be able to advance? He once saved us once — the previous 2002 World Cup qualifier against Greece — why can’t he do it again?! Hello, Mr. McClaren, are you watching this game? If you’re still agonizing over not having a hero to step forward at a critical moment, just look here, here’s one! He just saved Tony Twain’s unbeaten record against Mourinho! He can also continue to save England!”

※※※

The television commentator was right. Beckham’s goal just saved Tony Twain’s unbeaten record. The Forest team basically had no plan during the entire game. Every attack was countered by the opponent. Just when Twain thought the game would end like that and was feeling frustrated, a deity finally heard his repeated whine and could no longer bear the endless nagging. He sparked a flash of inspiration upon Beckham.

The score was finally fixed at 1:1.

When the ninety-minute game was over, Twain turned and walked toward Mourinho. He took the initiative to extend his hand and shouted Mourinho across the way, fearing that the other man would ignore him and walk away.

“What a pity, Mr. Mourinho!”

Mourinho heard his voice, turned his head to look at the smiling Twain, and said with a straight face, “it’s really strange that this is the first time I’ve met a manager who is so happy after he tied with the visiting team at home.”

With that, he did not shake Twain’s hand and turned around to walk off.

Twain stopped in surprise. He was also aware that there was something wrong with his conduct. He took back his outstretched hand and awkwardly scratched his head. He just thought about shaming Mourinho and did not expect to humiliate himself.

He shrugged his shoulders and turned back to his team. It was really not a good result to tie with Chelsea at home, but that was how football games could be. He could accept a draw. By comparison, Mourinho was a lot unluckier. He still had not won!

Chapter 602: The Kiss

After he had the breakfast made by Shania, Tony Twain sat on the couch and read the major newspapers that had just been published. In addition to giving some attention to the terrible stuff that his dear news media friends said about him, he also wanted to see if there was any amusing gossip he could also learn about every aspect of this society. After all, he was a Chinese man in his previous life and was still quite unfamiliar to capitalist society.

Besides, deep down, he wanted to see if there was any news about that man. He skimmed through the society edition and flipped to the sports section.

The draw between Nottingham Forest and Chelsea did not cause the Forest team to pull away from the first two teams, which was one reason that Twain could still laugh after the game. Since Manchester United and Arsenal had tied game with 2:2, Twain's point gap was still one point away from the two teams — Arsenal and Manchester United both had thirty points. With the rankings temporarily based on the number of goals scored, Arsenal was in the top spot and Manchester United was in the second. Nottingham Forest temporarily ranked third with twenty-nine points. At twenty-six points each, Manchester City and Liverpool were in fourth and fifth, respectively, while Mourinho's Chelsea — poor Chelsea, who were forced to a tie with the Forest team in the last moments of the game — now had twenty-five points and ranked sixth.

Seeing the newly announced league points table in the papers, Twain knew Mourinho's days would be even harder, but perhaps Mourinho still had time to adjust and save his coaching career at Chelsea. Twain did not care if he could not save it.

It was the first day after the game and the team had a vacation, so they did not have to do any training. The players and coaches had a whole day to rest. After that, the players assigned to national teams would fly to various places and join their national team teammates. For those without any national team assignments, they would return to the Wilford training base for their daily training. As the Forest team would be missing a large number of its main players, the team would not carry out any combined tactical practice and would mainly do physical recovery training.

During that time, Twain's job was usually simple, as most of the things were the responsibility of the assistant managers, but Twain would look busier because Dunn was going back to his country for two days.

Nottingham Forest and the television station in Hunan, China, as well as a number of media and sports finance companies were working together on the football youth talent show, which had entered the final training stage. According to the cooperation agreement signed between the two sides, Nottingham Forest needed to send a coach to China for a short inspection and guidance. It was not for a long time, only four days, but Twain might have forgotten the matter if Dunn had not brought it up.

After the agreement was signed, he threw that cooperation or something aside. He basically did not remember any of it in the meantime. Therefore, when he heard Dunn said he was going home, Twain stared as if Dunn was joking with him.

Dunn spent a lot of energy to make Twain understand that he was not joking. He was really following the requirements of the contract to return home to fulfill the contract. Twain muttered again about why it had to be him and not any other coach. Dunn said, "because I am Chinese, and the event is held in China," which shut Twain up.

It was true that there was no better candidate than Dunn. Evan and Allan wanted to fully demonstrate Nottingham Forest's sincerity in its participation in the cooperation, so the club's top executives demanded that they send someone with adequate coaching standards and qualifications to China. Being Chinese, Dunn was naturally the best candidate. There was no one with a better understanding of the current state of Chinese football and understood the Chinese football youth. At least, that was how it looked to outsiders.

Twain was reading the newspapers when the doorbell rang. He was about to get up and open the door when he heard the sound of hasty footsteps. Shania trotted out of the kitchen, wearing an apron, and did not even have time to dry her hands. She opened the door and cried, "Brother Dunn!"

"Good morning, Shania. Is Tony..." Outside the door, Dunn saw Twain, who appeared behind Shania.

Twain noticed a suitcase by Dunn's feet.

"Getting ready to leave?"

Dunn nodded. "This flight is this afternoon."

"The flight is in the afternoon and it's only morning, you don't have to be so..." Twain moved his head to the side and saw a black cab parked on the side of the road behind Dunn, with a familiar face in the back window. He snorted. "I was going to say I'd send you off, but it appears there's no need to."

Dunn knew who Twain saw and nodded. "She's coming back with me."

Twain nodded to show that he understood.

"I will not say much, just take care of yourself and come back early." Twain smiled. "Maybe you'll bring a Chinese talent back with you?" Twain smiled more. "A table tennis genius?"

Dunn did not respond to his sarcastic remark. He picked up his suitcase and bade goodbye to the two people standing at the door, before he turned to walk toward the cab. Inside the cab, Tang Jing smiled and waved goodbye to Twain, but Twain pretended not to see it.

Closing the door, Shania asked Twain, "you don't want Dunn to go, Uncle Tony?"

"Of course. With him away, I'm going to have to do a lot of trivial things. And those things are the ones I hate the most." Twain shrugged and went back to the living room to continue reading his newspapers.

Shania looked at his back and smiled. "Good, you can get some exercise!"

Sitting on the couch, Twain did not look back and just asked, “you have been very free lately. Don’t you have any jobs?”

“My jobs are concentrated during the Christmas period. There’s plenty of time to rest now.”

Twain laid on the couch and stretched his back. “Never have I ever seen such a laid back professional model like you.”

Shania, who was not in a hurry to return to the kitchen, smiled slightly as she sat down and replied, “this time next year, I won’t have so much free time.”

“Why is that?”

“Mr. Fasal has arranged some jobs for me which have nothing to do with the runway shows.”

“Are you going to be in some television commercials?”

“No, a movie.” There was no trace of joy in Shania’s voice.

Twain sat up on the couch and looked at Shania, who sat in a chair and asked, “Why do I feel like you don’t sound very happy? I should congratulate you on...”

“It’s just a background character that doesn’t even have a line. What’s there to congratulate?”

Twain smiled. “So you’re unhappy because you’re not the lead character. There are no natural-born leading characters in the world. All those big movie stars started out in minor roles without any lines. I remember you enjoy watching movies very much.”

Shania nodded. “Yes, I like movies, so I want to try acting. Otherwise, I wouldn’t have promised to do that kind of work...”

Twain cleared his throat. “You keep rejecting the work that Mr. Fasal arranges for you, which makes things difficult for Mr. Faisal, Shania.”

Shania shrugged her shoulders and pouted without saying anything.

Twain looked at Shania’s unhappy face with her head bowed. He thought for a moment and suddenly recalled a person. The last time he saw that person, she had said she went to Hollywood to be a producer. Perhaps she could help?

Since it was something Shania liked, he should help her. Although the showbusiness was messy all over the world, if anyone dared to bully Shania, he would make whoever it was pay for it.

Moreover, if that person did do well in Hollywood, it would not be difficult for her to take care of Shania, would it?

Twain heard a faint sound of water splattering from the kitchen, and he pointed to it. Shania also reacted. She had come out in a hurry to open the door and forgot to turn off the water. With a scream, Shania jumped up and ran back to the kitchen.

Twain went upstairs. He was going to call this friend and ask her for a favor.

※※※

“Tony?” Clarice Gloria was surprised to hear Twain’s voice. “You haven’t called me for so long; I thought you’d forgotten about me!”

Twain could clearly feel the enthusiasm in this voice, even across the phone and the entire Atlantic Ocean. He just mumbled in reply. He was really busy with his work and was negligent in contacting her. But perhaps there was another reason: he was a little afraid of facing Gloria’s enthusiasm.

“I’ve been really busy with work... I’m so sorry, Clarice. How are you doing in America? I haven’t heard from you much either.”

Clarice smiled. “I read your latest gossip, Tony. You’ll always be a popular man with the sports media. What about that Turkish beauty?”

Twain coughed twice. “There are all kinds of scenarios one faces in life...”

Clarice laughed on the other end of the line, and when her laughter subsided, she said, “you must have called me about something, right?”

Twain liked to interact with this smart person. There were some things he did not have, and the other person would understand, which saved a lot of hassle.

“Well... It’s like this...” Twain told Clarice about Shania and conveyed what he had thought. Then he waited quietly for her reply.

It was silent on the other end for a while before Gloria suddenly asked, “Tony, tell me, what’s your relationship with Shania?”

Twain was stumped by the question, and then he said, “how do I put it? Perhaps it would be more appropriate to say I’m her guardian in the UK?” When Shania moved here, her parents did communicate with Twain. Their words revealed the hope that Twain would take good care of Shania, make her happy, and supervise her.

“That’s it...” There was another silence and it was slightly longer this time, which made Twain think that the call was interrupted.

“Well, if she were to come here to develop her career, I’d do everything I can to take care of her.” Gloria said what Twain most wanted to hear, and he breathed a sigh of relief. Twain was not a person who liked to ask another person for a favor. He felt that it was not good to owe others and for others to owe him. He was used to solving his own problems. That was true both before and after his transmigration. It was just that as a football manager, he really could not help with Shania’s matter.

“Thank you so much, Clarice. I... Well, how can I thank you...” Twain really did not know how to repay her.

Gloria laughed again. “I think that to be able to hear the incorrigible Tony Twain thank me so carefully with such a gentle tone, is a good reward in itself. That is something that not everyone can encounter.”

Twain scratched his head and chuckled.

“You’re my friend, and what concerns my friend is naturally my business.” Gloria showed her capable and experienced side and was forthright, rather like the chivalrous heroes in Chinese martial arts novels.

“You don’t need to thank me, Tony. Besides, I just made some inquiries and received some news that may be of some help to you and Shania.”

Did she make some inquiries during the previous two periods of silence? Twain admired the woman’s style of doing things. He seldom admired women because he was a little chauvinistic, but Clarice Gloria really impressed him.

“The film Shania had her debut role in was by the studio... United Artists.” To anyone who was in the film industry, they would be familiar with the name and they would be amazed. However, Twain was a shut-in who did not know anything but football, so he was completely unresponsive as he waited for Gloria to continue.

Gloria thought of Twain’s personality and smiled. “It is a very influential production company in Hollywood. It was first founded by Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, Douglas Fairbanks, D.W. Griffith and other famous Hollywood figures in 1919 in conjunction with the MGM film company.” After she listed the names of so many famous people in the film industry, Twain finally understood the status of this company, but what did that have to do with Shania? Those people were ancient history.

Gloria knew Twain would not know the marvel behind it, and she patiently continued, “A year ago, the company changed hands, and their new executive is Tom Cruise. Do you recall anything, Tony?”

When the familiar name was mentioned, Twain immediately reacted. “Tom Cruise? Isn’t he best friends with David Beckham?”

Gloria’s voice came from the other end of the line. “Correct. You can use that relationship to formally introduce Shania to Tom Cruise. It will be of great help not only in the film, but for her future development in Hollywood.”

That information was really useful to both Twain and Shania. Twain once again sincerely thanked Gloria, and warmly invited her to England. After the two said goodbye, he hung up the phone and walked downstairs.

Shania had finished tidying up in the kitchen and was curled up on the couch. She held the Totoro pillow as she watched a movie. Twain recalled that Shania had indeed been watching more movies than usual recently. Perhaps she was pondering on how to act?

Although it was only a background character, she took it very seriously...

With that in mind, Twain felt that he did the right thing to ask Gloria for help.

Shania did not like modeling, but she liked movies. If she could be an accomplished actress, it would be also very good!

Twain sat next to Shania with a smile and looked at her.

Shania thought that Uncle Tony was a little strange. She took her eyes off the television screen and moved her gaze to Twain’s face. “What are you so happy about, Uncle Tony?”

“Well...” Twain thought about it and decided to be direct. “I’m going to introduce someone to you. Since you like movies so much, I think you’ll be interested.”

“Who?”

“The Hollywood superstar, Tom Cruise!” Twain gestured for a moment, and announced in an excited tone, “he’s David Beckham’s best friend. I can go to David and ask him to introduce you. So, when you’re growing your career over at Hollywood, you’ll have one more friend. Isn’t it nice?”

After Twain finished saying excitedly, he found that Shania looked at him with a somewhat strange expression. She was not as happy as he had imagined. “What’s the matter, Shania?”

“Uncle Tony...” Shania cleared her throat, “Your meeting with David and his wife, was I not the one who introduced you to them?”

“Yes, what’s the matter?”

“They knew me before they met you. Victoria and I have a good relationship, so... I met Tom before I introduced you to them. The acting that role I got this time was obtained with Tom’s help...”

Twain’s mouth was agape as if he had just heard a marvelous story. Then he reacted and muttered with some chagrin, “so that means what I did just now was useless?”

Looking at Twain’s dejected look, Shania smiled. She got up from the couch, knelt behind Twain, and put her arms around his neck. Twain could feel two soft mounds against his back, and he was suddenly a little nervous.

“This is to thank Uncle Tony,” Shania said softly and kissed Twain on the cheek.

After the kiss, Shania let go of Twain, jumped off the couch, and stretched her back. “You reminded me, Uncle Tony. When there’s a chance, I have to introduce my friend to you. Do you like watching the Mission: Impossible movies?”

Twain answered in a daze. He was still reliving the kiss. It was warm, wet, and sweet... Even though the kiss was only on his cheek, it was still wonderful.

In the moment when Shania’s lips were on him, he could feel his heart stopping beating. His heart suddenly contracted.

That was the closest contact he had with Shania since they started living together. He seemed to hear something deep in his heart break and make a “crack” sound. He did not know whether the sound was a good thing or a bad thing.

By the time he came back to himself, Shania had gone upstairs. Twain sat alone on the couch in the living room. He slowly reached up with his hand to place it on the side of his cheek, which had just been kissed by Shania, and gently rubbed it.

Shania was no longer that child who laid in his arms, soft and defenseless as she was tormented by a high fever and covered in sweat.

He lifted his other hand and buried his face deep in them.

Chapter 603: A Little Lonely

Twain recovered from the trance and realized that Shania had not come downstairs yet. Feeling a little odd, he walked up the stairs, and the two of them bumped into each other at the stairwell.

“Ah! Uncle Tony...” Shania was startled by Twain, who suddenly came up.

Twain glanced at her. It turned out that she went to change her clothes.

“Are you going out?” He asked.

Shania nodded, then pulled Twain’s arm. “I want to go shopping with you. It’s not nice to always stay at home.”

Twain thought this was a good suggestion. It was a shame to coop up at home and not make use of the one day of vacation.

If the two of them were to go out, they both needed to “dress up” a little to hide their identities. It was mainly to cover up Shania’s identity. If Twain went shopping alone, he did not need to conceal himself. Even if he were to be recognized on the streets, it was no big deal. At best, he just had to chat a little, sign a photograph or something.

A manager was also a person. No matter how famous a manager was, he also had his own life. If paparazzi wanted to come sniffing around, track him, and take photographs of ordinary things such as shopping to publish in newspapers, wouldn’t the readers tear them up?

Therefore, there was not much gossip about the managers in the various English media because managers were mostly older men with families and their lives were more regular and low-key. The reporters from The Sun could squat and keep watch over some big star player’s mansion, go through their trash cans to find sex tapes, but the paparazzi would not creep around the doorsteps of a certain manager’s house.

