

## Champions 701

### Chapter 701: Chilly

After the match with Man City, the media lost interest in hyping up the resentment Bendtner had against Nottingham Forest. Upon losing the bet, Bendtner treated all his teammates to a round of drinks. He was smiling again, almost as if he had forgotten his experience he had playing that match in that city. Although he lost the match and his bet, his relationship with his new teammates became more harmonious. Guess there was not a gain without a loss.

There were also no Nottingham Forest fans discussing the player who no longer belonged to the team, but Bendtner would be greeted with jeers if he returned to that city for another match as a Man City player. His performance in that match made a lasting impression on Nottingham Forest fans.

Nottingham Forest players would also no longer talk about the past matches, even though that match created many topics which could be talked about with great relish. George Wood's goal was evaluated to be the best in that round, and was repeatedly played in the highlight reel. Žigic was also favored by the media, because he had only recently transferred into the Premier League for a month, but had already scored for Nottingham Forest in his second match. Plus, this goal became the final winning goal.

After the end of that league match, Twain brought the team to Kyiv, Ukraine to participate in their second match in the Champions league. It was October, and the weather in Kyiv was cool and perfect for outdoor activities.

Although they were playing in the Champions league, Twain decided to use rotations on account of FC Kyiv Dynamo's true capabilities and the current state of the team. Switching up the roster they used in the Man City match and relying on the second-grade roster, Nottingham Forest was victorious over FC Kyiv Dynamo with a 2 : 1 victory as the away team. Having a streak of two consecutive wins streak and a good start for their group matches.

Continuing their expedition created problems in the physical fitness of the team. Their physical reserves, which were never that good to begin with, have been hovering below the safety line since the international matches.

Upon returning to England, Nottingham Forest drew against Middlesbrough with a score of 0 : 0.

After seven matches, Nottingham Forest ranked 4th in the league with 14 points. They were even behind the newly promoted Hull City. Hull City, since their 5-goal loss to Nottingham Forest in the second match, had achieved three consecutive wins, bagging 4 wins and 1 draw in their 5 most recent matches. They had accumulated the same number of points on the league table as Nottingham Forest, placing third and thereby becoming the biggest black horse since the opening of the new league season.

Even Twain would lament on the inconstancy of life. Hull City, who they had utterly destroyed in the second match, now placed above them in third place. But he was not concerned that Hull City could become a real threat to their team. It was normal for recently promoted teams to be ranked highly at the start of the season as they relied mostly on momentum and the public's general unawareness of them. However, the test of endurance was what truly tested the mettle of these teams. Wigan Athletic

F.C. was once also called a black horse. But now? The coach who looked up to him was still leading a team that was working hard in the Champions League to return to the Premier League.

Soccer's top leagues were essentially just a rich man's game. Without a stable financial backing, a team would only be a temporarily brilliant display. At the end of the day, they would still be heartlessly eliminated. No matter how strong a team was, stronger teams would split them up if they did not have money, reducing them to a "player market". This was what happened to Italy's Parma and England's Leeds United.

Though Twain knew Hull City posed no threat to him, he also knew that the league was a long battle where one placed most of their efforts not at the start during the middle or towards the end. As for the current state of the team, Twain was still not very satisfied.

What happened during the summer threw a wrench in their plans for transfers and they did not achieve many of their goals, which resulted in the players being overwhelmed with problems. It had only been 2 months since the league had begun and they were already in such a state. Winter, the more ruthless season, had not even started. Twain could not predict what other unfortunate events would happen to the team; he needed to take precautions.

He decided to find Evan to discuss the financial issues they would face when attracting players during the winter transfer period. Speaking of Evan made him realise that he rarely saw Evan around. Evan used to frequent Nottingham but meeting him in Wilford had become a rare occurrence in the past month. Allan Adams was another person Twain rarely saw. They were probably busy with some things, though it was a relief they were in Nottingham these days. Twain decided not to put it off any further. He immediately left to find Evan.

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In Evan's office, Twain saw Allan again. Because both of them were business partners and friends who were always hanging out together, this was not a surprising sight for Twain. He greeted Allan and went straight to the point.

"Evan, you've seen what the team is like now. The reserves are not sufficient, resulting in many matches where I could not arrange a well-rounded and complete roster. I feel that we should at least transfer in 3 players during the winter period, especially for the offensive half..."

Upon finishing, Evan looked at Allan for a moment, then gave a bitter smile while spreading his hands. "Tony, I'm afraid I can't meet your requests this time."

Twain felt strange. "Why?"

Evan's smile was not any less bitter. "We're out of money."

"Out of money? I don't understand, isn't the club still in a good financial state?"

Allan stood up from the sofa. "Simply put, the current costs of running the club are still affordable, but coming up with additional money to buy new players is a little difficult. Have you seen the news, Tony?"

"I only watch the sports side..."

Allan sighed. "There's a financial crisis."

Twain was a little confused. He could not differentiate between “financial crisis” and “economic crisis”; they were the same to him. He only had two opportunities to learn about these crises: once during high school where he learnt from the history books about the 30-year global economic crisis in the past century, and the 1998 financial crisis in Southeast Asia. But being an ordinary person living in China, even the most recent case in 1997 had minimal effects on his life, so it was unlikely for him to have a concrete idea of what a financial crisis was.. What exactly was a financial crisis, and what impact did it have on my life? Now, he had the chance to properly learn about it.

“A sub-credit crisis broke out in the United States, so it’s only time before this crisis affects the whole world. Evan’s business in the States took many blows. This sub-credit crisis started due to the United States’ property market bubble, and Evan’s company in the United States was property investment...”

Evan continued from what Allan said. “Simply put, Tony, my company in the United States went bankrupt.”

“But isn’t your business in the United States always separated from the duties in the club?” Twain asked. He still did not understand why Evan’s company in the United States had any relations with the club.

“It is. But in reality my business in the United States could still financially support the club. This summer we were doing heavy investments in China, but we overestimated ourselves and the investments were insufficient. Now the business in the United States collapsed, our investment chains are broken,” said Evan as he sat on the chair, looking a little dejected.

Twain felt like he more or less understood the situation. Although the business in the various lands were separated, they were always linked. The business in the United States could fund the club’s activities, and the club’s gain could be used for their investment project in China.

From the United States to England, then onto China, this structure of organisation for a soccer club, which was not considered wealthy and lacked a financial backing, was spread too big. Now, if any part of the link broke, the rest of it would be affected. Of course, if there were issues with their investments in China, the other two areas would not be impacted as much.

“If you want a large-scale business, your money cannot stay in a single place, which is why the money is constantly circulating. Now that there is an issue in the United States, this chain will break...” Allan’s words confirmed Twain’s conjecture. “We’ve been in the States this month to handle some affairs.”

Twain asked carefully, “How bad is the situation?”

Evan smiled a little, but it did not reach his eyes. “It’s not too bad now, but I think it will be bad once the crisis spreads across the world. Globalisation has made it easier for one country’s problems to become a shared one. Actually the sub-credit crisis had already begun in the United States last year, but at that time I was still optimistic that the economy will not collapse, that the self-regulating function of the market would resolve the crisis. Also, at that time there were many who were as optimal as me. But in reality we all underestimated the crisis. It was only a crisis last year, but it snowballed into Europe and Japan’s financial markets, becoming a windstorm...”

“Will the club go bankrupt?” Twain did not understand the professional terms that Allan would use, he was only concerned about one thing.

“I cannot confirm,” said Allan as he shook his head.

“That is indeed very terrible,” Twain mumbled.

Seeing how the atmosphere turned a little dull, Evan clapped his hands and grinned. “Alright, the situation isn’t actually that terrible yet, is it? I’ve already shut down all the business in the United States, now this club is the only business I own. I will not let this club go bankrupt no matter what.”

Twain looked at Evan Doughty who was beaming, and Allan Adams who was usually confident, but now seemingly at wit’s end. “How can I help?”

Evan laughed. “Just lead the team well, Tony. Don’t worry about the financial side of things. It’s not something you can worry about, anyway. Didn’t I say? No matter how terrible things are, I will also hold onto this club. Because this is my last hurrah.”

What else could Twain say? He had initially come here to ask for funds, but he could not make that request now. He bid them goodbye and went back to the team alone.

He sighed at the inconstancy of the world. Allan Adams and Evan Doughty had been smug upon arriving from Asia last summer. On the plane, they described the future of Nottingham Forest to him as one full of excitement. Unexpectedly, only after two months, things changed completely. The company in the United States went bankrupt, cash flow became unstable, and the plans went from becoming a reality to becoming completely impossible to carry out with the current state of affairs.

But what could he do? How could a club profit? Profit came mostly in the form of television money and sponsors, along with ticket and merchandise sales, and all of these stemmed from one thing — results. If the team’s results were not good, their television airtime would be reduced, sponsors would no longer be interested, ticket and merchandise sales would be reduced, and cash prizes from competitions will be lost. Twain felt the burden on his shoulders grow heavier, and was no longer able to relax.

Actually, even if Nottingham Forest went bankrupt, he could just jump ship. Depending on the results he achieved while leading the team, he could land a high-paying job as a head coach in any club in the world. Even now, some teams were waving cheque books in hopes of him joining them. He definitely did not have to worry about starving. It was not like his early days where not succeeding at his job would cost him his job, causing him to starve to death. That would never happen to him.

He did not need the guilt and emotional stress from worrying over Nottingham Forest’s potential bankruptcy. But he could not put down this team which he raised personally, nor the fans which looked up and trusted him. Being a traditional Chinese, he valued sentiment. Allan and Evan also treated him well, so he could not do things that would betray them. He should try to help them to his fullest. Evan said Nottingham Forest was his last hurrah, so Twain was also willing to regard the team as his.

Twain did not know how to run a club, and he was not some business genius. Looking at large numbers gave him a headache, and even when he was buying things from the market he would pay the wrong amount. What he did know was how to lead a soccer team in competitions, and winning those would mean the club earned cash prizes. Twain could only get the club through these tough times by earning money the only way he knew.

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Tony Twain, someone who only cared about soccer, only learnt about financial crises today. In reality, this global-wide financial crisis had already persisted for almost a year. Property markets took a heavy hit, stocks of various countries took a huge dip, credit companies went into bankruptcy, currency devaluation was occurring. It was akin to a windstorm, forming in 2007, spreading over the world and peaking in the second half of 2008.

The global market, during the first half of 2008, was still carrying the optimal thought of “subprime mortgage crisis’ worst period has finished”. But upon reaching the second half of the year, the situation took a turn for the worse.

In August, France announced its profit warning. Following that, an estimate of 8.2 billion euros were lost, because they, under an extent of 127 billion euros called the “Rhineland Fund”, participated in the United States’s sub-credit investment business.

The United States’ 10th largest mortgage institution — American Home Mortgage Investment Corporation, officially applied for bankruptcy protection on 6th August, following the bankruptcy of Century Financial Corporation, another big-scale mortgage institution in America.

On 8th August, the 5th biggest American investment company, The Bear Stearns Companies, Inc. announced the fall of two funds, reason also being the sub-credit windstorm.