Shania was different. Currently the hottest supermodel in the world, her each and every move would be of great interest to those entertainment media. Most importantly, if the media were to find out any gossip that Shania, who had been scandal-free, was holding hands and shopping with an old man, and that older man was not her father or grandfather, who knew what kind of rumors were going to come out?

From that point of view, it was necessary for them to disguise their identities. Even if they were not in London and Manchester, which was concentrated with the paparazzi prowling the streets.

Shania put on a pair of large-framed sunglasses that covered almost half her face and wore an elaborate hat. That way, unless someone stared carefully, they could hardly recognize her. Twain was dressed more casually. He just wore a pair of sunglasses. The two went out the door hand in hand.

While waiting for Landy’s car at the door, Twain glanced at Shania, who held his hand as she stood beside him. He thought about the way he and Shania appeared now. If outsiders were to see them, what would they think?

— They are a father and daughter, aren’t they? How nice!

Although he was only thirty-eight years old, it was reasonable that people would mistake him for Shania’s father from his appearance. Caucasian faces looked older.

Twain did not want to look older in other people's eyes, but now he really wanted people to view the relationship between the two of them in that way. It was better than being seen as a sugar daddy, who bought trendy gifts for young girls to coax them into bed, wasn't it?

Landy came very quickly and drove to the front of Twain's house. He waved to the two from the car and laughed. "What a nice father and daughter!"

Twain smiled with relief. Landy did not say he was a sugar daddy, but Shania's reaction next gave him a headache.

Shania happily said, "yes, yes! Then I'll call you Daddy today, Uncle Tony! I was still worrying about what to call you when we are outside. This is settled! Thank you, Landy!"

Twain's mouth pulled back at the corners and he looked embarrassed. He did not know whether to laugh or cry.

Shania opened the car door and pointed inside. "Let's get in the car, Daddy!"

Twain glared at her and got into the car helplessly. Shania followed suit. After she closed the car door, she asked, "where are we going, Daddy?"

The driver, Landy, saw Twain's awkward expression in the rearview mirror and laughed happily.

"Shania... we're not in a public place yet..." Twain coughed.

"This is a warm-up! I'm afraid I won't get into the role and give the game away!" Shania answered justifiably.

Twain's eyes bulged, and he raised his right hand. "If you're mischievous again, Daddy will give you a spanking!"

"Wow. Daddy's so fierce! You'd agreed!" Shania shouted exaggeratedly. She pointed to Twain and smiled smugly. "Daddy, I want new clothes! Daddy, I want a new toy! Daddy, I want some pocket money! Will you, Daddy... Daddy!" She held Twain's hand and acted like a spoiled child.

Landy laughed until he bent over the steering wheel and could not get up.

Twain was afraid to get mad at Shania, so he said gruffly to Landy, "drive your car, Landy! Hold the steering wheel steady!"

Shania got away with her scheme and leaned smugly against Twain's shoulder.

Landy glanced at the rearview mirror. No matter how he looked at them, they looked like father and daughter... But it was a shame that it was only a father and daughter...

※※※

Twain and Shania returned home with many bags of stuff in their arms when the sky darkened.

While they were out, Shania had fully showcased her acting skills. She played a spoilt daughter who liked to whine to her father very well. She would hang on if she saw something she liked and not let go and

insist that “her Daddy Twain” buy it for her. Luckily, all the things she liked were small toys, and nothing too expensive.

“Your daughter is so beautiful, sir!” An oblivious salesperson would often smile while Twain paid, or they would say to Shania, “your father treats you very well, Miss!”

It often made Twain roll his eyes, and Shania buried her face in the plush toys and giggled.

When they got home, Twain piled the things in his arms on the table, fell on the couch, too tired to get up again. “It’s tiring to go shopping with women!”

Shania pouted. “Every man says that. Daddy, you’re such a cliché! Ah...”

As she finished, she suddenly realized that they were no longer in a public place, so she did not need to address him like that.

Twain turned his head and looked helplessly at her. She stuck out her tongue and giggled. “I got used to calling you that after doing that the entire day... I didn’t mean to, Dad... Uncle Tony!” She saw Twain raised his palm, so she hurriedly straightened and corrected herself.

“I’m going to be angry, Shania!” Twain warned with an evil grin.

Shania did not give him a chance. She made a face and ran up the stairs, carrying a bunch of soft toys.

Twain was so tired that he laid down again. He felt a hard object press against his waist. He got up again to touch it and found that it was his cell phone.

The screen lit up and he was surprised to find that there was a text message.

Both before or after his transmigration, Twain did not like texting people. He thought it was too slow to type on his cell phone’s keyboard with one finger. If he had anything to convey, he would call. People who were familiar with him called him if they had anything to discuss. Few people would text him — unless the phone call could not get through or no one picked up the phone. Shania was the only exception. She would text Twain to chat when she was bored while she was out doing runway shows. Twain could only patiently reply with text messages.

He opened the Inbox and found the text message came from an unfamiliar number.

“Goodbye, Mr. Twain. Hopefully we’ll have another chance to play against each other in the future.”

Not able to make heads or tails out of it, Twain was confused. The text message was sent three hours ago, while he and Shania were on a shopping spree and playing the role of a “loving father of a daughter.”

He stared at the string of numbers for a long while and could not think of whose phone number it was. He wanted to call them to find out, but when he saw that the person’s text message did not even give an introduction to their identity, he could not be bothered to meddle. Whoever it was and whatever the matter was, he was just going to let it be.

His lips pulled at the corners and he put his finger on the “Delete text message” button. But he thought again, and finally moved his finger away.

“Shania, are you hungry?” Twain yelled as he looked upstairs.

“A little!” Shania shouted back.

“I’ll make you delicious Chinese food today!” With that, Twain got up and went to busy himself in the kitchen.

Shortly, Shania changed her clothes and came down to help. She was curious and wanted to learn how to cook Chinese food from Twain.

The two were so busy that it was a flurry in the kitchen, but they were very happy.

Twain also forgot about that bizarre text message amid the laughter and cheerful talk.

※※※

The next day, Twain got up early. He was going to get back to work today. With Dunn not around, he needed to get busy with more things.

At the dining table, he picked up a newspaper and habitually flipped to the sports section.

“Hey, Uncle Tony!” Shania found him reading the newspaper again while he was eating. She frowned.

This time, Twain did not listen to her and put the newspaper down, but held the newspaper as if he were possessed.

“Uncle Tony, Uncle Tony...” Shania grabbed the newspaper from Twain’s hand. Twain did not reproach her. She was surprised to see Twain pull out his cell phone.

She glanced at the newspaper that enraptured Twain, and a large headline on it stood out:

“Goodbye, José— José Mourinho leaves Chelsea”

The subheading below was:

“Abramovich: This was an amiable breakup.”

She knew who Mourinho and Abramovich were, and she understood why Uncle Tony behaved that way.

Twain flipped to the text he had received yesterday, and dialed the number.

When Mourinho’s voice sounded on the other end of the line, Twain was stunned and did not know what to say. He had called on the spur of the moment and did not think about what to say if he got through.

“Hello? Mr. Twain, if you’re going to call early in the morning to wake me up just to waste your phone bill, then I don’t mind putting the phone aside and continue my sleep.”

“Ah, ah...” It was only when he heard Mourinho’s sarcasm that Twain returned to normal. “Well... damn, I just read the news and suddenly wanted to call you. But I don’t know what to say... How did you know my phone number yesterday?”

“Jorge gave it to me.” Jorge Mendes was Pepe and Rafinha’s agent and also considered Twain’s “old acquaintance.”

“Oh...” Twain’s tone implied “that’s it” but he had not thought through what he was going to say next.

It was Mourinho who rescued him. “Is the news of my departure so shocking that even Mr. Twain, who has always been quick-witted and sharp, does not know what to say?”

Twain’s brain became clearer a little to reply, “No, I knew early on that you would leave Chelsea.”

Mourinho became very interested in his words. “Oh? Since when?”

“Since the day you became the Chelsea manager.”

Mourinho laughed in a low voice.

“I’m not joking. You and Abramovich have a mismatch of personalities. One of you was bound to leave sooner or later. The club chairman was much less likely to walk away than the manager, so it was bound to be you who would leave.”

Mourinho listened with interest to Twain’s analysis and then asked, “you... are also considered kind of a tough guy. So why are you still doing well as the Nottingham Forest manager?”

“My boss is smarter than your boss. He knows when to give in, to delegate to his men, and to sacrifice his personality to satisfy others...”

On the other end, Mourinho grunted. “Yes, you’re right about that.” He seemed to be nodding his head and spoke with the beat.

After a brief silence, Twain asked, “may I ask what you intend to do next, Mr. Mourinho?”

“I have a deal with Chelsea and cannot coach any Premier League teams in the next year. That way, I can get more “breakup fees.” I want to have a good rest for a while, anyway.” It could be the first time that Mourinho and Twain were in atmosphere without any daggers drawn and no of the explosive communication.

This feeling was so fresh and wonderful that Twain forgot to eat breakfast. Shania also did not urge him. She just waited quietly beside him.

“Then may I buy you a drink?” Twain raised the old topic again.

Mourinho found it strange and asked, “why are you so obsessed with asking me for a drink, Mr. Twain?”

“Uh, um... One of my reasons to be a coach: to take advantage of my position and have a drink with all the world’s leading managers after a game.”

Hearing Twain’s strange reason, Mourinho laughed. “Only in England. There’s this quirky tradition to have a drink after the game, Mr. Twain. But I’m still going to turn you down.”

“Why?” asked Twain.

“Because we are still enemies. I did not say I was going to give up football and retire. You’re continuing to coach Nottingham Forest and it looks like the team is unlikely to be relegated in the next few years. It will often be in Europe’s top tournaments... So, Mr. Twain, we’ll always have a chance to play against

each other again. As long as there's that possibility, you're still my enemy. I never drink and make merry with the enemy."

"All right." Twain gave up the idea. "Are you going back to Portugal?"

"Yes, go home and rest."

"You're not coming back to England?"

"No, I did not sell the house in London. The agreement just states that I can't coach a Premier League team for a year, but it did not state that I can't a year from now. Who can tell clearly what's going to happen in the future?"

"Very well. I wish you good luck."

"I wish you good luck, too, Mr. Twain."

After he hung up the phone, Twain looked at Shania, and Shania looked back at him.

"You don't look very happy, Uncle Tony," Shania said as she tilted her head to look at Twain.

"Why do you say that?" Twain did not deny it. He just asked.

"I don't know. It's just a feeling. You're not happy."

Twain smiled. "I should be happy."

"Why?"

"Because I would have one fewer powerful enemy." Twain pointed to the newspapers. "But my real thought is: 'God, there's one less interesting opponent!' I can't be happy at the thought of it. You're right, Shania. I'm not happy. I feel a little empty inside. It's like... it's like, losing a very important friend..."

Twain laughed again self-deprecatingly.

"Have you ever heard anything like that, Shania? 'In fact, the person who knows you best and cares about you the most is often your greatest enemy.' Look at what these papers are saying..." He picked up the newspaper and pointed at the photograph of Mourinho waving with a small caption below, and he read, "Goodbye, José. Without you, the English Premier League will feel lonely."

"I agree with The Sun for the first time. I feel a little lonely."

Shania looked at Twain, who was staring at the newspaper, without saying a word.

※※※

When Twain arrived at the gate of the Wilford training base, he found that a number of reporters had gathered here. He was a little surprised. Should the center of the world's attention not be at Stamford Bridge in London? The dismissal of José Mourinho, the fanatic manager, could be counted as a piece of sensational news in the world.

“Why are you all here?” Twain looked at the reporters. “Aren’t you going to London? Big things are happening there.”

One of the reporters came forward. “It turns out you know, too, Mr. Twain.”

“Thanks to you reporters, I got wind of it during breakfast.” In fact, he knew yesterday afternoon.

The reporter continued, “According to some of Abramovich’s trusted aides, the Russian admires your coaching results and wants you to go to Stamford Bridge. We’re here to seek confirmation...”

Before he could finish his words, he was interrupted by Twain’s laughter. Twain laughed happily. He was really very happy and definitely did not fake it.

“Thank you for letting me hear the funniest joke of the day. Thank you, Mr. Reporter.” Twain said to the confused reporters when his laughter subsided.

“No, it’s not a joke. It’s true, I have a reliable insider source...” That journalist felt that his integrity was insulted, and he stressed the veracity of his source very seriously.

Since he was being serious, Twain looked somber.

“Well, if what you’re saying is true, that you do have an insider source who is Abramovich’s trusted aide and he tells you that Abramovich is interested in me, then I would like to trouble you to return a message to that trusted aide and Mr. Abramovich himself.”

A group of reporters stood at attention and turned on their phones and recording pens in succession, ready to record Twain’s response to the rumor. The television reporters extended their microphones to Twain, and the camera lens faced the man.

“Dear Mr. Roman Abramovich...” “Twain cleared his throat and looked directly at the cameras.

“F**k you.”

Chapter 604: A Public Apology

“The former Chelsea manager, José Mourinho’s departure has caused a huge reaction in the football world. The inside details of his dismissal and candidates for his replacement have been the subject of the media hype these past two days. A group of Chelsea fans staged a small demonstration at the entrance of the Stamford Bridge stadium yesterday to protest the Chelsea club chairman, Abramovich’s dismissal of José Mourinho. Other teams’ managers have commented one by one, saying that Abramovich’s dismissal of José Mourinho is a step backward for football.”

Tony Twain’s face appeared on the television screen. He was standing at the gate of the Wilford training base and facing numerous reporters while he looked at the camera. “Dear Mr. Roman Abramovich, bleep-bleep”

When Sky TV broadcasted this video footage, they censored Twain’s crude language. However, everyone could guess what was silenced based on his lips — “F**k you.”

“Yesterday morning, Manager Twain’s comments caused some trouble for himself. The Nottingham Forest Football Club has already received an official letter of protest from Chelsea FC. They expressed a strong objection to the personal attack toward their club chairman by the Forest manager, Tony Twain, and stated that no one at Chelsea had reached out to Twain through any channels to send him an invitation to coach the team.”

The news that played on the television took place a day ago.

Twain’s big mouth got him into trouble again. Amid the news about José Mourinho, his crude language had secured valuable pages for himself. After he “cordially greeted” Abramovich in front of several media outlets, his remark and photographs of him were published in several major national newspapers, and television stations also reported the news in the sports news.

Twain did not just abuse Abramovich in front of the press. He vehemently slammed the Chelsea Football Club’s top echelon in his column, calling the cruel attitude a murder of the Chelsea fans — “They murdered the Chelsea fans’ joy in the pursuit of victory.”

Twain’s tough attitude and reaction came as a surprise to many people, so the incident with his foul language was newsworthy. Everyone had thought that since Twain and Mourinho were famously enemies in the league, almost to the extent of sending bullets to each other as death threats, Mourinho’s dismissal would delight Twain.

No one would have thought that Twain stood on Mourinho’s side and would abuse the Chelsea club.

Out of the nineteen managers in the English Premier League, no one anticipated that Twain’s reaction would be so intense. Ferguson and Wenger expressed regret and disappointment at Mourinho’s dismissal and praised Mourinho’s achievements at Chelsea. Only Tony Twain abused them and almost lost control.

No one could have guessed what Twain was thinking, why he did it, and what good it would do for him to do so.

Even Evan Doughty convened with Twain and made it clear to him that the club would not come forward to defend him because it was clearly a private matter for Twain and had nothing to do with the Nottingham Forest Club. The Forest club was only involved due to Twain.

Twain agreed with Evan’s handling of the matter because it was really due to his personal emotional outburst. The other reason he did not want to get the club involved was if he had to deal with it on his own, he would have more freedom and would not have to consider the club’s image.

※※※

“Did they really look for you?” During dinner back home, Shania asked about whether the Chelsea Football Club had ever looked for Twain to be its manager.

Twain shook his head. “They have not looked for me. And even if they meant to find me, they wouldn’t be able to come to me now.”

“Hmm...” Shania bit the spoon and looked up at the ceiling. “What if they did come to you?”

“I would refuse,” Twain answered. “But I’ll play them before I refuse.”

He smiled. Shania glared at him. "Are you going to get yourself into trouble again?"

"This is not a hassle. It's just a little adjustment in life. Don't you think it will hurt their feelings if I look grim as I reject them? So I used a different way, which also entertained the public. Don't you like pranks the best, Shania?"

Shania's eyes rolled. "What nasty idea have you got?"

Twain smiled. "I'll gather the reporters and call for a personal press conference tomorrow or the day after to issue a public apology to Abramovich and the Chelsea club."

Shania widened her eyes and looked at him unbelievably. "You're going to concede, Uncle Tony?"

Twain smiled. "How is that possible? Since you don't have to work during this period and dare not go out to the streets most of the time, you must be depressed at home. I will give you some fun. Anyway, you'll know when you watch the news."

He was being mysterious, and Shania did not continue to ask. She believed that her Uncle Tony was not going to be that easy guy. Just when someone thought that he was going to be like that, he would do just the opposite.

※※※

The next day, Pierce Brosnan got a call from Twain. He wanted Brosnan to help him contact his media friends to hold a press conference at the Wilford training base.

Twain made it a point to state that it was a personal press conference and had nothing to do with the Nottingham Forest Football Club. He also told him that it was held to apologize to Mr. Abramovich.

Without mentioning the specifics of the press conference, that piece of news was enough to get Twain's picture in the morning newspapers on television, and online. Twain had abused the man two days ago and would actually apologize today. Swearing at people was common for Twain, but apologies were uncommon, especially if he had to issue a public apology with huge fanfare just one day after cursing the person out. It had never happened before.

Brosnan thought that the matter was probably not as simple as Twain said, so he asked, "Mr. Twain, you... Are you really going to apologize to him?"

On the other end of the line, Twain chuckled hoarsely. "Of course, it's an apology, an open apology to fully demonstrate my sincerity. You just help me get in touch with your media friends. As you know, I have more enemies than friends in your industry. There are some words I can't say. You'll be more effective than me."

Brosnan, who had agreed, was a little gloomy after he hung up the phone. Just yesterday, he only wrote his own article to rally for Twain. He did not expect the protagonist's attitude to reverse completely today. It made it awkward for him to stop halfway.

He told his boss the news that Twain was going to apologize, and his boss was very happy. He did not care that his newspaper had always been steadfast in their support for Twain. That matter was no less sensational than Twain's abuse of Abramovich and might be even better than Mourinho's dismissal if it

were to be handled properly. As long as it was good for the newspaper sales, the boss was willing to do everything.

After he gave his approval to contact influential media across the country to attend tomorrow's press conference at the Wilford training base, he set aside two pages for Twain in his own newspaper so they could report and analyze the press conference in detail and from various angles. He even thought of a headline for Brosnan to use in the news article.

"The madman bows his head! What do you think of the headline, Pierce?" He asked Brosnan excitedly.

Brosnan nodded and complimented his boss, but he had another idea in mind.

He always felt that things were not so simple. He understood Twain and knew Twain's temperament. Although Abramovich was wealthy and Chelsea could be considered a powerhouse club, Twain had no reason to apologize just because of a letter of protest or to apologize so publicly. The Tony Twain he knew was a man who might not give in even in the face of the Queen of England. He always seemed to be fearless. And the greater the pressure exerted by others, the greater his backlash was...

Backlash?

Brosnan suddenly figured something out.

He decided to rush to the scene the next day to watch a good show.

※※※

"Manager Tony Twain decided to make a public apology for his malicious talk toward the Chelsea Football Club's chairman, Abramovich, for which he specifically invited a large number of media outlets to attend tomorrow's press conference at the Wilford training base." Sky TV's evening sports news reported the latest developments.

Twain was going to give in and apologize, which was not a small story according to the media. Many media outlets had to follow up on the report.

Those who liked him were surprised, and those who hated him waited to watch his disgrace.

Some of the reporters rushed to the Chelsea club to interview them about their reaction to the incident. The Chelsea Football Club had already been bothered by the recent Mourinho's dismissal, and they did not make any comment on the matter of Twain's apology, but everyone believed that Chelsea would be watching the matter closely. That was almost certain. With a man like Tony Twain, one could like or dislike him very much, but no one could just ignore him.

Since the phone conversation that morning, Twain and Mourinho did not make any further contact. From the sprawling news offensive, Twain knew Mourinho had returned to Portugal.

He did not do this as a show of goodwill toward Mourinho. He did not need to show anything good at all. His sudden outburst was driven only by a sense of dismay.

He knew he and Mourinho were in the same boat. Both strong and unyielding fanatical managers, they appeared to be very different in a traditional country like England. Their predecessor, Brian Clough, was

equally praised and reviled. People like them still felt a little out of place in society, even if the times changed.

Mourinho was Twain's reference in the industry. The treatment he had received might well be his own treatment one day. Since Abramovich was also a strong character, the conflict between the two men became apparent quickly. What about himself?

Although Evan Doughty knew how to be a good leader and was tolerant in the face of Twain's temper, he was the boss. No matter what the press said, no matter what the fans in the world thought, or how famous Tony Twain was, Evan was the real owner of the club. When the status of the Forest club changed with the rise of their performance, it was uncertain as to whether the real boss would still be willing to be behind the scenes and tolerant of everything.

Twain was aware of it, but a strong personality was not something that Twain could change. It had been branded into his life and soul and was unlikely to change. While he was aware that it might result in bad consequences, he remained indifferent. It was his character, and a person's character determined his fate.

Therefore, when he saw that a famous figure like Mourinho could not escape the fate of a dismissal in the end, Twain felt a kind of empathetic loneliness inside.

He had a good personal relationship with Wenger, but Wenger did not understand him. He had gone to a horse race and drank with Ferguson before, but Ferguson did not understand him either. He had not had a drink with Mourinho because Mourinho always refused to drink with the enemy, and he had not had a pleasant exchange with him. They had never said a nice word to each other and always wished each other dead when they encountered the other, but they understood each other because they were one of a kind.

When his wife exclaimed, "oh God, your feet are so cold," Brian Clough said, "Honey, just call me 'Brian.'"

José Mourinho said, "in addition to God, there's me."

Twain did not believe in God, but he thought he was the center of the world.

They were more arrogant and confident than anyone else. They were also more vulnerable than anyone else. If it had been in the Middle Ages, they might have been denounced as heretics and burned at the stake. They were undaunted by authority in a world where authority dominated everything. A lack of fear of authority was heresy, and heresy meant death. Thankfully, heretics did not have to be tied to burning stakes anymore, but they could lose their jobs, or even their reputations.

Equally the kings of the football, Pelé did better than Maradona after their retirements because he sought authority whereas Maradona did not fear authority. It was the same principle.

Never mind that Twain was doing well now, Mourinho fared just as well as Twain, if not better. He was the winner of the UEFA Europa League, the Primeira Liga, the UEFA Cup, the UEFA Champions League, the Treble, and the Premier League twice in a row. Now, he was fired. No matter how reluctant the fans were, he could not rely on the support of the fans to stop it from happening because he was not the real boss. He did not have authority.

The past few days made Twain lament the loss of a worthy opponent and left him with a bit of concern — would Mourinho's present become Tony Twain's future?

So he scolded Abramovich and Chelsea. Was he helping José Mourinho? Wrong, he was defending himself.

Madmen were different from ordinary people in the way they defended themselves.

※※※

Shania could very clearly feel that her Uncle Tony's spirits were low the past few days and she was not in a good mood either, but he still had a smile on his face and would joke with her during dinner.

On the surface, Twain was no different than before, but she and Twain had known each other for several years and spent time together, and Shania knew that Twain was not in a good mood and she was a little vexed as a result. It was hard to explain why she had the feeling. It could only be attributed to a more mysterious reason. She and Twain had a tacit understanding and telepathy. She understood Uncle Tony's heart and could feel his mood swings every time.

She wished she could do something to help. But what could she do to help in a man's world?

Her friends were in the fashion industry and show business. They could not come forward and say, "We all support Tony Twain." It would only make people laugh.

Unfortunately, Dunn was in China and could not help Twain with his problems, which only made Twain feel lonelier.

During dinner, Shania tried to find a joke to tell Twain, hoping that he would be in a better mood after he heard it. Shania really had a gift for telling corny jokes...

Twain felt a little strange. Shania's jokes were outdated and not funny. Why did she keep talking?

"Are you worrying about something, Shania?" he finally could not help asking.

Shania shook her head hard. "No."

"But you're behaving abnormally today."

"Am I?" Shania curled the corners of her lips to form a slight smile.

Twain stared at her for a moment, and Shania kept that smile the whole time.

"Well, if you don't want to tell me, I'm not going to force you either."

Shania was a little flustered when she heard that Twain's tone was a little rough. She did not want to screw things up. "It's not like that!" she said hurriedly. "I... I just think that Uncle Tony, you haven't been in your usual mood lately. You seemed to be anxious and I just wanted to make you happy."

Twain was a little surprised to hear that. He looked at Shania again, and this time Shania frowned and pursed her lips.

Seeing her like that, Twain suddenly smiled, and he reached out across the table to touch Shania's head.

“Silly girl.”

Shania did not dodge him. She just let Twain touch her.

“How could I be anxious? You can rest assured that there is nothing. By the end of tomorrow’s press conference, the matter will have nothing to do with me. Why would I be so obsessed with other people’s affairs? It’s just that I scolded someone, so I should explain to that person, right? After this, however the media want to hype will all have nothing to do with me.”

Twain pulled his hand back and pointed to the dining plate in front of him to say. “Let’s eat.”

Shania did not start, but carefully asked, “Are you really OK?”

“I’m really fine. You just wait to watch a good show tomorrow.” Twain chuckled.

※※※

The next day, Twain went to Wilford early to attend his personal press conference before the team began its training.

Reporters from across the country flocked there and squeezed into the small press hall until it was a hubbub. They were waiting for the main protagonist to appear. Before Twain appeared, the reporters were talking about the official announcement from the Chelsea club that morning — Mourinho’s successor was Grant, the Israeli who served as Chelsea’s technical advisor. It came as a bit of a surprise to the media, because generally when the manager was gone, the assistant manager or the youth team manager would be asked to be the acting manager, which was an unwritten practice in the English clubs. But Grant had no previous experience in coaching a top European league team, nor was he an assistant manager. It was incomprehensible that Abramovich would allow him to coach Chelsea... Furthermore, Chelsea’s chief executive, Peter Kenyon, said that Grant was not the transitional manager. He was the official new manager.

When he became Chelsea’s technical advisor, Mourinho was furious and openly questioned, “How is this man qualified to guide me and my team?”

Now he had gone a step further and become Chelsea’s head manager. Many reporters shook their heads at the mention of the change, believing that Chelsea was finished for the season. The league was nearly halfway over, and it ranked in sixth place. With the sudden change of managers and low morale, they would have to start from scratch.

The buzzing chatter suddenly stopped. Impeccably dressed in a suit, Twain appeared in front of everyone. As he put it: a formal press conference and a formal public apology to convey his formal sincerity...

There was nothing wrong with that in itself, but it felt like nonsense coming out of Twain’s mouth.

Nothing was rational about Tony Twain, even though he always said he was a reasonable man. Tony Twain’s standard of “reason” was not the same as the “reason” known to the general public.

Everyone noted that Twain had a piece of paper in his hand. Was it a letter of apology?

Twain walked toward the microphone and cleared his throat. "To everyone below, I'm going to read a letter of apology to Mr. Abramovich."

There was a slight commotion. It was indeed formal. He even prepared a script. Usually, when Twain was in a press conference, he just spoke directly.

"I apologize for the crude comments I directed at Mr. Roman Abramovich two days ago." Twain did not say any nonsense. He bowed his head to read the script and appeared to be very sincere, without the slightest sarcastic or impatient expression on his face. "The media asked me what I thought of Chelsea wanting me to be their new manager. To be honest, I felt at the time that the man was joking, and the facts proved that he was really joking. But at the time this friend insisted that what he said was true and hoped that I would answer it seriously. I was annoyed by this meaningless question because I thought it was an insult to my loyalty to Nottingham Forest. Therefore, in the heat of the moment..." He coughed once and lifted his head to look at the media below. He found that everyone was focused on listening to him.

"...In the heat of the moment, I burst out with an obscenity. After I calmed down, I was fully aware of my mistake and was deeply repentant and disturbed by the harm done to Mr. Abramovich. I hope Mr. Abramovich understands how much I respect him, that his arrival has changed the sport of football and injected a lot of life into it. It was he who changed the conditions at Chelsea FC. I have always admired such a generous person who is passionate about football. I do not doubt his passion for football and his love for the Chelsea club."

When Brosnan heard that, he had sensed a hint of conspiracy. Twain's attitude was too nice. It was so nice that it made people feel that it was a little fake...

"Not only have I not had any dissatisfaction against Mr. Abramovich, I would also like to thank Mr. Abramovich and the think-tank around him. I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to you."

A low rumble of discussion voices came from below. More and more people felt this was odd. He just had to apologize. What was up with this thank you?

"Thank you for helping my team drive away a strong contender and an extremely threatening enemy in the competition for the league title." Speaking of which, Twain suddenly looked up and smiled. His smile was radiant, and to all the reporters present, the smile could not be more familiar. They were all fooled!

They were called by Twain from all over the country just to act in his play and continue to humiliate Chelsea and Abramovich.

"Mr. Mourinho's Chelsea would have been an important opponent in my plan, but now I am delighted to see that this opponent no longer exists, so that I will have more energy to focus on the other major competitors. Therefore, I must take this opportunity to give particular thanks to the top echelon of the Chelsea Football Club, especially Mr. Abramovich, who has made a great contribution to this matter. If my team ends up winning as expected, I will send you a bouquet and greeting card as a token of my gratitude. It is for this that I recognize how foolish my previous crude words and the slander of Mr. Abramovich were. Mr. Abramovich is a friend of Nottingham Forest and a friend of mine. Thank you very much!"

Twain's tone was sincere, and he almost bowed.

“I thank Mr. Abramovich and I’m deeply impressed that you have made the sport of football full of competitiveness and vitality. Although... it may have sacrificed a little bit of Chelsea’s interest...” Twain smiled. “Your friend always, Tony Twain.”

After he read this baffling “letter of apology” — was there anyone who still saw it as a letter of apology? — Twain folded the paper in his hand, put it back in his pocket, and got ready to leave.

A group of reporters stood up one by one and raised their hands as they shouted at Twain. “Mr. Tony Twain!”

“Mr. Twain, please stay!”

“Do you really think this is an apology to Abramovich, and not a further provocation?” The scene was chaotic, and someone shouted loudly.

Twain kept walking. “This is really an apology and the sincerest apology and thanks. Not the slightest bit of insult was intended. If you think it’s insulting and provocative, it’s your problem, Mr. Reporter.”

“But anyone with a normal IQ will not think that those remarks were nice words...”

“Are you insulting Mr. Abramovich’s IQ? Watch out for the Chelsea club’s official letter of protest.”

“Mr. Twain! Mr. Twain... We still have questions!”

“I’m sorry. I did not say you were free to ask questions after the press conference.” Twain was almost out the door.

Someone shouted, “Mr. Twain! What do you think of Chelsea letting Avram Grant be the replacement for José Mourinho as the new manager?”

Twain stopped in his tracks. He turned back and swept his gaze across the chaotic press hall. He could not find out who had called out the question. But it did not matter.

“Who is that?” he asked.

Chapter 605: Outside the Squad List

Twain’s “public apology” and last remark of “who is that?” made him the man of the moment in the media once again. No one had ever played a club for a fool in front of so many reporters, but Twain did.

What happened next was exactly like he had said to Shania. He stopped paying attention to the Chelsea club’s protests and the various voices of the media. He concentrated on his work and did not make any more responses. Are Chelsea and Abramovich unhappy? What’s it got to do with me?

His incident became water cooler conversation for many people, increasing the sales of England’s major newspapers and tabloids each day.

The hype about Mourinho’s dismissal came to an end. After all, no matter how temperamental Mourinho was, he was nothing more than a Portuguese. Twain’s swearing incident would also slowly lose public interest because of his refusal to speak.

During this time and for some time to come, the focus of the English media was on the England national team.

The battle between life and death was imminent.