9th August, France’s biggest bank BNP Paribas announced the freezing of its three funds, similarly because of investing in the subprime bond with the United States and resulting in huge losses. Thus, the European market was in shambles.

On 13th August, Japan’s second biggest bank Mizuho Bank’s parent company Ruisui Group announced its losses from the United States’ sub-credits being 6 billion yen. In the past, people thought if the United States partnered with other economic powers in other countries, this economic state would not be so devastating. However now the cruel reality has been displayed in front of everyone. The financial crisis was not just a frightening thing to raise an alarm, it had become a reality.

These incidents were actually still quite distant from Tony Twain’s life. But as September transitioned into October, an event had begun to alter the work life he originally had. The American investment bank Lehman Brothers, which invested in Nottingham Forest’s new stadium through loans, applied for bankruptcy protection.

That October, in England, Twain also felt a chill.

## **Chapter 702: Winter Has Arrived**

The most immediate impact of the Lehman Brothers’ collapse on the Nottingham Forest Football Club was that their new stadium landed in a predicament of a shortage of funds.

Though Nottingham Forest’s new stadium did not yet have an official name, it had become a highly anticipated British construction project. Because it was not merely about a construction of a stadium.

It was a massive real estate development plan. With Nottingham Forest’s new stadium as the core, the development radiated outward to form a commercial and residential circle, as well as facilities such as a

football theme park, a national fitness park and green space. With Nottingham Forest's increasing rise to fame, Allan Adams also planned to open the site as a tourist attraction to the world in the future. Like Real Madrid's Bernabéu, Barcelona's Camp Nou, and both AC Milan's and Inter Milan's San Siro and Meazza....and the other stadiums of famous European clubs, they were not just stadiums. Due to the glorious tradition of the teams, they had become sacred places for countless tourists and fans at the same time

The plan was huge, and the prospects were fantastic, but the cost was much bigger than building a single stadium.

Manchester City's new stadium, City of Manchester Stadium, had cost just over one hundred and ten million pounds. If only one such stadium was built, it would not have been such a big deal for Nottingham Forest's finances. They only had to tighten their belts for a year.

But Allan's plan would cost at least six hundred million pounds. It did not include the investment from Nottingham City Council.

If they did not want to spend that much money, then the Forest Club would end up with the ownership of the stadium with no other facilities to earn money and accumulate wealth. In order to maximize the club's development, Allan and Evan ventured to be the majority owner in the project, in return for the development rights of the stadium, football theme park, and a commercial area.

America's financial problems were already prominent at that time. But who would have thought that the self-regulating capacity of the market economy was so vulnerable?

It took only a year to bankrupt Lehman Brothers, America's fourth-largest investment bank....

Allan became more haggard during this period and flew around the world all the time. Evan Dougherty's businesses in the U.S. were completely over, and now Allan was busy looking for follow-up funding for the new stadium. Many banks had refused to lend to Nottingham Forest because of the global financial downturn.

Without a choice, Evan had to announce a temporary shutdown of the new stadium construction and other building developments. Otherwise, if they continued to invest money in the project, the entire Nottingham Forest Football Club would sooner or later be dragged into this bottomless abyss.

The news immediately made headlines in the British press. Everyone knew that the Nottingham Forest club was finally in big trouble after a rapid expansion in the last few years.

"... I admit that the Nottingham Forest boss is ambitious and driven. But overly rapid development will lead to stalling. The Nottingham Forest team is widely popular in Europe, but their economic fundamentals have not kept pace with the team's progress, with the club's construction and their results not matching. Look at the other powerhouse clubs, both their results and the club's conditions are very much in line with their status. Only Nottingham Forest... Like a deformed child, it has a pair of fast-moving feet, but without a body that can withstand the impact of this speed..." The various professional experts at the television stations, analyzed Nottingham Forest's current predicament. They thought it was a reverse archetype of how a football club should survive and develop in the midst of the world's economic downturn.

“I think the Nottingham Forest Football Club should reflect on their strategy of expanding everywhere. China, Japan, Southeast Asia, England, United States of America and the entire world.... Tony Twain’s magic has caused his boss to think that his team and club are omnipotent. To be honest, I am not at all surprised by the current predicament when I know that the chairman and market manager of Nottingham Forest are Americans who have never cared about football before. They ignore the important point—a football club is different from an ordinary listed company. Other than having to abide by the laws of the economy, it also has to obey the laws of football. Tony Twain’s magic has given the team a good foundation for development, but they still need to take it slowly and develop step by step. Evan Doughty had once revealed his goal of turning Nottingham Forest into a powerhouse club at a certain reception held in Nottingham. But I’ve never heard of a powerhouse club that can be built in just five or six years. Chelsea is rich and has good results, but is it a powerhouse now? I think the vast majority of people will disagree that it is a powerhouse club.”

“Nottingham Forest is one of the clubs established the longest in the history of the modern football world and the only team to still compete in the top leagues. However, now the club is giving everyone the impression that it is young. From the owners of the club to the manager of their team and to the players, they are all extremely young. Young people will always make some errors in judgment and their estimation of the situation will be overly optimistic...”

“Now they know how bad the situation is.”

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“There are sounds of plaintive whines everywhere.” Evan sat in the large boss’s chair in the office and rested his chin on his hands. “It’s as if winter is coming early.”

He appeared to be talking to himself, and yet as if he was speaking to Twain sitting next to him.

Allan was not in the room. He was on his way to China. Those investment projects in China also ran into financial problems which he needed to personally solve.

Twain looked down at the sweater he wore inside his suit.

“Winter is really not that far away...”

After a 0:0 draw with Middlesbrough, the team was dismissed again as the national teams’ games resumed. The players flew to various countries in the world for the World Cup qualifiers on all continents. Some of them did well and the others performed badly. The players who returned to the Forest team after two national games were mostly unsatisfactory in terms of their form and physical strength. Under such circumstances, Nottingham Forest lost its away game to Liverpool and quickly slipped to the seventh spot in the league table. It was the first time in two years that Nottingham Forest had placed at seventh in the league. The last time they were in the seventh spot in the league tournament was on October 14th, 2006, after they lost to Manchester City in the eighth round of the league tournament and the team finished seventh following three consecutive rounds of no victory.

The score was 2:3. They worked hard but still lost. In the post-match press conference, Twain expressed concern about the fatigue of the Premier League players and suggested that the Football Association should consider giving the players a breather by setting up a winter break. But his suggestion elicited no response and he did not receive any reply from the Football Association. The setting up of a winter

break had hotly debated for so many years, but it was just wishful thinking of the coaches and players. Neither the Football Association nor the league committee would agree because it was directly related to their income...

Now he was about to lead the team to Italy to compete against a strong rival, Juventus.

Before he went to Italy, Evan came looking for him.

Twain knew what Evan was here for. Could it be anything else other than the team's recent poor results?

But there was nothing he could do about the current situation. The players' physical strength had been depleted by the club and national team competitions. The continuous twice weekly games had left them with no time to rest and adjust their form. For Benítez to have been able to reverse the score in the last five minutes, the Forest lads had already played outstandingly in the game against Liverpool. But it also took a lot of physical energy to play like this, and the whole team was exhausted after the game. He did not even know how to face Juventus.

He could not afford to buy anyone during the winter transfer window, and he must rely on the players to stand for one season. But he had not given up. He was still indoctrinating his players with the goal of winning at least one title this season. No matter how bad the situation might be, the team could not lose its confidence.

"I know what you're going to say, Evan. The team will win against Juventus." He stood up and wanted to get out of here as soon as possible.

Evan smiled at him and did not detain him.

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Two days later at the Stadio delle Alpi in Turin.

Nottingham Forest lost 2:0 in the away game against Juventus, which returned to the Champions League.

Twain sat in the technical area of Stadio delle Alpi's visiting team, without any angry expression on his face. He did not throw his suit jacket down nor kick a water bottle. He just sat there with a helpless look on his face. In fact, just before the final whistle sounded, he was still angry like a bull that saw red on the sidelines. He flew into a rage on the sidelines over the team's performance.

He had deployed the strongest lineup he currently had. But his tactics were not effective against Juventus at all. After all, his routine bore a lot of resemblance to the routine that Juventus was best at, and Ranieri knew how to deal with him.

Defensively, Juventus was no worse than Nottingham Forest. The Italians' blood had long been infused with defensive instincts. No matter how much the Forest team dispatched back and forth, no matter how quickly and suddenly the Forest team counterattacked, Juventus' rear defensive line was not disorderly. Moreover, they used sneak attacks to defeat Nottingham Forest by scoring a goal each at the start of the first and second half.



Twain's tactics came from Juventus during Capello's time. Juventus's football was ugly to watch but stable and capable of obtaining victories and winning titles. Now that they were up against Juventus, which was more stable than themselves and hungry for victory, he could not take any advantage. On the other hand, the Forest players might have depleted their strength due to the consecutive campaigns and could not get into their competitive form, as if they ate too much and not fully awoke. After Juventus scored their second goal, they did not appear to have any desire for victory even though there were almost forty minutes left. They were simply too tired. The players were human too and not machines. They would be tired and following their fatigue, they would certainly be slack, which could produce some negative thoughts ...

There was nothing Twain could do about it. No matter how energetically he tried to rouse the players in the locker room, the players did not have any strength at all. It was impossible for them to generate infinite power out of thin air and then POWER-MAX to blast their opponent away just because they heard him roar a few words of "we must win!" Nor could they definitely win the game just because he promised Evan Doughty that the game must be won before coming to Turin.

The Juventus players embraced each other with exceptional excitement after they won the game. Kerlake, who could not stand the spectacle, snorted, "It's not as if they won the Champions League title. It's only a victory in the group stage. Must they be so excited?"

"They did beat the defending champion after all, since their return to the Champions League..." Dunn explained. He thought that this could explain why the Juventus players were so excited. Many of these people had experienced the tragedy of relegation from Serie A to Serie B, also experienced the years of striving for Serie A while in Serie B and the joy of returning to Champions League qualifiers a season after a successful promotion.

Many of them must have tasted the ups and downs, as well as the joys and sorrows in life.

He looked at the Juventus captain Del Piero as he thought to himself.

While the two men talked, Twain stood up from his seat without a word and walked slowly toward the tunnel. He did not want to see the Juventus players get so excited that they were crazy because he felt that it was the victor showing off to the loser and a disgrace to the loser. He did not want to sit here and be treated as such.

In the post-match press conference, Ranieri looked very excited, while Twain was reticent and refrained from answering. Even if he must answer a question, he would try to be as succinct as possible.

"What do you think about losing this vital game?"

"I have no opinion."

"Žigić, who was the substitute for the injured van Nistelrooy, performed poorly in the starting lineup for the game. Do you think it was a mistake to buy him?"

"No."

"Will the loss to Juventus affect the team's eventual advancement out of the group stage?"

"There's no impact."

“What’s your assessment of Juventus’ performance?”

“It has nothing to do with me.”

When the reporters saw that he was so uncooperative, they directed their questions at him, and not the team or the game.

“Are you in a bad mood since you lost the game?”

“Take a guess.”

“Then why are you acting like you’re unwilling to answer questions?”