There were two rounds left in the UEFA European Championship qualifier held in Switzerland and Austria. As Group E had seven teams, there was going to be a team that would come up empty at some point during the competitive schedule and it was England's turn in the penultimate round. The scoreboard indicated that the England national team was temporarily in the second place with eleven games played and twenty-three points.

According to the rules of the UEFA European Championship qualifying round, fourteen teams would advance from the European Championship qualifiers, the first two teams from each of the seven groups, followed by teams from the two hosts, which would make up sixteen teams.

The first-ranked Croatia, with its twenty-six points, and the third-placed Russia, with its twenty-one points, had one less game than England. If England wanted to advance, they needed to hope that Russia would lose to Israel in the away game in the group stage match held on November 17th. Then England had to defeat Croatia at home on the 21st.

Only then would the team would be able to compete in the next UEFA European Championship.

The condition seemed harsh but was not impossible.

The English media beautifully surmised that Israel was not a weak team, not to mention they were competing at home. And in the final round, the group's current top ranked Croatia was likely to obtain the right to advance ahead of time. In that case, when they advanced, they did not need to use all their main force and energy to fight with England.

Therefore, anything was possible.

England concentrated on training before the 17th, while the English media cheered for the Israeli team in the hope that they would be able to beat Russia at home and retain the hope for England to advance.

※※※

Starting from the end of the league game against Chelsea until November 24th, the English Premier League would not have a game. The other European leagues were mostly the same. Those two weeks were reserved for games of the top-level national teams. In Europe, it was 2008 UEFA European Championship qualifying matches. In South America, it was the world's longest competition schedule, the CONMEBOL qualifier. The official competition time was 2010 but due to the special circumstances of South American football, the qualifier had been in full swing in October, the longest World Cup qualifier of the time.

The Asian Football Confederation qualifiers would not begin until February the next year. The Chinese national football team did not need to play any qualifiers because they were hosting the Olympics. After they lost in the AFC Asian Cup, the Chinese Football Association basically dissolved the national team to concentrate on its strategy for the Olympics and dragged the Olympic team to tour all over the world on public expense to play friendlies. The travel, accommodations, venue rentals, opponents' appearances,

as well as miscellaneous subsidies took a lot of money. As for how it would turn out... Twain could only wish the Chinese football team good luck with a sneer.

Sun Jihai, the only Chinese player on the Forest team, was not in the "Olympic strategy" program because he was over twenty-three years old. According to the information revealed by Tang Jing, he would not be on the list of the three over-age players. Therefore, Sun Jihai had nothing to do with the national match and did not have to fly all the way to the United States to waste time and play friendlies with a few major league teams, especially since overage players were generally not involved in such an Olympic friendly.

Nottingham Forest was already a Premier League team and a force to be reckoned with in Europe. It was inevitable that there be a lot of national footballers in the squad and that they would be drafted. It was no longer strange for Twain to encounter such a thing. Apart from complaining that his team played for their countries and then had to recover while they played for the club, he had no way to stop it from happening. After all, he was just a football manager, not the FIFA president.

David Beckham, who scored a goal at the end of the game against Chelsea and helped Nottingham Forest equalize, was popular with the English media. Many media outlets had publicly called for the veteran to be re-appointed. They did not demand him wear the captain's armband again, but they did not want him play for a couple of paces during the garbage time and then be brought off. Although it was no longer up to the England team to advance, as long as there was a possibility of advancement, it was necessary to give their all in the fight.

McClaren declined to talk about whether or not Beckham would appear on the squad list against Croatia. He also refused to answer the "boring question" of betting on Beckham. His reasons were sufficient: "for the sake of secrecy."

The media began to build up Beckham's number of national team appearances. Although there was not much to flaunt, the last eight minutes of the away game against Moscow was the 98th time he had played on behalf of England. It was two games short of one hundred games. If England could beat Croatia on November 21st, then they still had a glimmer of hope of breaking into the finals. In that case, Beckham's hope of one hundred games remained. Otherwise, it was hard to say what was going to happen.

Watching Britain's media excitedly discuss Beckham's record of appearances and how much they looked forward to the prospect of one hundred games, it was as if they had advanced out of the UEFA European Championship qualifier.

The country was so strange. When someone succeeded, they were used to calling them "God," but once they failed, they scrambled to hang them in the gallows with their own hands. It was rare to be utilitarian to such a point. If Beckham had not scored a crucial goal in the final minutes of the game against Greece in 2001, instantly making him a god, he might not have been able to change his fortune in the United Kingdom.

Twain suddenly thought of Li Ning, the Chinese gymnast. He used to be the darling of the entire country, and then he was the outcast, spurned by hundreds of millions of people. Beckham was more fortunate than Li Ning in that he was still able to save and prove himself. When Li Ning failed, he was old enough to retire and lost the chance to prove those who admonished him wrong with his own efforts.

Sports were cruel. The Olympics and the World Cup were not difference. No matter how beautiful it was, the one who lost was the loser. Only the winner could enjoy the applause and glory. It was not determined by the sport. It was decided by the people, the spectators, the participants involved in the game, the game operators... all human beings.

Beckham, at least, had the entire British media to build momentum for him and plead on his behalf, in hopes that he would appear in the starting list against Croatia and become the hero that saved the country.

However, amidst the conflicting views of the excitement and concern of the English media and fans, one man became a sacrificial victim behind the aura of Beckham's star power. He was forgotten.

George Wood's name did not appear on the squad list in the final showdown announced by McClaren.

※※※

Dunn had not returned yet, but Twain was not particularly busy. The team's training was only one day of practice. It was not much time, but it was high intensity. The relentless Christmas schedule was looming, and the team needed to be fit to cope with the multiple upcoming tournaments and twice or thrice weekly games.

Training was scheduled for the afternoon. Twain had an afternoon nap after his lunch. When he woke up, he would go to Wilford and start his day of training.

Every time he came to the training base, George Wood had already started to warm up.

McClaren had unveiled the full squad list of the last game against Croatia the day before. Out of twenty-five players, Nottingham Forest accounted for two spots — David Beckham and Aaron Lennon.

George Wood's name was not there.

Although George Wood was not a regular national team member, any fool would know what it implied to take his name off the list before such an important game. Under both Eriksson and McClaren, George Wood had not been placed in an important position except for being in the starting lineup in some unimportant friendlies and appearing as a substitute during garbage time.

He sat on the bench in the World Cup in Germany for all five games and did not get a minute of playing time.

England played twelve games in the UEFA European Championship qualifiers and George Wood received a total of 180 minutes of playing time, averaging fifteen minutes per game. He had never been put in an important position like in Nottingham Forest. The manager did not trust him and there was no spot for him in the tactical system.

However, George Wood did not make any public complaints. Maybe he had not learned how to fight for greater benefits for himself in the national team?

In the end, it was Nottingham local media that looked into it and publicly questioned whether the manager, McClaren, was biased against the players coming out of Nottingham Forest. McClaren's response was "the England team is concentrated with the best players from England, each of whom may

be a core player at their respective clubs. But you can't ask that these core players continue to be the core once they come to the England team."

Initially, it made sense, but after a more careful consideration, McClaren had given a perfunctory answer to the reporters. No one asked for George Wood to have a core role in the England team, but he did not even have the minimum playing time. Every time he was brought on to play, it was to waste the time if they were certain to win or lose. It was just using up the time. If the game was very intense and brutal, and the outcome was in doubt until the last second, George Wood was bound to sit on the bench. The diligent Nottingham media collected information on those games and came to a conclusion — McClaren had to have a grudge against George Wood!

Truthfully, it was uncertain if there was a vendetta against Wood, but distrust and the lack of an important position were certain.

McClaren did trust the players that Twain had trained and would not place them in important positions if he could avoid it.

"George." Twain saw Wood, who was warming up alone on the training ground, and he did not approve of it because of the senseless depletion of stamina. It would affect the effectiveness of training after that. But for a living robot such as George Wood, it was not too much of a problem.

He stepped forward and stood next to Wood to watch him finish a set of warm-ups.

"It's the game day for the national team, but I see you warming up here. It's actually quite a rare sight..." Twain said with a laugh.

It was a rare sight. Even though he had very little playing time on the England team, he would still make the squad list. After all, he was the captain of a European Championship team and favored by many as the defensive midfielder. If he were to be placed in other countries, he might have been the main force. It was just somewhat helpless in England because the "double virtue issue" was enough of a headache for every manager. If Wood was in the picture, the "double virtue" became "triple virtue."

"This is rather good. Anyway, I won't get to play if I go," Wood mumbled. He put on his jumper and stood in front of Twain.

He was not in a good mood and appeared to have been affected by the squad list. It was a crucial game that countless professional players loved to encounter because it was possible to prove one's ability, try their best to save the desperate situation and to become a hero to the entire country. This was especially true for Wood, who liked to keep challenging the limits. The stronger the opponent, the harder it was to play the game, the more vigorous he would be. It was McClaren who deprived him of the right to look forward to the game ten days before the match.

Twain was happy to hear him say that instead. "I thought you didn't care about this kind of thing at all."

Wood glanced at him.

Twain was still smiling. "Because you've never expressed your displeasure anywhere. Everyone thinks you're compliant and easy to bully, that you are used to sitting on the bench. George, if I were you, I would accuse McClaren of not knowing how to use his players, and then announce that I won't be there if he's still there, it's either him or me, if he's not dismissed, I will not go to the England team..."

“I’m not you.” Wood glanced at him. “But I’m really not happy. I’m not having a good time... on the England team, and I thought about simply not going.”

Twain was a little taken aback, not expecting that Wood would actually say such a thing. He was really having a hard time at the national team.

“I hate being a substitute. If McClaren had said that I was going to be a substitute, I would have turned him down. But he didn’t say... When the Jamaica Football Federation people first approached me and wanted me to play for Jamaica, I refused... Now come to think of it, maybe it would have been better for me to go to Jamaica.”

Twain was silent.

He had heard countless similar stories: a star player had no choice but to change nationality and play for a weaker countries due to the strong domestic competition, just to be able to participate in the World Cup or any other intercontinental cup competition. The situation most commonly occurred in Brazil.

George Wood had his Brazilian nationality, but when he became famous, the Brazilian Football Confederation did not even glance at him because Brazil had too many geniuses. They did not care about George Wood, who was far away in England.

Twain was silent for a moment. “Your choice is right. It’s better not to go to a place like Jamaica, where it would have been impossible to win. Don’t worry... If England can’t advance this time, McClaren won’t stay in that position for long. Maybe a change of manager will do the trick.”

“What if it doesn’t?” Wood looked up.

Twain did not know how to answer. It was not as if there was no such possibility. Some players had to announce their exit from the national team early because they were not used in important positions and had lost the chance to show themselves off on the larger international arena.

He could not say “it’s also good to focus on playing for the club and keep your form going longer” because he also wanted to see Wood play on that wider arena and amaze the entire world.

“Things are always going to get better.” Twain did not know what the future held, but he could only console in that way.

It gradually livened up outside. Players and coaches hurried to the base for training.

Twain had planned to head to his office to deal with trivial matters. As he was about to turn around, he heard Wood say, “if... McClaren’s gone, would you go?”

Twain understood Wood’s meaning. He looked at Wood in puzzlement. “Then I would have to give up my present job. Would you like that?”

Wood thought about it and shook his head. “Forget it. If you don’t go to the England team, at most I won’t go. If you’re not here... I don’t have a job.”

Twain laughed. “When did you learn to joke, George?”

Wood did not say anything. He turned around and walked toward the locker room.

He stood there watching Wood's back, and then turned to walk toward his office.

His ability to predict had expired, so he could not know whether England would be able to break through Croatia this time. He did not know if McClaren would be out of a job, who his successor would be if he were dismissed, or if that person would like Wood's style of football... There were too many questions.

However, now he was particularly keen for England to lose that key game and lose its ticket to the UEFA European Championship final.

Someone had to be responsible for the "tragedy." That person would not be an English Football Association official, nor would he be a star player. It would be the manager, McClaren.

Chapter 606: McClaren's good luck

There was no England game on November 17th, but a broadcast by English television stations would be watched by countless people. Russia had an away challenge against Israel. The outcome of the game would determine England's eventual fate in its advancement.

If Russia won, then the two teams would have played the same number of games and Russia would lead by one point. England would face Croatia in last round of the group while Russia would face the weakest team, Andorra. From the looks of it, it was certain that Russia would win. In that case, even if England won against Croatia, it would not be able to avoid the misfortune of being knocked out.

Therefore, Russia's away game against Israel would be the focus of all of England.

Twain sat in front of the television to watch the game. He was not concerned about whether England could advance or not. He had no interest in the fate of the England team. It was just that he had two players from his team in Russia's starting lineup. Since English television stations were going to broadcast it, he might as well inspect the two players' performances.

Even though Akinfeev was a substitute for Edwin van der Sar on Nottingham Forest for the time being and had only played in the EFL Cup, that had not affected his position as the main goalkeeper in the Russia team in any way. Hiddink had once expressed his displeasure at Twain putting Russia's number one goalkeeper on the bench, but Twain pretended not to hear it and did what he wanted. He had originally wanted to promote Akinfeev. Who could have thought that Edwin van der Sar's form would be so good that not only he did not lose his fighting spirit, but he was also fired up by last season's Champions League victory? He continued to be in top form this season. Since a goalkeeper's position valued experience and Edwin van der Sar was in a good shape, Twain naturally put him in the starting position.

Arshavin, another member of the Forest team, was currently the captain of the Russian national team. He wore the number 10 jersey and was the core of the team's offensive organization on the field. In the game England had an away loss to Russia, Arshavin scored one goal and even assisted his teammates with a goal. He played actively in the entire game, giving England's rear defensive line of star players a headache.

In Nottingham Forest, he was luckier than his fellow Russian because he received numerous appearances, as well as goals and assists because Eastwood was always injured. The English fans were also gradually more familiar with him. During his rookie season in the English Premier League, his performance could be scored seventy points. It proved, once again, that Tony Twain had a good eye for players. In fact, Arshavin's skills were very much in line with Twain's tactics — his speed, flank attacks, and plug ins from the back. Moreover, Arshavin's style of play fit well with the pace of the English Premier League and was not as unadaptable as Grosso.

With the two Russian players playing in the Premier League, the English commentator was familiar with them. However, he did not say anything nice about Russia. He wanted Israel to win from the start of the game.

Although the game was between Israel and Russia, the leading figures seemed to be England and Russia.

Before the game, the Chelsea chairman, Abramovich, promised to reward everyone with 100,000 pounds as long as Russia could defeat Israel! And during Russia's home win over England, Abramovich walked into Russia's locker room after the game and gave out a 500,000 reward to each national footballer on the spot!

As a result, due to the Mourinho incident, as well as Twain's swearing incident, the English media was almost entirely against the Chelsea boss because of their national honor.

The Russian was in action, and so were the English people. Before the game, the entire English team had launched a multi-faceted PR campaign: the national team players lobbied and campaigned their Israeli teammates at their respective clubs in the hope that they would not throw the game for the sake of their friendships. Crouch's and Gerrard's Liverpool teammate, Benayoun, could not be in the game due to injuries, which was a blow to the English people. Chelsea's center-back, the Israeli, Ben Haim, was also "tempted" by Joe Cole. He revealed, "These days, my English teammates have been putting pressure on me. Cole said that as long as I beat Russia, I can choose where to go for a holiday and he will foot the bill. I don't know if he's joking, but I'd like to try it. Hopefully Israel will get a good result because I also want to help Mr. Abramovich save money." The Israeli midfielder, Tamir Cohen, also had an English complex. He said, "My father, Avi used to play for Liverpool and he loved Liverpool and England."

The English media continued to publish articles urging UEFA to closely monitor the game; UEFA's official partners, which were some of Britain's biggest companies, were also busy, hoping to help Israel defeat Russia.

However Israel and Russia were the teams that were actually going to be playing.

"I don't care what the English or the Russians say." The Israeli manager, Kashtan, said in an interview before the game, "I just want my team to perform well."

Obviously, he was a little disgruntled that the real protagonist had become a supporting actor, but his remark reassured England.

As expected, ten minutes into the game, the Israelis took the lead on their own home ground. The British commentator was thrilled, as if England had scored the ball, constantly chanting the name of the goalscorer.