“I don’t feel like talking.”

“Why don’t you want to talk?”

“I have a toothache.” Twain replied with a straight face.

“... All right. Are the team’s recent results related to the financial difficulties the club has encountered?”

“I can assure you that the worldwide financial crisis has nothing to do with the performance of our team.” This was the longest sentence Twain had uttered at the press conference.

The press conference ended unhappily amid such a cold atmosphere.

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Having to break his promise, Twain was in a bad mood and did not even criticize the players’ poor performance in Turin. Back in Nottingham, the Forest team beat Aston Villa, which ranked above them, 1:0 at home after much difficulty. With this hard-won victory, their ranking rose from seventh to fifth.

But in the Champions League, the Forest team was in big trouble.

Back at home, Nottingham Forest, which swore revenge, were forced to a 1:1 draw at the City Ground stadium by Juventus, which used its usual method of clinging to defense, holding their ground and sneak attacks. A draw with Juventus left the Forest team now uncertain of their advancement out of the group stage. After the grouping came out for the Champions League group stage, the pundits were unanimous in their bullish view of Nottingham Forest and believed that it would be normal for them to be the first team to advance.

Tony Twain, who liked to go up against the media, had done it once again. However, it did not go as he wanted this time. If possible, he would rather cater to the media’s predictions this time.

Juventus was at top of the table with three wins and one draw; Nottingham Forest was second with two wins, one draw and one loss.; FC Kyiv Dynamo was third with two wins and two losses, following close behind with six points; FC BATE Borisov lost all four games with nary a point gained and had basically been declared out of the group ahead of schedule.

If there was no other surprise, it would not be a problem for Juventus to advance. Now the problem was between Nottingham Forest and FC Kyiv Dynamo. The gap between the two teams was so narrow that no one knew which team would advance until the last minute.

The final two rounds of the Champions League group stage were scheduled as followed: on November 26th, Nottingham Forest would challenge Belarus' Borisov in an away game and against FC Kyiv Dynamo in a home game on December 11th.

The away game against Borisov would be crucial. If they lost in this game, Nottingham Forest might bid farewell to the Champions League early. As for why the game was so important, it was not because Borisov was strong, but because the impact from the long journey to Belarus and the harsh natural climate would have on the Forest team would be too great to be ignored.

At the end of November, Belarus had already entered a cold winter. The worst-case scenario would be that Nottingham Forest would have to play in a world of ice and snow against the opponent which had the home-field advantage and was adapted to the icy weather in order to take the lead in the knockout stage against FC Kyiv Dynamo.

In that game, they would not only play against the Borisov team, but also against the cold weather in Belarus. Furthermore, it was often when the players were the most tired and the most vulnerable to injuries during that time period.

The players' fitness needed to be guaranteed to win and so that no one would get hurt.

As soon as Twain remembered the condition, he felt a boulder pressing on his chest and making him breathless.

In early November, in the morning of Nottingham, the mist from the Sherwood Forest still shrouded the city, the roads were wet, and it was still raining. The sun had already risen but was blocked by the thick dark clouds in the sky, not even letting in a ray of sunshine. The men who went to work huddled their bodies in black coats and hurried along. The headlights on the cars were still on as they drove across the roads, splashing sprays of icy water.

Twain stood outside Wilford Lane, looking up at the training base in front of him shrouded in the woods and fog. He tugged open the collar of his turtleneck, and the cold air took advantage of the opportunity to thread in, giving him the chills which he was unprepared for. But the good thing was that the feeling of breathlessness had finally eased a little.

He had just opened his mouth to take a deep breath when a puff of white breath from his mouth gushed out. It was dispersed by the chill in front of his eyes and diffused into wisps of white mist which gradually faded until it finally disappeared and melded with the white fog in the early winter morning.

Winter had arrived.

### **Chapter 703: The Distance Between the Dream and Reality**

Seven months had passed since he came from China to the faraway Britain. Chen Jian was getting used to life in this distant country. His language proficiency progressed very quickly in an environment where English was spoken everywhere. Only his studies progressed slowly at the University of Nottingham.

It was not that he did not want to study well but that he was too tired.

In the beginning during that period, his landlord, Fat John and his family were used to seeing the somewhat tanned looking Chinese young man dragged his exhausted body back home after the training and returned to his room to study English diligently once he had dinner. Then the next morning, he would go Wilford if there was training or take a bus to the University of Nottingham if there was no training.

Simple days like these were repeated. He rarely went shopping in the city center and did not go to any parks to relax. Other than John sometimes obtained an extra ticket for him to go to the City Ground stadium to watch the Forest team play, the city of the legendary English hero Robin Hood was just these three places, “Wilford training base”, “University of Nottingham” and “Mr. John’s house” and the roads between them to him.

Such arduous time slowly improved recently. He already had no problems with his English listening and speaking abilities. He could now communicate with his landlord at the dinner table and listen to John talk about Nottingham Forest’s proud history.

His body had adapted to the youth team’s training program and had shown his consistent qualities in training which were his strength and hard work.

However, he still felt very tired. Not just because the intensity of the training was particularly strong, but also because of the psychological reasons...

Chen Jian had formed the habit of keeping a daily diary since he came to England. His original intention was since this was a valuable life experience, he did not want this period of experiences to be forgotten over the course of his life as time went on. Therefore, he wanted to record his life, training and study in Nottingham in a written form.

Now when he flipped back at the earlier diary entries and read those crooked lines, he would recall each day during these seven months. In fact, he felt that even if he did not write a diary, these seven months, as well as the remaining five months would not be easily erased in his memory. They were too deep and strong, as real and clear as the aching in his body after the daily training.

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“Chen! Can’t you run anymore? Can’t you?” The youth team manager, Greenwood leaned over and opened his mouth wide as he was almost going to bite Chen Jian’s ear. He rushed to Chen Jian, exhausted on the ground, and loudly scolded in English, regardless of whether Chen Jian could understand. “If you can’t do it, you can go home now! No one’s going to keep you here! No one here has any hope for you! You’re just a lucky contestant from the talent show! Do you really think you’re lucky? Stand up! Keep practicing! You’ve got twenty more runs to dribble the ball back and forth! Don’t delay my dinner time, this is the most ordinary youth team training!”

Chen Jian could not understand what Manager Greenwood shouted. Even though the manager always had such a loud voice during the training, he knew that the English coach must have been unhappy with himself—he’d never seen anyone crouch next to his ear to compliment him with such a fierce expression.

He got up from the ground and wobbled as he continued to dribble the ball forward. He ran a few steps forward before he stumbled and fell to the ground again. But this time, without waiting for Greenwood to continue to rush up to “rain down on him with wrath”, he climbed up and continued.

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“Are you calcium-deficient or had polio as a kid? Chen! If you can’t withstand such a tiny collision, how are you going to play football? Are you a little girl? Do you secretly stuff your panties with sanitary pads? Are you having your period? Get up, continue! What are you hiding from? This is not motherf\*\*king playing football. This is war! If you can’t win, you might as well die. Anyone who runs away and does not die on the battlefield, will be dead by my hands! If you’re so afraid of getting hurt, I can recommend you train with ten-year-olds! Do all you Chinese behaved like this? Direct confrontation! Face the confrontation! How many times do you want me to say that? Face it!!”

Chen Jian could more or less make out the series of grunts from the youth team’s loud-mouthed coach’s mouth and what they meant. He did not shout back, nor did he did not wash his hands off it and leave. Instead, he got up, and yelled as he rushed up to his opponent. Then he tackled the opposing player to the ground with a foul.

The young man who was knocked down by Chen Jian shouted in an exaggerated way. He laid on the ground and did not want to get up.

“James, if you’re going to keep lying on the ground and pretend to be lazy, I’ll punish you with running ten laps with the ball!” Greenwood changed the aim of his muzzle this time and rushed to bellow next to the ear of the boy lying on the ground. The other person immediately jumped up from the ground. He certainly did not forget to give Chen Jian a smack in the chest and said, “Hey! You should have just used the force just now to vent at the coach!”

The youth team players who were enjoying this lively sight around them, watched and laughed. Greenwood also applauded Chen, “Although it was a foul, a defense player has to be used to fouling to stop the other side. And it was a good momentum... Another thing don’t go ‘ah ah’ and yell out the next time. You looked silly.”

There was more laughter.

Chen Jian wrote in his diary: “... I still don’t quite understand, but I think Manager Greenwood praised me. It was the first time in three months that he had complimented me... Professional football in England is indeed different from what I’ve heard at home...”

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“Chen, you should pay attention to the position of the opposing attacking player! You chased after the ball, but why were you chasing the ball? Do you think your physical strength is that good? This is not your talent show. You won’t be able to hold on till the halftime interval with that little strength of yours in a professional game. Are you training here for professional competition as your goal? If that’s not the case, then you just take it that I did not say...”

“Of course, I am, Manager Greenwood, of course. But George Woo.....”

“You want to say his stamina is very good, right? Yes, his stamina is extremely good. But he’s a monster. Are you a monster? Are you George Wood?”

Chen Jian shook his head.

“Then listen carefully! Your body may be considered strong in your country...”

“No, not strong, Manager Greenwood...”

“Don’t interrupt me! Well, since you’re not considered strong in your country, then you’re not strong here. You can’t always think about using your body to defend. I don’t know which idiot told you that the defense depends on the body. In fact, the body is only an innate gift, but people can’t always rely on innate gifts to live. You need to learn how to observe and analyze every move of the attacking players and then figure out what they will do next to prepare yourself in advance. It’s prejudgment. Do you understand prejudgment?”

“I think... I understand, Manager Greenwood.”

Greenwood pointed to his head and said, “If you think football is a physical sport, you’re wrong, Chen. Football is actually a sport full of wisdom. Idiots and fools don’t have a future here. Your body isn’t strong, but there’s no rule that only strong people are qualified to be defenders and defensive midfielders. You have to learn to defend with your brain and intelligence, find the attacking players’ next moves and weaknesses, and then make targeted countermeasures. Your speed and agility of an East Asian are your characteristics. You have to work on them...”

Chen Jian nodded vigorously and said, “I see. Manager Greenwood, thank you for the instructions.”

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“Chen! I ask you to use your brain to play. I did not ask you not to run at all! What are you doing there, standing like a fool? What are you defending? A human vegetable can easily bypass a wood block like you!”

“Shovel the ball! Be decisive ... Look, you put him in the penalty area. What are you going to do next? Give the opponent a penalty shot? Foul? What are you afraid of? What will you choose when it comes to a free kick as compared to a penalty shot?”

“Plug ahead and plug ahead! Don’t just stand in place after you pass the ball. Run forward diagonally...How is your teammate going to pass to you if you don’t run? His other passing routes are blocked. Only if you plug ahead from behind, can you create a passing route for him. Don’t just think that passing is only something a playmaker has to consider. It requires people next to him and the whole team moving together to create a passing route! Standing to play football is absolutely not allowed here!”

“Chen, do you know what your biggest problem is? It’s not that your body is thinner and weaker than an Englishman and not because you don’t have a solid foundation. Those things can be improved through constant exercise and practice. Your biggest problem is here. The brain, wisdom, consciousness. It’s football awareness! Playing on the pitch is completely different from watching in the stands. Don’t think that just because you’ve watched a lot of football games means you have a lot of outstanding football awareness. If you don’t come down and play in person, you never know what’s going on! You have to

learn to observe and analyze the situation on the field... Isn't your English fast improving? Why can't you use the same intelligence to develop your football awareness?"

...

Chen Jian could still think of a lot of such examples of remarks now. He discovered that the praise at the time turned out to be the only time the youth manager, Greenwood had acknowledged his efforts in seven months. He had just picking at his faults all the other times. Greenwood could certainly find more faults just when he thought he had done a good job in one area.

Chen Jian often felt that he was not really suitable for playing football ...he simply made too many mistakes. Even with the most basic running, Manager Greenwood would think that there was a problem with his running posture, which affected his speed and explosive force... But he had run like that since he was a kid. He had been running for eighteen years and no one had ever said to him, "Hey, man. There's a big problem with your running posture."

He admitted he thought about a variety of things before he came here, including how the professional training in England should look like. But he never thought it would be so harsh and unbearable. One tiny misstep, the sharp whistle and Greenwood's loud voice immediately rang out in his ears.

He could not refute and explain. A mistake was a mistake and he could only say "yes, Manager Greenwood. I won't make a mistake the next time!" The reason was simple as he was from China, a country with a backward level of football. Anyone from the English youth team was better than him and knew more than he did. In the sport like "football", he had no say as a Chinese.

During the seven months in the youth team, in addition to the unimaginable intense training, he was also subjected to mental challenges—any effort would almost certainly be relentlessly rejected. He absolutely could not expect an appreciative glance from the manager after he beautifully stopped a long pass or receive the appreciation and applause of his teammates after he successfully intercepted an opponent's dribble... Those scenes that appeared in the football fantasy novels never happened to Chen Jian. Why? Because the coaches and teammates would think that what he did was common. Did a footballer have to be complacent about praise and rewards when he did his job?

Chen Jian would never tell his parents or the fans and classmates in China who cared about him, the things he encountered on the training ground. He also would not tell his landlord, John and his family. No matter what kind of treatment and difficulties he encountered, there was one thing that remained unchanged for him and that was to always keep smiling, even if he found it hard to smile. He did not want to look miserable in the face of difficulties, giving the impression that he could not handle it.

As he always smiled, he was on fairly good terms with his teammates and there was no such thing as crowding him out. Perhaps the teammates were aware that this kid was just a product of a talent show and could not possibly fight with them for a spot here. He was basically not a rival.

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Sometimes Chen Jian would call his two companions at Bolton Wanderers and Everton to ask about their situation. Whether it was Wang Yang at Bolton Wanderers or Song Hui at Everton, they seemed to be in a much better position than he was. Everyone had the same training content and did not receive any special treatment but was not abused either. After they met the standard required and completed a

training session, they would be warmly praised by the coaches. Their training intensity and training environment simply could not be compared with Chen Jian's "hell."

They were all very surprised when they heard about what happened to Chen Jian. Wang Yang even asked him directly if he had offended the youth team's manager, or if the manager hated Chinese people.

Chen Jian firmly stated that it was impossible.

Wang Yang curled his lips and said maybe he did not realize he had offended the other man with some small details.

Chen Jian thought for a while this time and still shook his head to say it was impossible.

Song Hui was very concerned about Chen Jian's training situation. After hearing Chen Jian's account, he stayed quiet for a long while before he faintly said just when Chen Jian thought the phone cut off, "Ah, completely two different worlds...."

Although their training was easier than Chen Jian's and the people around them were relatively kinder, Wang Yang and Song Hui had basically given up on their "dream" of staying in the United Kingdom after a year. They called their "dream" a "daydream" after they experienced the level of English football. They knew their own levels and were also aware that be it Bolton Wanderers or Everton, they had no interest in either of them. Frankly speaking, the previous talent show only came about because they represented the Chinese market.

After figuring it out, they felt a little disheartened and foolish, knowing in advance that they had been eliminated while they tried their best.

"I have learnt much during the year. Even if I can't stay in the UK in the end... Ah, I definitely can't. I don't regret this year too." With six months to go before the one-year deadline, Wang Yang had begun to characterize his one year of experience. "No matter what happens, I'm here anyway. I'm much luckier with those who were already eliminated and did not even qualify to be here. I don't think I can ask for anything more."

"The gap is really too wide. Before I came here, I had the fantasy in my mind that I might even be the main character in those football fantasy novels on the Internet? I only realized what I'm made of when I came here. I'm worse than other people... by a billion light-years. The level of Chinese football is really backward in every area. It's not just the system, the players and the coaches who are behind..." Song Hui shook his head and sighed, somewhat frustrated. "Sigh, the only benefit is that the improvement in my English level... Even if I study in England later, I won't have to go to a language school first."

The manner of these two men was completely different from the complacency they showed before they came here. The reality was cruel, so they woke up from their dreams.

Only Chen Jian was still persistent in his dream. He was not arrogant, nor was he fanciful. He just felt that even if it was a game that he knew he was going to lose; he would persist to the final whistle. Giving up early was not his style and had never been since he participated in the audition of <The Football Kid> and was eliminated the first time.

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Chen Jian returned to the locker room after he completed Greenwood's special training program for him again. The players in the youth team were still changing their clothes and everyone looked very excited. It made him a little curious.

A black man on the team gesticulated to explain to him, "Manager Greenwood said the First Team manager, boss and chief will come to the youth team tomorrow to watch the training match!"

Chen Jian knew what it meant for these people. If they performed well, they might even be transferred to the reserve team and be qualified to play for the official competition. If they did well in the reserves, they could even move up to the First Team and play in the league tournament. They could perhaps obtain a spot to participate in the Champions League after the winter transfer window, then shine and make a name for themselves—all the young people would have that dream, wouldn't they? They thought that they would become the most special, prominent, unique and the best player.

It was a moment that all young players who had practiced hard for years, yearned for day and night. It was a chance to decide their own destiny.

But what did this have to do with him? Chen Jian used English to wish the enthusiastic black kid good luck, and then went to the shower room to wash off his sweat.

There were still five months away from his dream and he still could not see the road ahead up until now. He did not know whether his dream was really waiting for him up ahead. But he had to keep running. Even if he stumbled and did not have the strength, he had to keep going.

Because he really did not know what else he could do except to run forward.

#### **Chapter 704: Strong and Resolute**

The worsening global economy, the construction works on the new stadium that were ceased due to a lack of funds, problems with the players' fitness, signs of an imminent increase in injuries amongst the players and unstable team results. All these different factors came together to weigh down as an immense pressure on Twain.

At the same time, they also opened his eyes to the fact that he could not pin his hopes on the club to splash the cash and buy players during the winter break, and that he had to learn to make use of his local resources more to strengthen the team's capabilities.

The youth team was definitely an area that he should pay attention to. However, it was not enough to just pay attention to it just by sitting in the office and looking at data and reports as he had always done so far. He had to go down and see the youth team for himself. This was a way to make a statement on his stance. It did not matter if he all he did was to stand by the side of the pitch with his sunglasses on and space out. To the youth players, what they will see is hope. The sight of him will bring them encouragement.

This act of his would also be a signal to Evan Doughty. I know you don't have money to buy players, but the youth team is the foundation for the team's survival. You can scrimp however you want elsewhere, just not here.

The only thing he had not done to get his message across to Doughty was to paint the words 'you can scrimp, but not on the kids' on the walls of the youth team's training ground.

He decided to make a trip down to North Wilford with his two assistant managers Kerslake and Dunn after the first team's training session to check on the kids' progress. He wanted to see how far the talent of those young geniuses that the scouts have brought back from all over the world have developed.

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As Britain embraced winter, it also embraced the rainy season.

London was called the 'City of Mist' during the days of the Industrial Revolution due to how it was engulfed in industrial gases and smoke. But now, instead of industrial gases and smoke, it was shrouded in fog.

Nottingham was no different. The incessant cold rain had already lasted for four days, and there were still no signs that the weather would clear up or stop raining according to the weather reports.

Even though Twain was brought up in Sichuan where there would also be frequent cold rain during winter, he still disliked weather like this. The constant rain made people feel as though both their clothing and body have gone moldy. His body exuded an unbearable stench of mold and his clothes were always damp. It felt terribly uncomfortable when his clothes clung to his body.

"I hate weather like this." Twain grumbled under his breath as he walked under a black umbrella. He was on the way to North Wilford with Dunn and Kerslake. "Looking at a sky like this only makes people feel depressed."

He tilted his umbrella to the side a little and looked up at the sky. The raindrops went pitter-patter as they hit him on his face, in his mouth, in his eyes and rolled down his neck into his collar.

Kerslake furrowed his brows. The team's performance has been very unstable recently. A weather like this would certainly make people feel 'disoriented'.

He did not believe that they would be able to find suitable players for the team from the youth team during this winter break. He could not be any more familiar with the training of Nottingham Forest's youths. The team may have been constantly scouting for young, gifted players from overseas in recent times, but all those players are still far from ready to play in the league... The earliest they might be ready would be January of next year.

As for Dunn, he already had someone in mind. When Twain suddenly mentioned that he wanted to take a look at the youth team yesterday, the first person that came to his mind was not any of those hardworking kids in the youth team. Rather, it was Chen Jian.

He could not help but worry about him every single time he heard news about him from the youth team.

Can he hold on? Can he realize his dream?

The three of them arrived at North Wilford, each deep in thought.

The rain and bad weather did not deter the youth team from carrying out their training sessions outdoors. A small-scale practice match had been arranged in place of the usual training session to make it easier for the first team managers to discern the players' true abilities.

The youth team's training ground was hidden by a forest and usually looks to be of a better condition than the first team's training ground. However, all they could see today was a stretch of muddy field due to the bad weather.

The skies above were dark enough to mislead people into thinking that time had fast forwarded and that evening had already dawned. The forest to the north of the training grounds came across as a black, hazy shape amidst the fog, and it added an even darker shade to the training grounds.

The youth players were changing their clothes in the dressing room. They ran out timidly after the manager's exhortations.

Chen Jian was one of them. He had only found out a minute before that he was actually playing as a member for the yellow team in this intra-team match.

The youth players had been grouped into red and yellow teams for the practice match, and they would each wear a jersey corresponding to the color of their teams.

In the first team, the yellow jersey was typically worn by the starting players, but over here in the youth team, the colors meant nothing. They were only used to allow everyone to differentiate who were their allies and foes.

It has been more than seven months since Chen Jian came to Nottingham Forest, but he had never once represented Nottingham Forest to participate in a youth game.

It was not that he was ineligible, but rather he had only been building on his foundation for this entire time. He had only started training with his team mates two months ago and still lacks coordination with them.

He did get a chance to feature in intra-team games from time to time, but he was nothing more than an accessory for the most part. He would play the game and get substituted after a while.

Regardless of how well he might have played in those games, his performances would never be taken into account by the youth team managers.

It was quite cumbersome to be an 'accessory'. No one truly believed that an amateur chosen from a talent show would really make it through the year and ultimately get to stay at Nottingham Forest Football Club.