For his part, Twain just shrugged.

In the 60th minute, Russia finally equalized the score. The television broadcast immediately quieted down. After a while, the commentator's voice piped up again, sounding extremely frustrated.

What would happen if Russia and Israel drew? England had to beat Croatia to secure its advancement. England would be better off if Russia lost to Israel. Then they just needed to draw with Croatia to advance.

A draw would ensure that they could advance.

Twain took his eyes off the television screen as he recalled past events...

※※※

On the television, the game continued thousands of miles away in the Ramat Gan Stadium in Tel Aviv, Israel. Russia equalized the score after they stepped up the offensive. They also could not put the hope of advancement in the final round on Croatia, who had advanced ahead of time, to carry forward the spirit sportsmanship. Only an away victory over Israel would put the fate of their advancement in their own hands.

On the other hand, the Israelis seemed to be content with the result of a draw with Russia. Their attack was not fierce and even gradually withdrew with the intention to hang on to the one point. The English commentator impatiently shouted, "they definitely won't be able to hold if they start defending so early! Conservative play usually doesn't end well!"

Unfortunately, the Israelis could not hear his shouts and withdrew into the penalty area to contend with the Russians, as if they did not want to win the game. Twain started to imagine that there had to be a lot of drunk English fans who were currently admonishing the Israelis.

Unexpectedly, there was a sudden change in the game at the last minute. In the 92nd minute, the score was still at 1:1. The English commentator had given up. He listlessly started the formality of introducing to the audience what England would face under such circumstances — "We must have a home win over Croatia in the last game so that even if Russia and Andorra have a lot of goals, it won't affect our advancement... Yes, that's the case..."

He had not finished speaking when he saw the Israelis suddenly rally.

"What? This is... Omer Golan!" the commentator, who saw the replay shot, screamed with excitement. "Omer Golan! Golan, I love you! He created a miracle! This is a last-minute goal! A fatal shot from the Israeli! So deadly that the Russians are screwed!! The Israelis beat the Russians at home! They have lived up to the spirit of sportsmanship and fair play! They are the pride of professional football!"

This commentator almost yelled "they are possessed by Divinity."

Seeing the commentator this excited, Twain felt acid surge in his stomach. He did not want to see such a comedic scene again, so he lifted his hand to turn off the television.

Shania, who heard the loud roar from the television upstairs, got curious and came down, only to see a dark screen.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“Nothing.” Twain shrugged. “I was watching a film that was said to rival One Flew Over the Cuckoo’s Nest. But after I watched a little, I was disappointed. There was no flying at all. It was completely “a cuckoo’s nest,” so I turned it off.”

Shania was even more baffled. “Weren’t you watching a football game?” she asked.

“Yes, the game is over.”

“What’s the result?”

“The English have won.” Twain said unkindly.

Shania thought for a moment and laughed. “In other words, Israel beat Russia? England’s hope of advancement looks promising. But why do I think that you’re not happy at all?”

Twain stood in the living room and looked up at Shania on the stairs. He spread out his hands and waved. “The FA is not paying me. Why should I be happy for their victory?”

Shania took it that Twain and the Football Association had a very deep contradiction, so she did not ask further. Little did she know that Twain was unhappy because he had never been an England fan or an Englishman, so he did not need to get mixed up with others’ domestic affairs.

※※※

The next day, almost all the newspapers that Twain was able to see on the market used the front-page space to cover the game that took place the day before. Omer Golan seemed to become a hero for all of England overnight, and some people even seriously suggested that the bosses and managers of the English Premier League clubs purchase the player. Twain would find it amusing to see such similar comments every time — in fact, most of the time, he did treat a lot of the English media’s comments as jokes.

However, it was understandable that the English people were so excited, because the Israelis had an upset win against Russia. Although Croatia lost to Macedonia, it had been announced that Croatia had advanced early because Croatia still had a three-point gap with the second-placed England, coupled with the outcome of the two teams’ game was in Croatia’s favor.

England only needed to tie with Croatia at the new Wembley Stadium to be able to advance to the UEFA European Championship finals as the group’s second ranked team. That way, even if Russia defeated Andorra, the two teams shared the same points but according to the competition results of the two teams, England ranked ahead of Russia.

Now it was the Russians’ turn to panic.

Twain coolly watched the play. He was an outsider. England’s inability to play in the UEFA European Championship was no loss to him. The English national footballers in his team could even get a pleasant vacation next summer.

Before the game, England organized a friendly with Austria and the media sourly stated, "if Russia defeats Israel, then this friendly is likely to be the closest England will get to the UEFA European Championship." Indeed, it would be geographically closest.

The friendly match was on the 16th. After the friendly, the England team flew back to the United Kingdom and was dismissed, with all the players watching the game at home.

McClaren's luck was unbelievable. He had one foot out the door. After the game, both of his feet were firmly planted on the ground and he was safe for the time being.

Now the pressure was on the Russian side and the English team only needed a draw. The English media was jubilant, as if they had already advanced.

When Twain saw the scene, he really wanted to remind them that a draw to advance was the world's most terrible curse and the sweetest trap. He could even give them examples from Chinese football, which, of course, the conceited Britons would not listen to, because the difference between the levels of Chinese and English football was like night and day. But in Twain's view, English football had a lot of things in common with the Chinese football, such as the media and the Football Association.

Of course, Twain currently could not be bothered to do such a thankless thing.

There were also reporters coming to interview Twain. These days, many people in the English football circle had come out for interviews, to talk about how wonderful the England team's prospects were, to get a tied game and advance was almost equal to their advancement now, Croatia would not do its best, or enthusiastically promote the friendship between the two countries.

Even the Frenchman, Wenger, came out to say he was bullish on England's victory. In order to prove that he was not saying it just for show, he analyzed the reasons for England's victory from a tactical standpoint in detail. That strengthened the confidence that many English fans and the media had for the looming better future.

When Twain was asked, he said, "if I were to express a different view, would I become everyone's enemy?" Then without waiting for the dumbfounded reporter's response, he put up two fingers and claimed, "England can score at least two goals!"

He did not say the second part. The reporters could use their own imagination. What did it mean to score two goals in one's own home ground? The game was basically won! The crowd left Wilford with a wonderful wish.

On the last day before the game on the 20th, Twain could not help but express his concerns in his column, tactfully saying how terrible the idea of "a draw to advance" was. It was similar to what Wenger had said except that Wenger had followed up saying that he had faith in the English team. On the other hand, Twain stated the English people were so optimistic that it might fail miserably in a very easy task, not to mention that Croatia was not an "easy task."

If he had only said that, the comment could still be acceptable. But following it, he said it was still fine to get a draw, but England's midfield lacked a good defensive midfielder. If McClaren really wanted to defend, it would not work to depend on the big-name players. Hargreaves was injured during training before the game and was unable to play in the important game. England was basically without a

defensive midfielder. Did they hope to tie the game with such a lineup? Did they really think that Croatia's forward line, which had scored twenty-five goals, was for show?

Therefore, he thought that since McClaren was not going to recall George Wood, then it would be the road to disaster if he still wanted to hold the ground. As for the good luck, "when the Israelis beat the Russians, McClaren had used up all his good fortune."

By saying so, he gave people the idea that he seized the opportunity to achieve his personal vendetta and promote his players. It naturally gained no favors. There were already voices saying that it was inappropriate for Twain to pour cold water on everyone and cause the players to lose heart. Twain could not be bothered to wage a war of words with the ignorant people. He had expressed his opinions and would shut up and wait quietly for the fate of England and McClaren to arrive.

He could not predict the future, but there were some future events that he could still guess, such as the break between Mourinho and Abramovich, and the fate of the English team, which had been spoiled by the media and the public and lwas ed by the mediocre man, McClaren.

Chapter 607: The Destined Result

On November 21st, the day of the match, the English fans waited at home or in pubs to watch the game.

According to news released before the game, McClaren did place David Beckham on the starting lineup list. It looked like he was finally going to believe in the veteran's experience for such an important game.

Twain waited in front of the television to watch the game, but he was not cheering for England or McClaren. He purely wanted to examine Beckham's form and performance.

In the Croatian squad, the striker, Eduardo da Silva, who currently played for Arsenal, was the most watched. The fawning English media heaped praises on his ability and reviewed his half-season at Arsenal before the game, calling him "flawless." In fact, it was not flawless, but was successful. He scored five goals in less than half a season, and given that it was his first season, that was pretty good. He would be the most threatening player for England in the game.

There was another change in the squad list. Robinson, who had previously served as England's main goalkeeper, was ditched for the game, while Carson, who did well in the friendly game against Austria, was the starter. It appeared McClaren was distrustful of Robinson, otherwise it was too risky to replace the main goalkeeper in such an important game.

With Owen and Rooney injured, the starting striker was only Crouch, exactly the same as Wenger's analysis — Wenger thought McClaren would play 4-5-1 because England was short of strikers.

The five players in the midfield were Lampard, Gerrard, Beckham, Joe Cole, and Barry. In the rear defensive line, due to Rio Ferdinand's suspension and Terry's injuries, the arranged combination was Richards from Manchester City as the right-back, Campbell and Lescott as the center-backs, and Wayne Bridge as the left-back.

Before the game, the English media praised Croatia hard in hopes that Croatia would let England off easy since Croatia had already advanced and there was no need to struggle with the team.

Croatia's manager did not make any comments on the question when a reporter asked. No one knew if he was going to let the team go all out or if he was really just pretending and would throw the game when England powered up.

European football was not cleaner than Chinese football. Match fixing, football betting, match manipulation, throwing games, corrupt officiating were the many dark sides of football in Europe. The Europeans just did it with more sophistication than the Chinese. The average person would not be able to discern it unless they took a closer look. Even if they could discern it, there was no evidence.

For example, the English people wanted Croatia to throw the game. Although this would harm Russia's interests and contrary to the spirit of fair play, which option would the English people pick, harm Russia's interests or harm England's? Any fool would not choose to satisfy Russia. Because not everyone was a saint who could place oneself above the common populace and without feelings and emotions. At a time when the nation was at stake, fanaticism would prevail.

However, the English people were smart. They did not directly state it and just gave Croatia seemingly dignified reason to throw the game — "Since they have already advanced, they do not need to fight hard for a game that doesn't matter to them, just in case one of their main players is injured or takes a red card and be suspended. It is not worth it."

The reason was adequate, reasonable, and legitimate. If Croatia sent the reserves squad and did not exert themselves and to let the England team win, the Russians might resentfully appeal. If there was no definite evidence, the matter would be settled inconclusively.

But, the problem was... Would the Croatians follow the script written by the English?

※※※

In the opening eight minutes, a boulder landed on the English people.

Srna, a full-back that Twain had hesitated whether or not to bring in that summer, made a pass from the flank after he broke through. Kranjčar followed up with a vigorous shot twenty-five yards away from the left flank. The starting goalkeeper, Carson, made a major blunder when he was up against the shot — he pounced on the ball and missed!

The football slowly rolled from under him toward the goal while Carson was still on the ground, somewhat still in a daze.

"Oh my god..." the commentator, John Motson, groaned painfully. "Either he was too nervous, or it was... a stupid mistake!"

The Croatians celebrated the goal, but Wembley Stadium was dead silent. No one anticipated that they would concede a goal within eight minutes of starting.

Everyone was generally optimistic that England would use the home-field advantage to defeat Croatia before the game, so majority of the fans were pretty bullish.

Twain straightened up on the couch. Due to Croatia's energetic performance, he suddenly looked forward to the game again. It seemed that the Croatians did not intend to follow the script written for them.

The nightmare was not over. Just six minutes after the goal in the fourteenth minute, Eduardo da Silva broke through the edge of the penalty area. He lured England's two center-backs, Campbell and Lescott, to follow. He passed the ball straight to Olić.

Campbell raised his hand to signal the other team was offside and did not give chase, but the assistant referee gave no indication that he'd seen and Campbell realized that Bridge was still delayed in the back.

Olić was successfully onside. He easily bypassed Carson, who came out to attack, and then shot into the empty goal.

In just six short minutes, Croatia had entered two goals in a row.

2:0!!

Croatia had no intention of throwing the game. Their performance felt like a bucket of cold water and put out the fire of hope among the English fans.

The Wembley Stadium was silent and the commentator, Motson, was quiet as well. The camera turned to McClaren, who was standing on the sidelines to direct the game. The poor man looked at the field in a slight daze, seemingly wondering what had happened. He held a bottle of water in his hand. From the first moment Croatia scored a goal, he had been drinking water nonstop. Every time the camera panned toward him, he was drinking water. Sweat covered his ruddy complexion, not because he was in good spirits, but because he was tormented by nerves.

After a while, Motson's voice rang out again. "Not even twenty minutes since starting, and we have conceded two goals in a row... Is Campbell old? Is Lescott too young? That's not a reason. Where is our midfield defense? Who is the most important barrier in front of the rear defensive line? Gareth Barry works very hard as an all-around midfielder — Gerrard and Lampard are all-around midfielders too — but what we need is a dedicated defensive midfielder! Barry can't stop Croatia's pervasive offense alone. They have too many attacking points!"

Motson vaguely reminded to the television audience that there was a player who could be extremely helpful in the situation sitting in front of the television at home.

Twain did not see it that way. As he watched the game, he explained everything to Shania, acting as a guest commentator and showing off the skills he picked up as BBC's guest pundit during the World Cup.

"Motson is wrong, and what he said can only be used before the goal concede. Now that England is two goals behind, it doesn't make sense to talk about the midfield barrier. McClaren is in a lot of trouble now. Does he desperately press up at all costs and bombard, or does he strengthen the defense in order to stop conceding more goals? It's a hard choice to make, Shania. And something is bound to go wrong in this kind of situation if he does not choose well. So he has to make a decision as soon as possible."

Twain grinned. He was well aware of McClaren's feelings because he had experienced them. What should he do when he desperately needed to score a goal, and his opponent scored instead? Should he steady the defense to prevent the continuation of goal concede, or step out and fight it out with the other team?

McClaren did not seem to have chosen his answer. England was in complete disarray. The players seemed to want to score on their own. There was no cooperation. Even if they had coordinated, it was rushed, and they always ended up losing the ball.

The loyal English fans in the stands were still singing but had not been able to conceal the hissing against McClaren.

Motson shook his head hard. "Can we still expect miracles with this kind of offensive standard?"

The positions and functions of Gerrard and Lampard on the field completely overlapped and they played for themselves. Beckham was confined to the right flank and lacked adequate support. Other than his header passes, he played no role once he was marked by the opponent. What about Joe Cole on the left flank? His skills were brilliant, but his lack of speed made his breakthroughs fancy but contain no substance. He lost the ball as soon as he was surrounded by the Croatians. Where was Barry? He was placed behind the Lampard-Gerrard duo to balance the defense and offense.

One of his best performances on the national team was in the game against Israel. Lampard and Hargreaves were absent due to injuries, Carrick was dumped by McClaren, and Gerrard grit his teeth and was left to play as a barrier. In that situation, Barry played like he did at Aston Villa. The layout of the team's midfielders at the time was just right for him to play.

With one half of the Lampard-Gerrard duo missing due to Gerrard's injury, Barry was able to be the core after he moved to the middle, where his passes created five offensive chances for England and resulted in a goal. In that game, he was used as the core of the midfield organization, which fully played to his characteristics as an all-around player.

But now, Gerrard and Lampard were not hurt and McClaren let them be the core. Barry could only serve as the foil. The position was very awkward for Barry. He was at a loss on what to do and could not pinpoint his position. He did not know how to play to his best.

The entire lineup was strange, stuffed with powerful star players, and yet could not fully play their parts when put together. One plus one plus one plus one plus one did not equal to five, but less than five.

The first half passed by in Croatia's counterattacks and England's blind blunders.

"If I were McClaren, I would instruct all the players to attack and not to think about defense, and to try to score a goal in the opening ten minutes, so that there's hope of winning in the second half," Twain told Shania. "Otherwise... they can just wait to be eliminated."

Shania pouted. "Why don't you coach the England team?"

Twain smiled. "I'm not going to. I wrote a newspaper column to admonish the national team manager and criticize his tactics. It does not mean that I want to be in that position and be scolded by others. That position is not meant for humans to do."