Thus, it did not matter how hard Chen Jian tried. Nobody other than Greenwood paid much attention to him, because Greenwood knew that assistant manager Dunn was exceptionally concerned about him. As someone who had worked with Dunn in the youth team before, he was willing to help Dunn keep an eye on his Chinese compatriot.

Since this was a game that would allow the first team managers to scout players who could be brought over to the reserve team, he believed that he naturally did not have a part to play since he would just be taking up a spot in the team. Therefore, he was quite surprised to hear Greenwood call his name.

Chen Jian might have been surprised, but he did not act as though he had just been given a once in a lifetime chance. All he did was to smile and nod his head as an acknowledgement, before he calmly went to change his clothes. He then ran out of the dressing room that was situated at the second floor and ran out onto the training grounds and into the rain.

As he passed by the side of the field, he saw Greenwood conversing with three men under black umbrellas. He was only able to make out the men's features from under the umbrellas after he had run past them, and that was when he recognized who each of them were.

One of them was the Chinese assistant manager Dunn, whom he was the most familiar with. In his eyes, Dunn was a man who was always gentle and busy. He was already the assistant manager in a team like Nottingham Forest despite the fact that he had yet to turn 30. It was quite the feat.

Seeing him fills Chen Jian with strength. It did not matter that Dunn was a manager and he was a player. Dunn was his top role model on his journey to achieve his dreams.

The tall man standing next to Dunn, who did not speak much and was wearing a black shirt and a frown on his face was the king of this football team, their boss Tony Twain.

Nottingham Forest has had a bad run of results recently, and they were also struggling to qualify for the knockout stages of the Champions League.

After enjoying success for three years, the pressure riding on Twain now must be immense...

Behind the two of them was a man who kept looking about. He was the other assistant manager Kerslake. It has been said that he became the manager of the youth team after Twain made his departure. Manager Greenwood even worked under him at one point.

He has since been promoted to become the first team's assistant manager... But people at the top also have their troubles. The team is performing badly, so his days as an assistant manager must not be good either.

Chen Jian ran past all three managers and started to do warm-ups with his other team mates under the guidance of their youth team managers.

The temperature was low in the winter and it was also raining. This made it even more vital for him to do his warm-ups properly. It would be a complete shame if he were to get injured during match like this.

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Dunn discussed the recent state of the youth team's training with Greenwood so as to obtain first-hand information and advice. After their discussion, all four of them turned around to watch the young players as they went about with their warm-ups on the field.

Out of them, only the youth team manager Greenwood was wearing a knitted hat to conceal his deeply cherished, almost bald head. The other three all had umbrellas over their heads.

Greenwood's entire body had become drenched in the rain as a result, but he did not care about such trifles. He was not a first team manager who had come to observe the players. He was in charge of this place. He was not in the position to be leisurely strolling around holding onto an umbrella. There were

times where he had to get on the pitch to demonstrate a particular movement, or get in a player's face when the player made a mistake.

Given his role, was it appropriate for him to be holding onto an umbrella?

He squinted his eyes in an attempt to keep the raindrops from sliding into his eyes. He waved his hands towards the field and shouted, "That's enough. Let's begin!"

Players from both teams stood in the field as they were told. The practice match kicked off the moment the referee-cum-manager blew the whistle.

Twain was fully aware that it would be almost impossible to find a player from the youth team whom he could bring into the first team. Nonetheless, he had to appear in this training ground to motivate the youths and to give them the peace of mind to remain in Wilford.

The truth was that the ones who were taking everything into consideration and doing the scouting were his two assistant managers. He was just there to find players who interest him.

It was particularly demanding for players to play in the fairly heavy rain and their ball handling techniques were constantly put to the test. Players slipping and falling on all fours became a frequent sight on the pitch.

Greenwood felt a little awkward. Twain had been too random with his visit. Or rather, he had chosen a poor time to come and visit. It was impossible for the players to demonstrate their best form and abilities in a match like this.

The first team managers would surely lose their patience and simply condemn the youths for their performances if all they could watch were several minutes of 'football in the mud'.

Greenwood wanted to let the first team managers see the abilities of the youth team players, so he had specially transferred their two gifted players John Bostock and Nicolás Millán from the U16 team to the U18 team to let them participate in today's practice match. Both players have yet to reach 18 years of age, but they have been training in the U17 team all this while.

They were players that Twain wanted to pay close attention to as well. He was interested in seeing how far the two geniuses had progressed after a year of training in the Forest team.

What he saw from them was satisfactory. The two of them might still be young, but they were able to perform exceptionally well against numerous team mates who were older than them by a year or two. They were each the core player for both the red and yellow teams respectively. Neither looked estranged from the team and they were both able to coordinate well with their team mates. It was clear that Greenwood had often utilized them in the U18 matches.

The poor condition of the training grounds and the bad weather did impact their performances slightly, but Twain was confident that if they were to keep developing as they were now, he would have to bring both of them into the first team in the coming season, so as to provide them with more chances and a better stage to shine on.

After confirming that both players' performances were up to his standards, Twain began scanning through the pitch aimlessly to search for another player to focus on. The way he looked around could easily lead others to the misperception that he was being inattentive.

Besides the sounds of players' shouts, the sounds of water splashing as the players ran, tackled and shot for goal and the sounds of the whistle going off repeatedly, there were no other sounds that could be picked up on the field.

Everyone was focused on the match and on leaving the best impression possible in front of Tony Twain.

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Chen Jian was well aware that he was nothing more than an 'accessory' in today's match once again, but once the match started, he invested his whole mind and body into the game. He ran around and tackled the ball industriously, and tried his hardest to fortify the defense. They were tasks that were delegated to him by Manager Greenwood as the right back for his team.

He was not trying hard so as to catch the eye of the first team managers. He was trying hard because it was a match.

However, to Greenwood, Chen Jian's performance was terrible. The pitch was slippery due to the rain and as a result, there was no power behind some of his movements. Chen Jian also looked extremely clumsy due to the fact that he was wearing soccer boots with short cleats that provided very poor traction as he ran. The right flank that he defended was always easily broken through by the opposition, which led to the red team primarily attacking down the right as the match progressed.

John Bostock also found the Chinese to be someone he could take advantage of, so he started to bring the ball towards the right as well.

The yellow team had just gotten a chance to counterattack, but the red team pushed them back and made it difficult for them to move forward. The young players became irritated at the fact that they were being held back and started acting out a little. Their actions allowed Bostock to earn a penalty. He stepped up to the plate to take the penalty and the red team led by 1-0 afterwards.

Greenwood, who was standing by the pitch, applauded and praised Bostock loudly after he scored the penalty. His gestures upset the yellow team who was trailing by a goal.

Discord began to brew in the yellow team. The goal from earlier had not been scored because the red team had broken through from Chen Jian's side, but the looks that everyone sent Chen Jian were looks of animosity. Everyone got along well with him usually, but that was only because he did not pose a threat to them. However, if they were to become unable to perform as a result of Chen Jian's terrible performance, then he would surely be resented by his team mates. Who would treat a guy who was only going to stay in the team for a year kindly at such a time?

If you make a mistake, the ones with a better temper would only send a look your way, but the ones who were more hot-headed would most likely charge at you directly and admonish you.

Chen Jian stood at the right flank. He was not an idiot. He knew the meaning behind the gazes.

He tried his best to not let himself think about the looks of contempt from his team mates, and continued carrying out his duties at the right flank.

He continued to defend and continued to be the target for the opposition's attacks. He felt like an idiot every time he fell to the ground after losing his balance and climbed back up.

The words 'at wits' end' could be used to describe the predicament that he found himself in. He could not stop an entire team's attacks all by himself. He lacked support from his team mates. His poor performance from before had caused all his team mates to lose trust in him.

Raise a hand and ask for support?

Nobody would listen to him anyway.

He felt aggrieved, but could only keep on dealing with the red team's relentless breakthroughs by himself.

One-on-one, one-on-two, one-on-three...

The red team's dogged efforts finally paid off in the end. Bostock easily ran past Chen Jian, who was already about to drop dead by then. He passed the ball into the middle and provided an assist to his team mate who went on to score the second goal.

The yellow team was behind by two goals.

Unlike the previous time when they had conceded a goal however, no one looked at Chen Jian this time round. They were completely treating him like air. A center back playing for his team ran up and stood beside him, clearly unhappy about the shoddy defending he did previously and wanted to take over the role as right back himself.

Chen Jian looked at his team mate, then turned his head to look at his managers at the side. He wanted to see if this arrangement had been done at Manager Greenwood's wishes. He did not see Manager Greenwood make any special gesture, but what he saw was Tony Twain looking around, seemingly distracted.

Twain's actions angered Chen Jian instantly.

Regardless of how he performed, the ball had been rolling around him this entire time. Even if his managers were not pleased with his performance, they would at the very least stare at him and shake their heads, or they would look away when they realized that he was looking their way.

What's up with that?

All he was doing was to lift his head and look around. Was he watching the match or was he watching the forest in the distance?

So he was actually nothing more than a bundle of air to all these British!

Look at how he was covered in mud from top-down now. If he were to fall to the ground, he would just blend right in and nobody would look surprised if they were to accidentally step over him.

Chen Jian looked down at his miserable state and felt humiliation for the first time.

That's right, I'm from a country whose abilities in football trails behind many other countries. I'm just a celebrity who came from a commercial talent show. I know my place and I never expected any of you to revere me and treat me like a star. But at the very least...You all should at the very least look my way! I am a grown-up who's alive and stands at 183 cm tall and weighs 70 kg.

He was broken through time and time again. He faced numerous opponents all by himself. He was toyed with. He ran. He jumped. He fell....

He was a human who could move!

Are you foreigners all so f\*cking blind that you can't see me?

At that moment, Chen Jian suddenly desperately wanted Greenwood to run up to him angrily and scold the living daylights out of him. Because that meant that he was being paid attention to. It meant that he still belonged on the pitch.

I don't expect praise from you lot anymore. I only wish that you don't ignore my presence, that you don't pretend I'm not here, and that you don't close an eye to all the effort that I've put in!

Why have I worked so hard for every single day? What did I hope to gain by working hard in a foreign land all by myself?

All of you are chasing after your dreams, and I'm the same!

I don't want to get promoted to the first team of Nottingham Forest. I just want to become a true professional footballer!

It has been seven months. Other than being praised once before, all I have gotten were criticisms and rebukes. None of my hard work was rewarded or acknowledged in any way.

No matter how badly I performed, it will just be that I worked hard to all of you right? What right does any of you have to so easily deny my every drop of sweat and hard work that I have put in over the seven months?

Chen Jian saw that Dunn, who was standing next to Twain, was looking at him. Dunn then sighed and lowered his eyes, clearly disappointed at his performance. That was good.

A fire set off within Chen Jian and he galvanized into action instantly. He walked to the side of the pitch and walked in front of Greenwood. He then said in English to the youth team manager, "Please substitute me, Manager Greenwood."

Everyone was shocked at his words. Greenwood did not understand what compelled Chen Jian to do this. He was never one who stirred trouble and was never one who got angry at anyone else. The Chen from China who had always kept a smile on his face was standing before him with his lips tightly pressed together, his eyes wide open and brimming with fury.

Greenwood had yet to answer him, but Chen Jian had already gone past him and was headed for the dressing room.

"Stop right there." Someone pulled him back.



Chen Jian turned around to stare at the person who was pulling him. The person was none other than the 'distracted' Tony Twain who was looking all around just now.

Tony Twain was not wearing his trademark sunglasses due to the dark skies overhead, and it allowed Chen Jian to see the manager's eyes clearly.

They were a little cold.

"Who allowed you to leave?" He asked coldly.

"Tony..." Dunn was a little surprised and called out to him.

Chen Jian did not respond to Twain's question. He had no idea why the first team manager would hold onto him suddenly and not let him go.

"I'm asking again, who allowed you to leave?" Twain repeated his question in a cold voice as he stared straight ahead at Chen Jian. His gaze felt colder than his voice.

Greenwood could not bear to let Chen Jian get berated by the King of Nottingham Forest. He was well aware what sort of person Tony Twain was. His acrimonious words could make even the toughest of kids cry. He wanted to help Chen Jian out, and was about to wave his hands and call for the substitute player from the side when he was stopped by Twain's outstretched umbrella.

"Get back on the pitch. The match has not ended and the manager has not substituted you." Twain said with a dark face as he enunciated his every word slowly.

Chen Jian still did not understand why the first team manager would suddenly butt his nose into the affairs of someone like him who was only training in Forest's youth team.

He turned his gaze towards Greenwood. To him, only the youth team manager Greenwood had the right to give him instructions.

Greenwood forced a smile and waved his hands. "Get back onto the pitch, Chen. The match has yet to end. I haven't substituted you yet."

Twain released his grip. Chen Jian glanced at Twain before walking back onto the pitch with a face that suggested he did not feel like relenting.

The players stared quizzically at Chen Jian who made his way back onto the pitch. They still did not understand what had just happened.

The center-back who had wanted to take over the role as right-back was asked to return to his initial position by Greenwood.

The match restarted after that.

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Chen Jian's performance after the match restarted was as terrible as ever. To be precise, it was even more terrible than before. His emotions had undoubtedly taken a hit after the events from earlier. How could someone like him whose mental state was in turmoil play a good match?

Twain had finally stopped looking around after the incident. He was only staring at Chen Jian under his black umbrella.

Chen Jian was broken through by the opponents' two-versus-one pass when he tried to defend against Bostock. He lost his balance as he turned around and he slipped. He fell onto the ground on both knees. Both his hands were stuck in the mud. He kept his head low and never got back onto his feet.

He felt extremely dejected. He was looked down on and chided by others because he was incapable. Because he performed terribly.

Reality was so cruel.

He realized that his dream was starting to distance itself from him. Maybe it was never waiting for him at the end of his journey in the first place. Everything was just his fantasy. He was just pulling the wool over his own eyes.

He suddenly felt like bawling his eyes out. He wanted to cry for the dream that he has kept in the depths of his heart and chased after relentlessly for all these years. He wanted to cry for the 10 years of time that he had lost by being passionate about soccer. He wanted to cry at his stupidity for choosing to give up his studies to come to Britain to pursue his dream.

What was hard work without talent? How could an amateur football fan dream of becoming a professional footballer? Stop kidding yourself! If it was that easy to succeed, there won't be so many people relying on those imaginary things to fulfil their desires!

So what if you are resilient? So what if you never give up till the end? Your attitude can determine everything?

Bullsh\*t!

It has been seven months. I worked so hard for seven months and what have I gotten in return?

Endless criticisms and looks of distrust and displeasure from those around him!

Forget it, let's go back. Leave behind all your unrealistic thoughts. Study hard and make progress every day.

He clenched both his hands and grabbed onto two fistfuls of mud tightly.

But... But... I really can't accept this...

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Dunn was discreetly shaking his head at Chen Jian's terrible performance when he saw a wobbling umbrella by his feet.

He then heard Kerslake's shout of surprise.

"Tony!"

When he raised his head, he saw Tony Twain's back as he took big strides onto the pitch. The umbrella he was holding onto had been tossed onto the floor. It was flipped over and had already collected a little rainwater.

The referee-cum-manager saw Tony Twain walk onto the pitch. He blew his whistle to suspend the game in a hurry before running towards Twain. All the players got out of Twain's way as he advanced. They all wanted to hide from their dark-faced boss.

Twain trudged forward under the rain. Puddles of muddied water splashed and dirtied his pants as he walked.

He made his way straight towards Chen Jian who was still crouching in the muddied water. Chen Jian did not notice his approach. He continued to kneel there with his head lowered.

A voice rang out above his head.

"Get up."

Chen Jian did not respond.

"Get up!"

Chen Jian raised his head at the second shout and stared blankly at Tony Twain who stood before him.

Twain knotted his brows together at the sight of a dazed face that was devoid of life and radiance. He quite preferred the face that turned to glare at him earlier than the one he was seeing before him now.

He bent over and grabbed Chen Jian's collar with both hands abruptly. Then, he pushed Chen Jian over onto his back with force.

"I told you to f\*cking get up! What are you doing kneeling here? Are you trying to do a kowtow to someone? Me? I don't give a damn about a loser asking for mercy!" Twain opened his mouth and began to give Chen Jian a dressing-down after he had pushed him over onto the ground.

Chen Jian was dumbfounded. Tony Twain was speaking fluent Chinese.

Twain spoke in Chinese once during the very first time the two had met, but ever since then, he had insisted on using English to converse with him, even if it was easier for him to speak in Chinese than to translate his words.

Chen Jian understood that the reason why Tony Twain did what he did was to remind him that they were in Britain, and to tell him not to take it easy knowing that he had a manager who could speak in Chinese with him. It was important for him to learn to speak in English so that he could truly get used to life and football here.

But now, Twain was using Chinese that could not sound any more fluent and any more authentic to castigate him.

"Look at you and the miserable, sh\*tty state you are in! You really look like you are a patch of f\*cking mud by lying there. Utter mud! Grass can't grow where you are lying now! What are you doing? What are you doing staring at me? Are you upset? If you are then get on your feet and punch me!"

Twain noticed that there were two areas on Chen Jian's mud-stained face that were clean. They extended from the corners of his eyes all the way to the wing of his nose.

"What's this? Did you cry? Tsk tsk. Look at you! All you did was play a bad game of football, and you are all snot and tears. Do you think this is some kindergarten's football match?"

Dunn was shocked to hear Twain mock and swear at Chen Jian in Chinese.

It was not just him. Everyone by the side of the field were stunned to see Tony Twain lose his temper, even if they could not understand whatever was coming out of Twain's mouth.

"What's wrong, Mr. Mud? Did you decide to cry your way back home since you just played one bad game? Are you going to go back to China to continue your studies earnestly and find a job upon graduation, and then be satisfied playing occasional amateur soccer once you are lugging a big belly about? Then when you are old you will brag to your grandson about how his grandpa once trained for a year in the youth team of Nottingham Forest, who was the European Champion! What if your grandson asks you what happened after a year? What are you going to say? You are going to tell him, 'Ah, your grandpa performed badly in a match and gave up trying and then came back to China crying... What do you think your dear grandson will say to you?'"

Twain pointed at Chen Jian who stared at him dazedly and chided, adding a pause between his every word, "You. Are. A. Wimp! A. Cowardly. Scaredy. Cat! You are never going to be able to raise your head before your grandson till the day you die, just like a man who can't get it up. Get this right, you are an impotent man, not a man who has premature ejaculation, because you are a man who can't f\*cking raise your head so you don't even have the right to have premature ejaculation!"

Dunn thought that Twain's admonitions were all over the place. What exactly was he scolding about...

Why was Twain so infuriated? All Chen Jian did was to perform slightly badly. How did that rub him off the wrong way? Didn't he not rate Chen Jian's performance all this while?

"So? Have you finally realized that you have been daydreaming all along after experiencing for yourself how cruel reality can be? Let me tell you. This isn't even f\*cking professional football! This is just a f\*cking youth game! And an intra-team one to boot! Did you think that all dreams were easily achievable? Did you think that as long as you got fired up like some stupid main character then your dreams will just strip itself and let you f\*ck it? You need to f\*cking pay even if the other person is a prostitute! There's no such thing as a free lunch in this world! That little hard work of yours means nothing! It means nothing!" Twain pointed at the youth players all around him, who stood there completely stunned.

"How many of them here have not been training for 10 years? How many of them do you think can be successful on the professional stage and make their appearances in Nottingham Forest's first team? Who do you think you are? You are not the protagonist of some novel or comic. You are not a genius. You are just an ordinary man! Hundreds of people who are just like you die every second in this world!"

"One year!" Twain held up his middle finger. "You f\*cking want to become a professional footballer after one year? How can such a good thing exist in this world! You can talk about your dreams all you want, but let's see you try! Do you remember what I asked you when you first came here? You said you

will never give up... Look at your cowardly state right now. Do you have the face to say those same words to me again right now? Do you dare to say, 'I will not give up, sir' to me again?"

The rain got heavier. It had drenched Twain from top to toe, but he did not feel anything about it. All he did was to stare at Chen Jian with eyes that looked as though fire could erupt from them.

"Very well. I want to congratulate you for not being that stupid little kid who only knew how to superficially chase after his dreams anymore. You have matured, you now know that reality is cruel! You have decided to beg for mercy in the face of the cruel reality. I won't stop you if you want to walk away now. The match is not over, but your match is, boy! You have lost and have been disqualified! When you are ready to go back to China crying, don't forget to give me a call. I will buy the plane tickets for you and will even give you a complimentary packet of tissue."

Twain finally caught a breath after going on for so long and he inhaled deeply.

Following that, he bent over once again and looked squarely at Chen Jian. His face was right before Chen Jian's.

"Before you leave, I have one last question to ask you. Tell me, what's your name, you failure."

Seeing that Chen Jian did not respond to him, he repeated his question. "Answer me. What's your name, you failure!"

Chen Jian answered, with trembling lips, "Chen... Chen Jian." It was unclear if the trembling was because he was frightened, or if it was due to the cold weather.

"Very good! Chen Jian, Chen Jian... Your mother gave birth to you, your father gave you this name. Chen's your surname, and which Chinese character is it for your 'Jian'? It's not the character that can be found in the word that means 'rape', not the one that is found in the word that means 'indistinguishable' and not the one that is used for the word that means 'get a bargain'. It is also not the character that is found in the word that means 'depraved' or the one that is used in the word that means 'blade'. The Chinese character that is used in your name 'Jian' can be found in the words that mean 'strong' and 'resolute'! Remember this well. This is your name, Chen Jian!"

After finishing those words, Twain straightened his back and turned to leave. He no longer cared about the youth team's practice match, and did not bother seeing what expression Chen Jian had on him while lying in a pool of muddied water. He did not stop to pick up his black umbrella off the floor. He walked straight out of the field and out the door.

Dunn saw Twain walk straight out of the training grounds. He quickly apologized to Greenwood before chasing after Twain while holding an umbrella over his head.