※※※

After the start of the second half, just as Twain had said, England stepped up their offensive. It was a sudden surge of offense and they ferociously pressed up against the Croatian team. It was like they had

no defense at all. McClaren replaced Barry with the striker, Defoe, to strengthen the frontline and increase support for Crouch.

Croatia had expected England to fight back in the second half. They quickly made their own defensive response to counter the situation.

Their defense against England was simple. They retreated to the middle to let England pass on the sidelines. Once they came in, they would have to go out after the siege was lifted. It was not easy to compete for a header shot in the compacted penalty area. Even a man like Crouch, who was more than two meters tall, had little chance when squeezed between the two defenders.

Changing the course of the game was often not an unexpected adjustment of players or a clever tactical arrangement, but purely an accident.

Joe Cole passed into the penalty area and Defoe fell in the penalty area, which the referee believed was a foul by the Croatian player, Šimunić, and he awarded a penalty kick. Despite protests from the Croatian players, the referee had no intention of changing it. The penalty invigorated the atmosphere in the stadium, and the Wembley fans sung loudly to cheer the players on.

When the broadcast gave the poor McClaren another shot, the water bottle in his hand was finally gone. Twain maliciously thought about if he spent more time in the restroom or in the locker room explaining the tactics to the players during halftime.

Lampard came forward to take the penalty kick. His low shot deceived the goalkeeper and the football flew into the bottom left corner of the goal. England reversed with a goal! It was the fifty-sixth minute, just one minute after the ten minute mark stated by Twain.

The reversal of a goal greatly boosted the morale of England and the Croatian team appeared to be a little listless. Things moved toward what the English people had hoped for — the Croatians would score two goals to shut the Russians' mouths and then England would strenuously counterattack and take advantage of the situation to return the favor, culminating in England and Croatia tying at 2:2. Everyone would shake hands and advance together.

However, Bridge, who had made the offside blunder in the first half, knocked the bar on the crossbar while lifting a siege and nearly caused an own goal, making the hearts of all English people leap into their throats. Then Srna sent a straight pass, and Bridge made another error while trying to lift the siege and helped the opponent stop the ball. Fortunately, Olić was not mentally prepared for the frequent gift-giving. His hasty shot on the edge of the penalty area was caught by Carson.

“Leighton Baines is stronger than Bridge but it’s pity that you don’t appreciate it, McClaren. You just can’t see it.” Twain murmured and shook his head.

In the 65th minute, David Beckham, whom everyone had high hopes for and expected to stage a miracle before the game, finally shined. He made a precise pass from the flank and sent the football to Crouch’s side. The tall man stopped the ball with his chest and volleyed the ball to equalize the score for England!

The Wembley Stadium burst into energy, and the cheers of the fans were deafening to Twain, who sat in front of the television.

“Crouch! Beckham! David Beckham, he saved England again! This pass was so accurate that Crouch only had to jump a little and stop the ball. He didn’t need to get rid of the defenders at all because David’s pass made it impossible for the opposing defenders to rob it!” Motson cried excitedly. “A draw! The situation is in our favor!”

News had come that Russia and Andorra had not scored yet, so Motson could say that. If Russia tied with Andorra, England would be in the clear — they would advance even if they lost.

Beckham, who assisted his teammate to break open the goal, acted more thrilled than the goalscorer, Crouch. He stood back after he embraced his teammates in celebration. He held up his fist and pounded the Three Lions emblem on his chest, the badge of the English Football Association.

Now that he was on the England national team again, the number he wore was no longer that glorious number 7. The number 7 was now Barry’s. He could only wear the number 17. Even in Nottingham Forest, he could not wear number 7 and 23. There was a time when everyone thought that he had sunk and could not return to the past. But every time people thought like that, Beckham proved how wrong they were.

In the 1998 World Cup, he was sent off for his retaliation against Simeone and became the “the nation’s public enemy” crusaded by the entire Britain. Everyone thought his career was over, but Beckham announced his return with a goal in in the first game of the 98-99 season. That season, he helped Manchester United take the great Treble. In the 2000 UEFA European Championship, England was knocked out during the group stage, and he was as depressed as England. However, in the 2001 World Cup qualifiers, he scored against Greece with a free kick, instantly turning him from a man to a god. In 2004 UEFA European Championship, he lost a penalty shot, causing the team to be eliminated by Portugal. For a moment, people mocked him. That kind of tone continued to the World Cup in Germany. In the eyes of the people, England’s linchpins were Lampard, Gerrard, and Rooney. But in Germany, who was the one that almost brought England into the top 16 on his own, and relied on his free kicks to help the team break into the top eight? It was David Beckham. Who wore the captain’s armband and ran tirelessly in the hot sun at the age of thirty until he vomited? David Beckham. After the World Cup, he was ruled out of the national team and had a hard time at Real Madrid, where he could not even get on the substitutes’ list. Everyone thought he would be finished this time. He could only go to the United States to make his fortune and waste time. But no. Beckham used his amazing professional performance and stable state, as well as his fighting spirit, to impress Capello to return to Real Madrid’s main lineup. He helped the team get its first league title in four years. He also announced a return to the English Premier League to join the newly minted European champion, Nottingham Forest and to make a comeback.

Twain saw the familiar, hideous, twisted face the television. He was going to gloat that England was going to be eliminated, but now he could not feel happy.

He was conflicted because he did not want McClaren to stay in the manager position, but he also did not want to see Beckham’s national team career end so tragically. Without the UEFA European Football Championship qualification, would Beckham still have the condition to look forward to the World Cup in three years?

Without his return in the first half, McClaren's team would not even have a chance to face Croatia and compete against Russia for the last spot at Wembley.

But was it more brutal in this way? Which would make people feel better: to be eliminated before the finish line or before the game?

For the rest of the game, Twain remained silent and did not explain the game to Shania, who felt it was a little strange, but she glanced at the serious-looking Twain and did not ask.

Beckham played harder, or rather, the English players tried their best because the Croatian team fought back. It looked like the Croatians did not accept the English people's wishful thinking. They did not want to shake hands and play along with their opponents.

Beckham began to frequently pull back and move to the middle to help with the defense. The threat of his attacks weakened. After all, he was older and was unable to run like when he was young. Sometimes, he would go up and not return. At other times, he would return and not press up. In the 74th minute, McClaren made a substitution that was highly controversial after the game. He called on Wright-Phillips to replace Beckham.

When Beckham came off, the entire crowd stood up and applauded him, thanking him for everything he had done for the team.

It was clear that McClaren did not want to just defend to the end of the game and brought on Wright-Phillips, who had outstanding stamina and dribbling skills, to break through. He wanted to continue to put pressure on Croatia and slightly weaken their counterattacks.

He had a good idea, but he ignored one point. Suppressing defense through offense was a double-edged sword.

Wright-Phillips might have been more active in offense than Beckham, but he definitely contributed less than David Beckham in defense.

The Wembley Stadium was plunged into a minute-long silence after a twenty-five-yard shot from the left flank by Croatian substitute Petrić in the 81st minute, which gave Croatia the lead.

This time, Twain did not clench both his fists to cheer for Croatia's goal. He just sat on the couch and sighed.

The result was destined. It was just too cruel for David.

At the same time, the Russian team scored. The score of the Russian and Andorran game was displayed at the bottom of the screen — 0:1, with Andorra trailing at home.

The news made the bad situation worse, causing the English to continue their silence.

Just after Croatia scored, McClaren used Darren Bent to replace Joe Cole and continued to step up the offense. He ran out of substitutions and had to stake it all.

The England team turned out in full force, wanting to equalize the score at the end to create a miracle. But Croatia did not retreat, even after their lead, and allow England to besiege them. On the contrary,

they still insisted on fighting back and attacking. As long as there was an opportunity to firmly press forward, they would cause trouble for England's rear defensive line to and force England to defend.

It was very similar to Twain's approach. No matter how many goals he was ahead, he did not give up the opportunity to fight back to prevent the opponent from doing their best to press the attack and create miracles.

When the referee blew the whistle at the end of the game, the score was fixed at 2:3.

Beckham, who had not changed out of his jersey, stood on the field. The television footage focused on his back, with a noisy grandstand in the background, as well as the eye-catching screen over his head.

Beckham wore the number 17 jersey and looked up at the score on the screen:

England 2:3 Croatia.

No one could see the look on his face, and he stood there alone for a long while in a daze. Behind him were his dejected teammates and the Croatians who cheered and celebrated. An empty pitch and an empty goal was in front of them.

Motson sighed. "England is out. In the summer of 2008, it has been announced in advance... that this is end."

Twain turned off the television. He did not want to see Beckham's back or listen to McClaren's speech at the post-match press conference.

Shania looked at him strangely.

"I'm going to bed." He turned around to walk up the stairs. "Good night, Shania."

"Good night, Uncle Tony." Shania watched his back disappear up the stairwell and then turned her head to look at the quartz clock on the wall.

It was not even ten o'clock.

She turned around to turn on the television, which happened to be the post-match interview. Beckham stood in front of the cameras. His jersey was soaked in sweat and stuck to his chest.

He wearily said, "Being eliminated from the UEFA European Championship qualifier is not the end of the world. England has so many outstanding young players. I believe we will have a better future in the World Cup in South Africa..."

"Now that you're out of the UEFA European Championship qualifier, will it give you a peace of mind to play for Nottingham Forest?" A reporter asked vaguely.

Beckham shook his head. "I'm not going to announce my withdrawal from the England team. I have said before that I am always ready to play for England until England no longer needs me."

Having said that, Beckham refused to answer any more questions and bowed his head as he walked out of the interview zone.

Shania saw McClaren on the screen. She turned off the television and went upstairs to get ready to sleep.

Tonight is a downer...

Chapter 608: The League Tournament Resumed

England's elimination caused the British media to become a sea of wailing and despair.

Some said that McClaren had ruined the best England team in history. In the eyes of the English, their team was the strongest in history at all times. Some people lamented that the end of the world had arrived. Others stated sourly that without the England team, the UEFA European Championship was incomplete, as Britain was the birthplace of modern football.

Another group of people calmly analyzed the reasons for the loss. They continued to analyze until they finally came to a conclusion. The players were not the problem. The issue laid with McClaren, so they asked the Football Association to start preparing for the selection of the new manager.

Twain did not get in on the action. He had said what he wanted to say before the game. If he were to speak up, it would just be copy and paste. McClaren had many problems with his player selection and tactical arrangements. He was born to be an assistant coach, not a manager. Twain had repeated that point countless times since McClaren came to power, but no one listened. Now that the people of England had finally received their just desserts, Twain could not be bothered to add insult to injury.

Two weeks without a league game did not bore Twain because a lot happened in between. Mourinho was gone and he had abused Abramovich and offended the Chelsea club. He wondered if he would feel that "this is a new season" when the league tournament resumed.

Dunn had returned, two days later than his expected date of return. Dunn said it was because of Tang Jing. He went to have dinner with her father, and toured the countryside for a day, which delayed him. When he heard this, Twain wanted to tease Dunn that he had met the parents, but he did not say it in the end.

Dunn returned with a brocade handkerchief from Sichuan for Shania and a box of compact discs for Twain.

Twain thought it was strange.

"They are the videos of the talent show, including the ones shown on TV and not broadcasted," Dunn explained.

Twain was even more baffled. "I didn't ask you to bring these things back. I have little interest in the talent show."

Dunn interrupted him. "Just have a look when you're bored and see what a football talent show looks like."

How could Twain be bored? With Shania at his side, he always had something to do.

Not even two days later, Shania packed her bags to say goodbye.

Shania left Nottingham the two days after England lost their chance for the next summer. Christmas was coming and her busiest part of the year began.

It was not the first time that Twain and Shania had parted like this. They had not spent Christmas together since Shania became a top model. Every Christmas without fail, Twain would mail a large Totoro toy to Shania as a Christmas present. The two of them would chat on the phone to count as they had spent it together.

This time, though, when Shania packed her bags, Twain stood at the door and watched her.

“Is it going to be busy next year? Runway shows, commercials, endorsement deals... and making movies.”

“Well, the fun times are over.” Shania stretched her back and suddenly turned around to look at Twain. “Can’t bear to see me go, Uncle Tony?”

Twain was a little bewildered by the question. He fumbled for a while before he said, “when you’re gone, no one’s going to cook for me.”

Shania smiled. “That’s a lousy excuse. The meals I cook were not delicious.”

“Actually... they’re okay once I got used to eating them.” Twain scratched his head.

Shania did not speak again. She smiled and continued to pack.

There was not much to pack. She just needed to bring some clothes and small toys, which could be fit in a small suitcase. However, Shania always thought that the clothes were not folded neatly and there would be creases. As a result, she took them out to spread them out and re-fold them as soon as she packed them, so it took some time.

They heard the sound of a car horn coming from outside.

“It’s Mr. Fasal.” Shania went to the side of the bed, pulled back the curtains, and looked out.

“Come on, don’t miss your flight.” Twain stepped out of the way of the door.

Shania took her suitcase and walked up to Twain, who took it from her hands. “I’ll walk you to the door.”

Shania did not refuse and followed Twain down the stairs.

“When will you be back?” Twain asked Shania as she put on her coat at the door.

“Next March,” Shania said. According to the work schedule given to her by her agent, Fasal, she only had a ten-day break in March, and then she would go to Los Angeles to get ready for filming. Although she only had a few scenes and no lines, it was necessary for her to stay longer because her desire to develop there. She needed to get closer to the industry, then Tom Cruise and Clarice Gloria would introduce her to more people. More friends equaled to more opportunities in Hollywood.

Once she put on her coat, Shania stood at the door, and instead of opening the door, she turned and looked at Twain.

“Can you give me a hug, Uncle Tony? As if we are saying goodbye.” She opened her arms, and Twain hugged her before she finished speaking.

“Goodbye, Shania.”

“Goodbye, Uncle Tony.”

The two separated. Twain opened the door and carried the suitcase out. Fasal came forward to take the suitcase and put it in the trunk of the car. Shania opened the car door to get in.

“See you later, Uncle Tony.” She sat in the car and waved to Twain.

Twain waved back at her. He turned to Fasal and said in a low voice, “please take care of her, Mr. Fasal.”

Fasal smiled in reply. “Please rest assured, Mr. Twain.”

The two men shook hands and said goodbye. Twain stood by the street and watched the car disappear around the corner before he returned inside.

As soon as he was about to enter the door, he heard the door of the house beside make a sound, and Dunn opened the door.

“Shania left?”

“You’ve been... Why didn’t you come out and say goodbye?”

Dunn shook his head. “Never mind. It’s not so nice... if I came out.”

Twain gave him a stare. The present Dunn and the Dunn he knew from his memory when he first transmigrated were so different.

Wow, his personality is a lot more open now...

He decided to retaliate. “You and Tang Jing...”

“Oh right, I have something to do.” Dunn did not wait for Twain to finish speaking before he went back inside and closed the door.

“Hey!” Twain rolled his eyes.

※※※

With Shania gone, Twain sometimes felt a little lonely. But the feeling only happened when he went home. He was not used to returning home with Dunn from the training base and opening the door to an empty room and no one jumping out, saying with a smile that there was a delicious meal this evening.

It was no wonder since it was longest period that Shania and Twain had been alone together. He was used to having someone to come home to every day. He could not return to his former single life right away.

On several occasions, when he and Dunn opened the doors to their respective homes, Dunn went in, but Twain stood at the door in a daze. It was dark with no one inside; he thought he had opened the wrong door.

In the first few days, those reactions were frequent and pronounced. Later, with the passage of time, he gradually got better. Sometimes he would go to Kenny Burns' pub with Dunn to eat dinner and have a drink and chat. Dunn still only drank water. Sometimes they would go to a fast food restaurant on their way home and buy take-out. Other times, when he was in a good mood and had plenty of time, he would choose to go home.

He was used to be a bachelor, so it was still easy to get used to it again.

※※※

Just two days after Shania's departure, the Forest team ushered in a new round of league games. Nottingham Forest had an away challenge against Arsenal on November 24th.

As they had just played in the national team competition, there were a large number of players on both teams who were exhausted and kept off the starting list, or even the squad list. For example, Beckham did not appear in the starting lineup.