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Everyone on the pitch was stupefied. This included Chen Jian. He remained in the same posture after he was pushed over by Twain. He looked spaced out and could not believe the scene that had just unfolded before him earlier.

He felt like giving up, then he suddenly got chastised by the first team manager... And it went on for several minutes?

What... What exactly happened?

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Dunn shared half of his umbrella with Twain and sheltered him from the rain above his head. He had left in a hurry earlier and had forgotten to pick up the umbrella that Twain had tossed to the ground.

“Why?” Dunn asked.

“I can’t bear to see these scaredy-cats being all cowardly before me. If you want to cry then do it while hiding in your home! Doing it here is indecent!” Twain’s voice as he spoke still sounded stiff. He was truly angry.

“Just because of this?”

“And also to relieve some pent up stress after what happened these few days.” Twain turned around to look at Dunn. “It’s true. Scold people when you have time on your hands. It’s good for your health.”

Dunn smiled. “And?”

Twain was not in a hurry to answer Dunn’s question. He fumbled around his coat pocket for a pack of cigarettes and was about to light one when he realized, to his annoyance, that the entire pack of cigarettes was wet from the rain and none of the cigarettes could be lit up. He crushed the entire pack of cigarettes with his hands and discarded it into a rubbish bin by the road. He patted his other pockets and gave up once he realized that he had run out of cigarettes.

“Honestly, it was nothing. He has a dream, and has already gotten so far. But the reality was also right in front of him. All I told him was that there were two roads before him right now. The rest is up to him. As for what he chooses, that has nothing to do with me. But, if he really wants to go, I will definitely pay for his airline tickets and the packet of tissues like I said I will. I have never gone back on my word.”

“But there is clearly only one road.” Dunn did not agree with Twain’s opinion. “The dreams have reached a dead end.”

Twain smiled. “No, to me, there are actually two roads. One road leads to reality,” he pointed at Wilford Lane. It was a straight stretch of road and one could see the end.

“The other leads to dreams and it is a...” He pointed at the wall surrounding the training grounds and continued, “... Dead end.”

“What difference is there?”

“To some people there might not be a difference, but to some others, there is a difference. You are right, the dreams have reached a dead end. Some people will choose to stop, then turn around and walk back towards the road to reality. What about the others? They will choose to push at the wall!” He pushed at the wall near him.

“It might be more tiring than to walk back to the road that leads to reality, and it might also be more challenging... And there is also a risk that they will get hit on the head by bricks that fall over. But how can dreams be so easily attained? It’s very easy to give in to destiny or reality. But you have to risk your life... If you want to push down a wall.”

Twain stood by the road and mumbled under his breath as he stared at the wall.

Dunn stood beside him, and held up an umbrella to shelter Twain from the rain.

### **Chapter 705: Accidentally Caught a Cold**

The next day, Greenwood was slightly surprised to see Chen Jian run up to him with a ball at his feet at North Wilford.

“Chen, what are you doing?”

“I’m practising my first touch, Manager Greenwood.” Chen Jian kicked the ball upwards using his heel and began to juggle it with his feet as he stopped to talk with Greenwood.

Greenwood smiled at the sight of Chen Jian practising. “Still, you didn’t need to practise while you make your way here, right?”

Chen Jian shook his head. “I can’t think of what else I can do besides this. I don’t have much time left, Manager Greenwood. I have barely five months left. I must...” he paused for a moment, “The training time is limited. So I am making use of the time when I come here and when I go home to practise my first touch.”

Greenwood looked at the boy from China. In truth, he did not understand why Twain got so angry at Chen Jian yesterday. However, it was not a question that he needed answers for. The incident only made him increasingly interested in Chen Jian.

“All right. You might have added extra practice items for yourself, but don’t expect your training regime later to become lesser as a result.”

Chen Jian nodded. “That’d be for the best, Manager Greenwood.” He wanted to bid farewell to Greenwood as he finished his words, but was stopped.

“Chen, tell me. What are your aspirations? To be more exact, why did you come here to go through a year of practice?”

“To become a professional footballer.” Chen Jian replied without hesitation.

“Where do you want to play in?”

Chen Jian hesitated this time round. “If... I can play in Britain or Europe, that’d be for the best. Even if I can’t, I’d still like to be able to play in other countries.”

“What about your home country?”

Chen Jian froze.

“I...” He did not know how to answer the question. He was a Chinese and was undoubtedly patriotic. Nonetheless, he was well aware of the state of football in China and the standard of play in their so-called ‘professional leagues’, namely the Chinese Super League and the China League One.

In the end, he responded with apparent conviction, "I will not return to China to play professional football."

Greenwood nodded his head to signal that he understood. He knows a little about the standard of football in China due to the presence of Dunn, Sun Jihai and the 'China Hand' [1] Tony Twain in the team. The environment in China was certainly not ideal for someone who desires to play professional football.

Greenwood patted Chen Jian on the shoulder. "Continue working hard. You still have five more months."

Chen Jian was working hard to push down the wall that was in his way.

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After he had given Chen Jian a dressing-down in the rain, Twain woke up to a headache the following morning. However, he did not pay much attention to it. He ate his breakfast and rested for a bit before heading out to Wilford to work.

Twain had only stood by the side of the training grounds for a short while when he felt like he could not hold on any longer. He did not sneeze, did not have a runny nose, and was not coughing either. All he had was a headache and it felt as though something wanted to rush out from his temple. It felt swollen and painful and it affected his thought process. He also felt debilitated. The muscles on his back were sore, and he felt chilly.

He turned around, walked to the back and leaned against the pillar that propped up the sunshade, wanting to rest for a bit.

Kerslake had a whistle to his mouth as he directed the players' training on the pitch, while Dunn was making preparations for the next training item off the pitch.

Dunn realized that Twain was not standing at the spot he last saw him at. Finding it odd, he turned his head and looked behind.

He saw Twain leaning weakly against the pillar with his head shaking left and right gently.

Seeing that, Dunn immediately tossed aside everything that he was doing and scurried over to Twain's side.

"What's wrong?"

Twain saw that it was Dunn and continued to shake his head. "My head just hurts a little."

"Go and see the doctor."

"It's a waste of time." Twain continued to shake his head.

"Then I'd get Fleming to check on you."

"He's a physiotherapist, not a doctor who can treat everything." Twain found the suggestion to be ridiculous.



Dunn ignored his remark. He turned around and walked towards Fleming who was examining Beckham's ankle.

"Gary, Tony's not feeling too good. Can you take a look at him?"

Both Fleming and Beckham raised their heads in unison and looked into the distance at Twain. They saw Twain shaking his head with all his might.

Fleming pressed hard on Beckham's left ankle. Beckham gasped and grimaced in pain.

"Apply ice over it after you are done with your training. This part here needs rest. Don't treat it too roughly, David."

"What's wrong?" Fleming's very first question was the same as Dunn's.

"Headache." Twain's response was the same as well.

Fleming reached his hand out and felt Twain's forehead.

Twain drew back his neck at his cold touch, and the back of his head collided against the pillar. He winced in pain from the impact.

"Your hand is really cold."

Fleming ignored his comment. He continued to press his hand against Twain's forehead and asked, "What other symptoms do you have besides the headache?"

Twain thought about it for a moment and said, "Muscle pain. Feeling weak all over. And I feel a little chilly..."

"You have caught a cold, you idiot." Fleming shook his head. "I heard you coolly tossed aside your umbrella yesterday, scolded a Chinese boy for several minutes in the rain and got drenched from top to toe. Did you take a bath after going home?"

Twain shook his head. "I had already bathed the night before..."

"Poor bachelor," muttered Fleming, "Go back home and rest. Eat some medicine for your fever. If they don't work you'd have to go get an injection at the hospital."

"Don't make things sound so serious. Saying things like go to the hospital..." Twain did not want to leave. There were lots of things going on with the team right now. How could he leave?

"If you don't leave, I can't guarantee that you won't spread your cold to others here." Fleming knew what was on Twain's mind, so he brought up the reason that would force Twain into compliance.

Twain watched as both Dunn and Fleming started to retreat away from him and threw up both his hands. "All right, all right. I'm going back. I'll leave things here to you, Dunn. Help me tell Kerslake and the rest. I won't be going over, or Gary's going to call me a contagion..."

Fleming was skilled at chasing Twain away. "Hurry up and go. The earlier you leave, the safer we feel!"

Twain glared at him, then turned around and walked out of the premises.

Everyone on the pitch had already taken notice of what was happening by the side of the pitch when Fleming and Dunn both walked towards Twain, and they were quite surprised to see Twain turn to leave.

Dunn walked over and whispered a few words into Kerslake's ear. The assistant manager smiled, then clapped his hands and announced to the players, "There's nothing for you to see. Your boss got drenched in the rain yesterday and is suffering from a headache and a fever today. To prevent him from spreading his cold to us, Fleming has already chased him back home."

One of the players laughed softly.

"Don't laugh. The temperature has been dropping very quickly recently, and the rain that goes on all day long can make people feel as though their bodies have gone moldy. So all of you have to be extra careful these few days. Make sure to take a hot bath every day after training and change into a set of clean clothes daily. I don't wish to see our results being affected due to these tiny cold viruses! All right, get back to practice, don't let your bodies cool down!"

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Twain returned home, ate a bunch of cold and fever medicine, added two layers of blankets on his bed, took a hot bath, wrapped himself up in three layers of blankets, laid on the bed and left everything else to fate.

His body kept on shivering as he laid in bed. Looks like his cold this time round is pretty bad...

All I did was to get drenched in a bit of rain... Do I really deserve this?

He felt like he was down on luck. He thought to himself, when have I ever taken medicine for my colds, and when have I ever felt this terrible for being down with a cold? When have I not gotten better just by toughing it out?

Looks like this body of mine is really getting old with every day, every minute and every second of my life.

That reminds me, others who transmigrate get to be reborn, but I get 10 years of life taken away from me instead. Twain felt upset at this.

However, there was no point getting angry over it. You gain some and you lose some. What he has gained so far is unimaginable fame, honor and wealth, and he even has a chance to gain a peculiar love relationship.

It was necessary for him to use 10 years of his life in exchange for all the things he has and is about to gain. After all, how can one wish to have their dreams come true but give nothing in return in this world?

His biggest worry right now was whether he would be fit to direct the team in the EFL Cup's game a day later.

Because their opponent for that match is Arsenal...

What's more...

He found himself unable to lay in bed and rest in peace the moment he thought about the situation that the team is facing currently.

The team had just won narrowly against the weak Stoke City by 1-0 in the last league game. The players' conditions were still unstable. The team may be ranked third in the league currently, but the gap in points between them and the first and second-ranked teams was slowly widening.

Chelsea and Liverpool have both racked up 29 points.

Arsenal won their last match and has 23 points. They are very close behind Nottingham Forest who has 24 points.

Manchester United might have lost to Arsenal and are ranked fifth in the league with 21 points, but they are one game behind the other teams at the top of the league.

He cannot let the two teams ahead of him widen the gap too much before the winter transfer window commences, and he also cannot allow Arsenal and Manchester United the opportunity to overtake them.