The England team was knocked out, so he was not in high spirits and his form was affected. Twain feared Beckham's foot injury would flare up again and did not let him start.

Replacing Beckham in the starting lineup was Lennon, who was also selected for England but sat on the bench for ninety minutes. Ribéry also did not appear in the starting lineup. Out of consideration of a more intensive schedule later, Twain had to let some of the more important players take a break, even if doing so would affect the team's current results.

George Wood made the starting lineup and van der Vaart formed the middle. Bendtner made the starting lineup again on the forward line and partnered with Eastwood. There was no change in any other positions.

Arsenal deployed the strongest squad they could get in their home ground, other than the players with injuries.

Wenger did not want to lose to the Forest team at home. Arsenal was currently in first place, but Manchester United had the same number of points as them. If they lost to the Forest team, they would be temporarily defeated in the contest for the league title.

Twain did not want to lose to Arsenal. His squad was still the best at the Forest team's defensive counterattack. With just a solid defense and seizing the opportunity to score with a sneak attack, they could drag the game into their most familiar rhythm.

But it was impossible that everything would always go so smoothly and his luck would always be so good.

Arsenal was the first to score in the starting fourteen minutes, and Fàbregas' long shot pierced through the goal guarded by Edwin van der Sar.

At the start of the season, the performances of a few young players astounded people.

Manchester United's Cristiano Ronaldo was no longer the "Lone Ranger" who only knew dribbling and fancy footwork. Ferguson used him as Manchester United's offensive core, even at the expense of

Rooney, just to let him burst out with more energy. Sure enough... the number one player in the league's strikers list was not a proper striker, but the midfielder.

Liverpool's new "Golden Player" Torres completely adapted to the Premier League. Upon his arrival, he was able to score, and even scored consecutively. He now ranked second in the league's striker rankings.

As for Arsenal, Henry's departure to Barcelona before the season shocked many people and made them pessimistic about Arsenal's prospects for the new season. They did not expect their midfield core, Fàbregas to come forward at a time when people questioned Arsenal's forward line capabilities. This young player, who was closely marked and tormented by Wood in the English FA Cup, had fully matured. He could not only rely on his passing to create opportunities for the team to attack but could also rely on his own plug-ins to besiege and attack when the strikers could not score.

It happened in this game. While Twain's defenders guarded against Adebayor, George Wood's single blunder allowed Fàbregas to find a chance to plug in with a shot. The football flew straight into the corner of the goal, and Edwin van der Sar did his best but could not stop Arsenal's lead.

It forced Twain to press up and attack Arsenal because Arsenal was different from other opponents. It would be arduous and thankless for the Forest team to allow Arsenal to take advantage of the goal and continue to stick to their defensive counterattack. Arsenal might not score again, but in order to cope with their attack, the Forest team had to attack. The end result could likely be that the Forest team would lose the game unwillingly.

Twain chose to attack Arsenal. He knew what the decision meant, but Twain did not think he was going to lose to Arsenal if they went head to head with his team's attacking prowess.

Consequently, the rest of the game was a godsend for the fans.

Both teams fought it out in the Emirates Stadium, with many countermeasures and lively attacks.

Arsenal was good at offense. Their offensive routine was rich and varied. Offense was like second nature for them and the rapport between the players was delightful to watch. It could be named "artistic football."

Nottingham Forest's offense was not as artistic as Arsenal's, as they did not pay much attention to subtle cooperation between players. They emphasized speed and straightforwardness. They were more aggressive, and speed and strength were important elements that ignited the passion of the spectators. The aggressive breakthroughs from the flanks by Petrov and Lennon drew surges of shouts from the stands each time. It sounded pretty lively, whether it was cheering or booing.

Arsenal's offense was beautiful and uplifting, and the Forest team's offense lacked finesse but was quite impressive. It had a lot to do with the styles of both managers.

"Professor" Wenger was cultured and refined most of the time. Even when he got angry, he kept to himself behind closed doors. Twain was not the same. With his brash and extroverted personality, the team that he trained would naturally be just as brazen.

In the 37th minute, Nottingham Forest's relentless attacks finally cracked open Arsenal's goal.

Bendtner's header shot was fast and fierce and Almunia could not react in time. He could only use his chest to block the football, not having time to catch it. It was chaotic in front of Arsenal's goal and he could not see clearly, so the football that bounced out was snatched and nudged by Eastwood. The football rolled in amid the chaos.

The tied score continued into halftime.

Twain made minor adjustments during halftime. He allowed van der Vaart more freedom in his position.

Once the second half of the game began, neither teams made any player adjustments. Even their tactical arrangements did not change. It appeared Wenger was also determined to use the offensive tactics that Arsenal was best to defeat Nottingham Forest.

Tony Twain had the same intention. He grinned at Wenger.

Arsenal took the lead again in the 59th minute of the game. Their captain, William Gallas, scored by making use of a corner header.

Five minutes later, Arsenal scored their third goal. The man who scored the goal was Eduardo da Silva, who had just helped his team beat England in the final game of the UEFA European Championship qualifier. Wenger brought him on and three minutes later, he scored.

The Emirates Stadium broke out in cries of joy. Two consecutive goals in five minutes was a huge blow to the morale of any opponent.

Twain put everything on the line and brought off Leighton Baines to bring on Gareth Bale, who had played two games for the Welsh team, and used Ribéry to replace van der Vaart. He made the plug-in offense from the team's two flanks more determined and sharper. He instructed George Wood to actively participate in offense and not care too much about the defense.

In the 81st minute, Nottingham Forest's frenzied bombardment finally paid off.

George Wood's aggressive scramble in the front field grabbed a chance for the Forest team. After he passed the football to Ribéry, the Forest team switched to counter-offensive.

Arsenal was unprepared for the loss of the ball in the backfield. Wood had intercepted the ball from Hleb, who was known for his dribbling skills. However, it was that dribbling genius who did not accept Fàbregas' suggestion that he should pass the ball when he was up against Wood. Instead, he decided to face him alone. He wanted to depend on his good form to get through the guy who was claimed to be a "defensive monster."

Wood successfully intercepted the ball from Hleb's feet with his judgement and strong body. The Forest team launched a counterattack. Although Fàbregas had anticipated that Hleb might drop the ball, he did not expect the Forest team to attack so quickly. Even if he went to defend against Ribéry, he was still a step behind and allowed the Frenchman to pass the football. Petrov's cut to the inside attracted Arsenal's defensive attention, and Bale quickly plugged in to receive Ribéry's overhead pass. Then he passed not a high ball but a low-flying ball. In the chaotic penalty area, whoever kicked it could score a goal. The pass made Arsenal's defenders restrain themselves for fear of scoring an own goal. There were certainly people who were not afraid, such as William Gallas. He stretched his legs to shovel, but the

football quickly passed his toes. Bendtner, who came to distract, did touch the football. The players who got bypassed included the goalkeeper Almunia and Eastwood.

Just as everyone thought the football would bypass the goal without any danger of scoring, a figure wearing the yellow Forest team away jersey flashed past. He slid to the ground and made a slide shot. The football hit on his toes and changed direction to crash into the net...

“Aaron Lennon!!”

Lennon scored the Forest team’s second goal, but this only narrowed the gap between the two teams from two goals to one goal difference. If Twain did not want the team to lose the game, they had to keep attacking for the remaining ten minutes and try to equalize.

Wenger chose to defend. He directed the team to retreat and adopt a defensive stance.

Twain did not expect the move. He thought Wenger would fight it out to the end.

The Forest team launched a frenzied counterattack in the last ten minutes and gained a number of good opportunities. Unfortunately, the opportunities did not translate to scores. The frenzied bombardment for ten minutes did not result in any goals.

In the end, Tony Twain could only accept that result: he bravely went up against Arsenal for ten minutes and satisfied the television commentators and the media, as well as a wide range of football fans and viewer. The only ones left unsatisfied was themselves.

Subsequently, when he was blocked by a group of excited reporters after the game, and was asked about why to attack, he helplessly shrugged and replied, “is everyone happy now?”

Then he turned around and walked away.

Chapter 609: Just A Regular League Game

The away loss to Arsenal caused the Forest team to have two consecutive losses again. Within the hellish calendar, Twain had lost all the games against his three strong opponents with the exception of Chelsea. The media lost faith in the goal of “vying for the league title” that Twain stated before the season. Manchester United, Arsenal and Liverpool were all his direct competitors for the title. Now that he had lost to them and the point difference had widened, would Nottingham Forest still be qualified to compete for the league title?

Although Twain was unhappy about losing to Arsenal, he was not so pessimistic to think that his team had no future. The media always liked to kick up a fuss and write sensational headlines to attract readers’ attention.

Arsenal beat Nottingham Forest and moved to first place in the league with thirty-three points and one game short, while Manchester United lost 0:1 to the Bolton Wanderers in an upset in the current round of the league games. Liverpool defeated Newcastle United by 3:0 at home and Manchester City had a 2:1 home win over Reading. The two teams currently held twenty-nine points, same as the Forest team, but ranked above Forest due to goal differences.

As for Chelsea, who had recently undergone a major change of personnel, no one held any hope for their results in the games. Not just because the club had just gone through something, but also because majority of the media did not approve of Chelsea's new manager, Grant's ability at all. They did not believe Chelsea could come back to life in the hands of the Israeli. Chelsea was no longer in the running for the league title in the current season's tournament.

As if to prove the media correct, Chelsea lost 0:2 to the newly promoted team, Derby County, in an away game in the latest round of the league tournament.

Everyone waited to see Grant fall, and he did. Having lost Mourinho, Chelsea seemed to have been drained of their spirit. They did not show any fighting spirit on the field. The players were out of form and tactically chaotic. Everyone was preoccupied thinking about their future.

Twain understood it deeply. The Nottingham Forest team was pretty much like that when he first took over. Mourinho had laid the foundation for the team in his three years at Chelsea, but his sudden departure caused irreparable damage to that foundation. Therefore, he had left Grant with a mess, low spirits, and panic, feeling like they were without their pillar. During that period of over three years, the Chelsea players had become used to following Mourinho blindly. He had injected a strong mental strength into the team, and he had filled them with the desire for titles to keep them going.

Now, those things all vanished, like magic. Poof! The dove disappeared from the magician's hand.

No one knew exactly what the team that Grant took over thought or what he could do with this team, but none of it mattered. All anyone cared about was how much longer he could stay in the hot seat. Abramovich was said to be in touch with Henk ten Cate, who once worked as the assistant manager for Rijkaard in Barcelona, to come to Chelsea to be the manager. There were also rumors that Abramovich had looked for Hiddink, who currently worked for the Russian national team, as well as van Basten, who was the manager of the Netherlands national team. The names of these three men were given confirmation. With Tony Twain, who caused the "swearing incident" a while ago, Chelsea did not admit that they had looked for the troublesome man. It looked like Twain had overreacted.

It was rare for everyone to start a countdown for a manager's death sentence the day he officially came to power. Should Avram Grant feel honored or sad?

Thanks to Grant, most of the media hype was targeted on Chelsea after Chelsea's loss and the losses of Nottingham Forest were not worth mentioning against this background.

The devil's calendar was coming to an end, and then after three rounds of buffer, the intense schedule over the Christmas period would hit again.

This was a special feature of the English Premier League. While the other leagues had a winter break after Christmas, the English Premier League did not have one. Because the public had a holiday on Christmas Day, people who had been busy all year would have time to choose whether to travel or stay at home and watch TV. Similarly, fans would have plenty of time to watch the game live. Considering maximizing profits, it was fitting to schedule an intense calendar during that period. But the problem was that the players were not robots. They needed to rest as much as the ordinary people, and perhaps required more rest. There were twenty teams in the English Premier League and with all kinds of tournaments in a season, a major team might play more than sixty games. The English Premier League

also had the fastest pace and the most intense competition. The players had more physical requirements than in La Liga and other leagues and were more likely to show symptoms of fatigue. The cup tournaments in the other countries were usually scheduled midweek. To maximize the benefits of the television broadcast, the English Football Association tried to schedule both the English FA Cup and the EFL Cup on Saturdays and Sundays, to crowd out the league's schedule. The other leagues could only be packed into the midweek schedule. That was one of the major reasons why the English Premier League had a particularly busy two game per week schedule.

During Christmastime, the temperature plummeted. Britain's climate was mainly wet and cold, extremely unsuitable for outdoor sports. The probability of injuries greatly increased in the cold and wet. It was no coincidence that the injuries at each club surfaced collectively, like a volcanic eruption.

Like most managers, Twain was unhappy about the arrangement, but countless managers more prestigious than Twain had also opposed it to no avail. At the end of the day, the English Premier League was still a corporation, and naturally put making profit as its top goal. The English Football Association had to take its profits into account. As for the health of the players, since they made so much money, the hardships and risks that they endured were worth it.

Any sport was a gamble for the future with youth as the stake. Some people won the bet, some people lost. It was a reality that made Twain feel very helpless.

※※※

In the 15th round of the league tournament, Nottingham Forest was back on its home ground. The opponent's ranking was not much lower than the previous opponent, although its ranking was somewhat inflated.

It was Manchester City.

Taken for a ride by Twain at the start of the season, Twain did not mind having Manchester City be the fool again when the Forest team desperately needed a win.

Ashley Young went to Manchester City and had done well. If he had not had a scandal, his current reputation would not be bad. Manchester City became the fool with more money than sense. In terms of Ashley Young's ability, 25 million pounds was overpriced.

The game was Ashley Young's first return to the City Ground Stadium. He would be back many times in the future, but they were no match for the first time. It was an argument that virgins were more precious than those who were not.

Some media outlets thought it was a publicity stunt to be hyped. The inside story of the transfer was more or less revealed and everyone felt that Ashley Young was deliberately driven away by Twain because Ashley Young did not want to leave Nottingham Forest. The matter was already publicized by some "anti-Twain" media, which cast Ashley Young as a loyal subject of the Forest team and painted Twain as a ruthless dictator — anyone who went against his will, even if they contributed and were loyal to the team, could be made to leave Wilford in misery.

There was traction for this kind of talk, because the people who hated Tony Twain were the majority. Twain had no intention of quarrelling with people in the media. He never cared what other people

thought of him. If he quarreled with someone in the newspapers, it was not due to personal factors, but to help the team reduce pressure, divert the media's attention, or purely to mess with certain people. None of which was to make a name for himself — the media said that Twain was a devil with long horns on his head, wings on his back, a tail, and fangs for teeth. He was happy to proclaim this everywhere for fear that others would not know his revolting conduct.

In short, the media wanted to hype Ashley Young's battle for revenge, but Twain refused to take up the challenge.

"Ashley Young? Oh, he's a brilliant midfielder and I'm grateful for the contribution he brought to the Forest team over the seasons. Hopefully he'll be able to play better on the new team. This is just a regular league game. I have quite a few old friends in Manchester City... If you really can't find the right stunt to publicize, I suggest you publish an edition filled with advertisements, and you can make more money..."

He did have friends in Manchester City, but that was in the past. Stuart Pearce had been recalled to the English Football Association to become the manager of England's U21 national team last season. As a result, Manchester City contacted Eriksson to return to the United Kingdom because they needed a manager.

Perhaps elsewhere, a football club's manager could also be the manager of the national team. The most typical example was the Dutchman, Hiddink, who could be the manager of the Australian national team while he was Eindhoven's manager. However, this was decidedly impossible in England. Not to mention that the fans' skepticism about the manager's loyalty, which was a matter of fairness and could not be ignored. What if a Premier League team manager became the England team's manager? In order to keep his club's players more physically in shape for the league, he chose all the players from the other teams for the national team and flew them out thousands of miles away to play important friendly matches only for them to drag their tired bodies back to their respective clubs. Then when they were up against the team of that particular manager, perhaps they would not have strength to compete?

As a result, the English Football Association would never allow England's manager to serve as another football club manager at the same time.

Even as the U21 manager, Pearce had to choose between the football club and the country. He chose to give up his place as the Manchester City manager and go to the England national youth team.

The Manchester City team that Twain faced this time could not really be considered a friend.

When Eriksson was the England team's manager, Twain already did not like him. Twain did not have any interactions with the Thai, Thaksin. As for the players, they would definitely not be friends.

The game was as Twain said: a regular league game. If the media wanted to hype the feud between him and Ashley Young, they picked the wrong occasion.

Twain used the rotation in the game. Beckham was in the starting lineup and Ribéry appeared on the left flank. The midfield and middle were still a combination of George Wood and van der Vaart. Twain wanted to focus on the rapport of the combination. If there were no surprises, the Forest team could rely on the two in the middle. Although Ribéry could also play in the middle, Twain wanted him to stay on the left flank.

On the forward line, van Nistelrooy and Eastwood partnered in the starting lineup with Arshavin on the bench, while Bendtner was not even on the squad list.

On the rear defensive line, Gareth Bale became the starter, with Ayala and Kompany as center-backs. Rafinha was on the right while Chimbonda was still on the bench.

The recent results on home ground had been pretty bad. Twain fired up the Forest team until they were ready to burst out with energy and saw Manchester City was a fat lamb waiting to be slaughtered. They were chumps — there was only one thing in everyone's minds: three points!

"Oh, oh, oh!" the commentator screamed excitedly. "Van Nistelrooy—"

The Forest team took the lead in the opening three minutes. It was too effortless, too easy. Manchester City's magical aura at the start of the season was fading, and now they were just waiting for a strong enough opponent to send them packing to where they came from.

The Dutch striker ran on the sidelines with open arms, like a flying bird. Twain forgot where he had first heard the phrase "the Flying Dutchman," but at that moment, he connected to it. Van Nistelrooy was as good as ever. He had made the right choice in purchasing him. Not only was his form stable, but he was also conscientious, and he never formed a Dutch clique with his fellow Dutch countrymen. He had a good relationship with Beckham and could also unite the others. A real professional player. Sir Alex, how could you let go of such a man?

Manchester City launched a strong counterattack before the end of the first half but did not achieve any results. Ayala was old, but he had experience. Coupled with George Wood's diligent efforts, Manchester City's offensive was all bark and no bite.

During halftime, Eriksson encouraged the players to work harder. Being one goal behind was nothing. Anything could happen on the football field.

Three minutes again into the second half, the Forest team scored a second goal.

Twain also told his players that anything could happen on the football field. A one goal lead was nothing at all, and they had to sneak in an attack on their opponent when they fought back aggressively.

He succeeded again.

Manchester City pressed on heavily and the Forest team seized ahold of the empty backfield to score another goal.

The look on Eriksson's face was ugly when they trailed by two goals.

The goal was scored by van der Vaart, whose long shot pierced through Joe Hart's hands.

For the rest of the game, the Forest team persisted and scored another two goals.

Ribéry and Eastwood each scored a goal, and the Forest team eventually beat Manchester City with a 4:0 win.

What about Ashley Young, who was used as a stunt by the media before the game? He was crushed by the offensive from both Gareth Bale and Ribéry during the game and did not play as well as he should

have. After seventy minutes of mediocrity, he was replaced. He walked off with his head down and ended his "Journey of Vengeance."

The Forest team's victory stopped their possible decline, and Twain was in a good mood.

He and Eriksson hugged and the fact that he had fiercely criticized the Swede on television and in the newspapers was nowhere to be seen.

At the press conference, a reporter asked about the goal that Twain had set for the team before the season. Now that the team had lost three games to their most direct competitors, would it have any adverse impact on the goal he set for the team before the season?

"It certainly makes things a little more difficult for us, but I think it's more valuable to get the title like that," Twain replied with a laugh. He was in a good mood and did not bicker with the reporter. "The goal has not change. It is still the championship title!"

Chapter 610: Back to Top Three

Before the game against Manchester City, the Forest team played another game in the UEFA Champions League group stage. For Nottingham Forest, the question was their advancement, and which rank to advance from.

Twain hoped his team would win the remaining two games and get the top spot in the group.

Consequently, the Forest team beat Porto 4:1 in their own home ground challenge. Although Porto was glorious a few years ago, they could not compete with Nottingham Forest these days.

Some people did not want to believe it, but Nottingham Forest was currently one of the top teams in Europe. The strength of their players and the coaching standard of the manager were both top notch.

Before, no one in European football would have expected a day when Nottingham Forest, who had struggled in the lower leagues, would return to glory. The obscure Forest team seemed to appear out of thin air.

What would have happened without Twain's transmigration? Perhaps Nottingham Forest would have been relegated to League One or Second Division due to its frequent changes of managers, economic crisis and other factors. No one would ever mention the once brilliant name, and Nottingham Forest, like countless other football clubs in modern English football history, would have a brilliant past but could only drown in the tide of time and money and be quickly forgotten.

Those events might not have happened. They could have changed to an equally good manager and with a little bit of good luck, they could have charged back to the English top flight league after a few years. As for whether they could reproduce the brilliance or not, it could not be determined.

But none of it happened.

They might occur in another parallel universe, but in the world Twain currently resided in, it could only be a hypothetical.

The problem that lay ahead of Twain was that as the tight Christmas schedule and the recommencement of the Champions League in the second half of the season approached, he had to distribute the team's fitness to ensure they did not fall behind in the final sprint. The rotation system was particularly important.

Rotation and the players' wishes contradicted. No one liked to be replaced when they were in good form because it meant their main positions were not solid enough.

But Twain had to do it. His First Team squad was not as bloated as Chelsea and other teams. He had implemented a "streamline" policy to reduce the number of First Team players and raised the level of their competitiveness. The advantage of the approach was that they could save unnecessary expenses, but the downside was that they were slightly overstretched when changes were required. In particular, when injury situations struck.

Twain asked the team's doctor unit to list the current health statuses of everyone on the team and give him a figure of possible injuries.

Eastwood and Beckham were both plagued by old injuries and were affected by occasional minor injuries. Van Nistelrooy's fitness was severely challenged by the previous series of games on the devil's calendar, and his current physical condition was not good; he needed to be included in the rotation system. Ribéry had recovered. After playing a few games, he found that there were no hidden illnesses. Pepe's problem was a bit complicated. He seemed to be able to cope with the games, but after he played two games, the team doctor thought he should be put under careful observation. So in the game against Manchester City, Twain did not let him play and did not even put him on the squad list. He sat in the stands to watch the game. Ayala was older and could not always be used; it was necessary to rotate him. His experience and ability to help the team was not just seen on the playing field, but could also help defenders during normal training. Just as Hierro had done for Pepe, Piqué, and the others when the Forest team first rose to the English Premier League, Ayala passed on his own understanding of defense to his teammates.

George Wood was ruled out of the report. Fleming had told Twain that Wood was an unknown creature that did not belong to Earth. He would be caught and put in a laboratory to be dissected if he did not play football. His physical condition was so good that he was unlike people on Earth.

Twain understood and agreed, because he himself thought Wood was an android from the future. On the other hand, the English media made a big fuss and created a tacky nickname for Wood — "Monster."

Every time he thought of Wood's physical qualities, Twain's thoughts would drift to his mother, Sophia. Compared to most people, Sophia did not have the ability to buy supplements for her son, and there was no way to give him a well-balanced nutrition for his development. She could only save the best food she could afford for her son. In that way, the sickly, weak mother, who was almost on her deathbed, single-handedly raised the "Monster" that amazed everyone in the English football world. It didn't fit any scientific explanation, but Twain believed it, because behind everything was the love that Sophia had and gave George Wood every reason to be strong.

When Wood became famous, Sophia was also inevitably exposed to the limelight, but after everyone found out about Wood's childhood, they were surprised that Wood was able to be so strong. Twain would exclaim, "This is love..."

But...

If he had not considered Sidwell's feelings, Twain would not have rotated Wood, but in the end, Wood was on the rotation list. However, his rotation was not the same as everyone else's; he only rotated once in a while. Sidwell's appearances depended on the Forest team to go further in the English FA Cup, as they had been eliminated in the EFL Cup.

Twain did not change his idea of using a domestic cup to train his players. Whoever the opponent was, he would manage with the combination of "youth team, reserves as well as some of the First Team players."

Twain did not care for the EFL Cup. Since he had already won it once, he would not have any regrets if he did not win it again. The title for that kind of competition was only seriously considered by teams that had been utterly defeated in other tournaments, as well as teams that had no chance of winning the other championships. Obviously, Tony Twain's Nottingham Forest was not that kind of team.

The FA Cup occupied a noble position, even in the early years of the Premier League. Although the status of the FA Cup was not low, it was not as good as before. With more than 136 years of history, it was the world's oldest modern football cup and older than the majority of the football clubs in the world. In England, the team that won the FA Cup was respectable and the team would treat the FA Cup as a prestigious honor. Even many years after the establishment of the Champions League, the English people thought the best cup tournament in the world was the English FA Cup and not the UEFA Champions League.

The Emperor of the Nottingham Forest Dynasty, Brian Clough's only regret was that he did not lead the team to win even one FA Cup. Twain did not want such a thing to become a regret for him. But the problem was that while the strength of the Forest team was strong enough to win the Champions League, they could not accomplish competing in all three tournaments at the same time. Twain did not want to lose out in the league tournament and Champions League for the sake of the FA Cup. It was not twenty years ago, and the FA Cup was far from satisfying the ambitions of a professional team.

The FA Cup official tournament began in January every year and continued until May, which overlapped with the Premier league tournament and the European tournaments. The intense games would have many distractions and eventually likely cause deficiencies everywhere. As a result, Twain did not want to focus on the FA Cup right now.

Strong teams like Barcelona and Real Madrid also failed to resolve the problem of competing simultaneously in multiple tournaments and succeeding. When playing the FM and CM video games, it might feel that getting multiple titles was an easy thing to do, but, in fact, there were not many teams that could achieve the Treble. It was not hard to explain Manchester United's prestigious reputation when they acquired the Treble, a magnificent achievement. Even though Liverpool's "five crowns" were not as prestigious, Liverpool fans similarly relished it for a long time. It was all the same principle: to be able to win championship titles at the same time in multiple tournaments not only required a strong team, but also extremely good luck. It could not be achieved easily and, oftentimes, could not be governed by human power.

※※※

Nottingham Forest had a strong rebound in December, and Twain hoped the team would seize the opportunity of a less intensive competition schedule to narrow the points gap with the top-ranked teams.

After they swept Manchester City with a 4:0 score, they beat Bolton Wanderers 4:1 in an away game.

Grant from Chelsea finally achieved a winning streak in this round of the league tournament with their home win of 2:0 over Sunderland. Manchester United also had a massive home win of 4:1 against Derby County. But two of Twain's other rivals, Arsenal and Liverpool, both lost in their away games: Arsenal lost 1:2 against Middlesbrough, and Liverpool lost 1:3 to Reading. Manchester City, one of the top six teams, also lost in an away game to Tottenham Hotspur with a score of 1:2.

Next up was the seventeenth round. Arsenal would host Chelsea at home and Manchester United would go to Anfield to challenge Liverpool. Manchester City and Nottingham Forest were best off in the top six teams — Manchester City would play against Bolton Wanderers at home and Nottingham Forest would play against Blackburn Rovers at home.

The two games between the powerhouses caught everyone's attention. Even Twain was focused on the two games. Fortunately, they were not at the same time as Nottingham Forest's game. Otherwise, he would have missed the two exciting games. The process might be not necessarily wonderful, but the result had to be.

After an arduous ninety minutes, Arsenal narrowly edged Chelsea out at home with 1:0.

In an equally tough ninety minutes, Manchester United relied on a breakthrough from the almost omnipotent Cristiano Ronaldo, who assisted Tevez to score 1:0 to beat Liverpool.

The next day, Manchester City defeated Bolton Wanderers 4:2 at home, while Nottingham Forest won 5:3 against Blackburn Rovers.

The points and rankings became interesting.

At the end of the 16th round of the league tournament, due to Arsenal's defeat and Manchester United's win, the two teams both had 36 points and ranked first and second, respectively, in the league rankings. And both Liverpool and Manchester City, who had previously shared the same 32 points as Nottingham Forest, had lost their games, Nottingham Forest jumped to third place with 35 points. Since Chelsea had won twice consecutively, its points went from 25 to 31. Therefore, Arsenal was still in first place with Manchester United in the second. Third place went to Nottingham Forest while Liverpool and Manchester City occupied fourth and fifth places. And Chelsea was in sixth.

The order was the same as the 11th round, but by the 17th round, there had been another change.

Arsenal, Manchester United, Nottingham Forest, and Manchester City all won. As a result, Arsenal and Manchester United shared the same 39 points and were still in first and second places. Nottingham Forest was still in the third with 38 points but the fourth and fifth places had changed. Initially, Liverpool ranked fourth, ahead of Manchester City, who had the same number of points, due to goal difference. However, now that they had lost a game, they had to give up their fourth place to Manchester City, who had 35 points. Liverpool, with its 32 points, and Chelsea, with its 31 points, took the fifth and sixth positions, respectively.

The difference between fourth and the fifth place was more than just the rankings on the scoreboard. Fourth place could ascend to Heaven — play in the Champions League qualifying tournament, with a great chance to play in the UEFA Champions League — whereas fifth place could only play in the UEFA Europa League with its much-reduced gains. Although it was not hell, for Liverpool, who had been playing the UEFA Europa League for three consecutive years, it was a result that was even more hated than Hell itself.

The pressure on Benítez's shoulders was not light. In addition to the turmoil in Liverpool's upper echelons, there were rumors that Benítez could be dismissed, partly because of his poor relationship with the club chairman. On the other hand, it was also the club board's explanation for the team's failure to advance into the UEFA Champions League for three years in a row.

Though the position of a manager normally appeared impressive, since they could order big-name star players around, the pressure they faced was more than the players could imagine. Twain was very sympathetic to Benítez's rumored situation. He did not want Benítez to leave as well. If all the good managers in the league tournament were gone, he was not interested in playing anymore. There had to be challenges in life for it to be interesting. If all the good opponents were gone, what was the use of getting championship titles if they were easy to achieve?

Why did the trophy look so radiant and fascinate so many people? In Twain's view, it was because there were good enough opponents on the way to the championship title. The sense of accomplishment was stronger after stepping over strong opponents on the way to the throne rather than stepping on ants.

Fortunately, the Liverpool FC board issued a statement stating that they had full confidence in Rafael Benítez and considered Benítez's years at Liverpool "remarkable."

Twain did not have to worry about losing another good opponent.

※※※

In the Champions League group stage, Twain did not fulfill the wishes of the people who had always wanted to see the Forest team fall. The Forest team did not have to play in the UEFA Europa League. Nottingham Forest won 4:0 against Marseille in the final away game. With four wins, one draw, and one loss, they had a score of thirteen points to rank first in the group and advance. Porto also advanced, as they were second with eleven points.

In recent games, whether they were in the domestic arena or the European arena, the Forest team had suddenly become a "cottage industry for goalscoring."

After the league tournament's away loss of 0:1 to Liverpool, they scored in every game. They had an 8:0 win against Beşiktaş and 3:1 win against Tottenham Hotspur. The 1:1 draw with Chelsea was the game in which they scored the fewest. They even had two goals in the 2:3 loss to Arsenal, which was followed by a frenzy of goalscoring. In the Champions League group stage, they swept Porto 4:1. They defeated Manchester City 4:0 and Bolton Wanderers 4:1 in league games. In the last game in the Champions League group stage, they had a 4:0 victory over Marseille and beat Blackburn Rovers with 5:3 in the 17th round of the league tournament.

Someone exclaimed that the Forest team was no longer conservative and played offensive football, so offense ruled and so on. Twain was dismissive. His style had not really changed, but the Forest team

made a lot more progress than before in controlling the ball and the pace of the game. No matter what tactics they faced Twain had the means to deal with them, and would not be at a loss when he encountered a team that clung fast to defense.

Twain had always thought that in the competition for the league title, the important thing was not to win the games against the strong teams, but to win the games against the weaker teams and firmly grab onto the three points which should have been in their hands. Not losing points senselessly was the key to deciding who would be the league champion in the end. Otherwise, they would be like the Chelsea team in the hands of Vialli and Gullit. They had a group of talented players and advanced tactical play, but because the overall performance of the team was not stable, they could repeatedly beat the strong teams, but would always inexplicably lose points to the underdogs, which eventually led people to give them the nickname "the Disruptor."

Since Twain took the top spot and advanced of the Champions League group stage, he could put all his energy into the league tournament because Christmas was coming...