He would have to see if there are any free agents whom they can obtain without paying a cent, and if there are any really, really cheap players that they can buy in January to strengthen the team and help them get through the winter.

His painfully swollen brain kept on mulling over all sorts of problems.

The medicinal effects started to kick in after a while, which made Twain feel drowsy, and he slowly drifted off to sleep.

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Twain managed to triumph over his cold virus before the EFL Cup game. His body still felt a little lethargic, and he would cough intermittently when he spoke with too much force, but other than those, he was fine, which is why he did not care about the persisting issues that he was still suffering from.

Based on his past experiences, many of his cold symptoms lasted for quite a while before he was able to make a complete recovery. He was going to stop taking medicine and let his body recuperate by itself slowly.

He is so busy on a daily basis. If not for the fact that his symptoms were so glaring this time round, he would definitely not have remembered to eat his medicine on time.

Nottingham Forest, who played a team of players from the reserve and the youth team, lost 1-3 to Arsenal at the Emirates Stadium, who also similarly played a team comprising of their youth players.

It was the third consecutive year that Nottingham Forest have failed to make it past the third round of the EFL Cup.

The final score for the match demonstrated the difference in abilities between the youth players for both teams.

Arsenal's youth players looked monstrous and dazzling. Carlos Vela scored two goals by himself, and Jack Wilshere slotted another one in before full-time, thoroughly securing a victory for Arsenal with his goal.

The only goal for Nottingham Forest came from Şahin, and his goal helped to rescue Forest from total humiliation as the away team.

He felt that the time was right for Şahin to play in the first team matches. The team lacks players currently, and Şahin's arrival will help to lessen the burden on van der Vaart. The Dutch is certainly trusted and valued in the team, but the pressure placed on him has also multiplied as a result.

Van der Vaart does not have players who can replace him, when even George Wood gets to have players who can replace him. Twain cannot keep getting Ribéry to run down the middle so as to share the burden that is placed on van der Vaart.

Twain was full of praise for Wenger's young geniuses when he shook hands with Wenger after the match. He could not conceal his urge to salivate at the talent that was displayed by Arsenal's youth players.

Wenger pretended not to notice Twain's urges. "No one would have believed half a year ago that he would be able to perform as he had just now. Tony, you are great at turning junk into gold."

Twain forced a smile. "I was forced to do that."

Indeed, he had been forced to do whatever he did. Why would he only rely on Şahin if Forest had a youth system that was as developed as Arsenal's, or came close to how Arsenal have produced numerous talented youths ceaselessly over the years, and how it is known throughout the world as a football club that valued talented youths?

Wenger spent 10 years to get Arsenal to where they are today. He had only spent six. He still has a long way to go as a manager...

"Hey, Professor. Is Wilshere available for loan?"

Twain had set his eyes on Arsenal's talented youth players. Since the club did not have money to purchase players, then it should be acceptable for him to get some of these young players on loan to help the team through this difficult time.

Wenger shook his head. "He's a part of my first team's plans, Tony."

Twain muttered the word 'scrooge' in his heart. How is Wilshere a part of his first team's plans? All Wenger plans to do is to let Wilshere play a few games in the EFL Cup, and then let him play during 'garbage time' in the league games.

At the end of the day, Wenger just did not want to let a talented player be on loan at a rival's team, and did not want to bolster the strength of their rivals.

He decided to stop talking about a potential loan.

"May you progress far in the EFL Cup."

“Thank you.”

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Twain became the focus of the British media once again after losing the EFL Cup.

This time however, it was not because of something that happened during the match. Twain had not provoked any of the Arsenal fans by the pitch, had not gotten in the face of the fourth official, and had not questioned the fairness of the referee in the post-match press conference.

He had peacefully accepted the loss, since winning the EFL Cup was never in his plans.

The reason he became the focus was not because of the match, but rather the publication of a new book...

The book written by Carl Spicer from The Daily Telegraph had finally been published after six months of preparations.

Due to how Spicer would actively speak about the book in his interviews prior to the publication of the book, everyone already knew about the frighteningly long title of the book before it was even released.

“What Kind Of Man Is He: Uncovering The Mysterious Halo Around Tony Twain”

A blurry back view of a person was printed over the red book cover. The white letters of the title took up all of the space on the cover and was printed over both the red background and the black, blurry image of a person’s back view.

During a television talk show, Spicer held up the book and told the audience with a solemn face,

“He is a ‘phenomenon’.”

It was a quote from the title page of his book.

Twain had observed the author for a while after he found out that he was the one who conducted that utterly foolish survey. He realized that many of the views that were against him were all written by this man.

He was actually a resolute ‘Anti-Twain’.

If that is the case, is his reason for writing the book so that he can earn money while writing about his anti-Twain comments?

The book was sold out the moment it was released. The publisher had not anticipated that a book analysing Twain would be so highly sought-after. Even people who were not fans of Nottingham Forest or football bought the book. The book had to be hastily sent for reprint due to the overwhelming popularity.

Carl Spicer proudly announced in his own column that the book delved into a very serious ‘social issue’, and that it was not one of those boring biographies that discussed the private lives of celebrities. He also denied that he wrote the book to satirize Twain, calling it a form of performance art instead.

There was not a single good thing that was written about Twain in the book. The book was full of comments that derided him, questioned him, and scolded him in a roundabout way.

However, such a book still became a bestseller in Britain. It had barely been published for a week and was already ranked third on Britain's Bestseller List for the month of November, and it looked like it could continue to climb higher up the list.

A book with the name 'Tony Twain' printed on it became overwhelmingly popular, but Twain earned nothing from it.

He felt like he was ripped off.

### **Chapter 706: Carl Spicer's Hardcore Fan**

When Carl Spicer's book was on sale, Twain received a signed copy. On the book, Spicer wrote, "To my closest friend Tony Twain, wishing you all the best." The inscription wrote, "Your life-long partner, Carl Spicer".

When Spicer had gifted the book to Twain, he brought this matter up to the media. He was showing off about this incident on his own column. "I really want to see his reaction upon receiving the book... Haha!"

The relationship between Carl Spicer and Twain had always been tricky. In the past, the Twain's hatred for the media had always been generic and not specific to a person. Now, Spicer had bravely stood out and raised a flag indicating "Twain being bad". How could Twain stomach such a brazen provocation? 80% of the people thought it would be uncharacteristic of Twain to not respond to this. Spicer thought so, too. He was well-prepared to deal with Twain's revenge. For example, having a verbal warfare on the column, using Nottingham Forest's recent unstable results to criticize Twain... Since the start of the provocation, he was starting to be impatient for Twain's inevitable revenge.

Since there was still half the day left, Twain drove around the whole of Nottingham to all the bookstores and newsstands, maxing out his credit cards to buy all the copies of <The mysterious aura of Tony Twain—the man he is> in Nottingham.

Since the book was essentially mindless gossip, it was not selling well in Nottingham. Other than a portion of Notts County's fans who might buy the book, almost all of Nottingham Forest fans did not care about it at all.

As such, Twain bought so many copies until he could not store any more in his jeep. In the end, he had to tell the bookstores, "Pack the books the exact way they were sent to you, and wait for me to call a truck to haul these."

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BBC aired a programme preview on television. In the new episode of Match of the Day this coming Sunday, they were going to invite the popular soccer journalist, Carl Spicer, as a guest and discuss with him about his thoughts on <The mysterious aura of Tony Twain—the man he is> , interesting episodes during the creative process, and his personal opinions on Tony Twain as a person.

<Match of the Day> producer Lineker predicted that this week's programme would attract widespread attention, and sure enough, two days before the recording of the programme, he received a bill of lading.

"What is this?" Gary Lineker looked confused as he held onto the bill. The bill was attached with a letter which wrote, "For my dear friend Carl Spicer". The inscription made Lineker laughed. It was signed "Tony Twain".

The letter opened with a greeting for Lineker, thanking him for speaking on behalf of Nottingham Forest several times. At the end he raised a small request —

"I want to thank someone very important who spent close to half a year writing a book to log my achievements. To express my respect for him and my gratitude for his efforts, I have a presumptuous request: while interviewing this book's author, please ask the respected Carl Spicer to sign my copies. All of the books have to be signed; I want to gift the book to a few of my friends so I hope he can sign them. Of course, I'm not asking too much from him with this small request, right?"

Following that, Lineker ran out of the BBC building while holding onto the bill, and he almost fell when he reached the car park.

What was it that he saw? Four trucks, weighing five tons each, were parked neatly. The containers were covered by canvas and secured tightly by the rope. The truck drivers who were huddled together and smoking saw Lineker. One of them frantically ran over and shook hands with him. "Gary Lineker. I'm a fan!"

Lineker did not care about him, he was only blankly staring at the four trucks. "This is..."

The four truck drivers gave each other a look, and broke out into laughter. The leader said. "Heh, we delivered props for your programme on Tony Twain's request."

"Props?"

The driver pulled Lineker to the back of one of the trucks and pulled up a corner of the canvas. "The three trucks behind contains the same thing."

A chill ran up Lineker's spine when he saw what was in the trucks.

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Adrian Chiles was a well-known BBC talk host. He was the host of Match of the Day: Sunday Edition, but this episode where they interviewed Carl Spicer was also his job, and it was a lot better compared to Lineker's.

Carl Spicer was absolutely delighted during the show. He answered several questions, and both parties seemed to be able to talk a lot. Even though he was criticizing Tony Twain on the show, this host did not comment much. On the contrary, he incited Spicer to say more groundbreaking words. They spoke about the motive behind the production of this book; Spicer thought researching on Tony Twain had a lot of purpose for the society.

"... on a road interview, those who picked 'I hate Tony Twain, he is a b\*stard' made up 93% of the whole group, and those who picked 'I like this guy, he is not bad' were only a pitiful 7%. Worth mentioning was

that no one chose the option of 'Tony Twain? Who is that?' Adrian, did you know why Twain would think our research was lame?" Once they got to badmouthing Twain, Carl Spicer became overjoyed. He liked to see a strong figure being beaten up in front of him as it gave him a sense of achievement.

In this episode, there were many topics similar to this one. Before the end of the program, the program director had already received several calls protesting from Nottingham. The only position opinion towards Twain was the sentence of the title, "He is a phenomenon."

Towards the end of the programme, Adrian Chiles told Carl Spicer cryptically, "Since the start of the programme, the bottom of the screen was constantly showing that we would give you a mysterious gift at the end."

"I know, you brought it up to me." Spicer nodded.

"We can guarantee to the audience that this is definitely a mysterious gift, and that we did not discuss this with you before the filming. This is a live broadcast."

Spicer nodded continuously to confirm that Adrian Chiles indeed did not arrange anything with him beforehand. He smiled, as if he were also looking forward to it.

Lineker and his colleagues hid in the production room, sheepishly laughing while preparing for the good show. Mark Hansen leisurely said at the side, "This programme is becoming more and more like an entertainment show..."

Alan Lawrenson turned his head towards his colleague with the sharp mouth and grinned. "Isn't this great? We need to relax from time to time."

Back to the live broadcast. Adrian Chiles smiled like he knew a prank was about to unfold. The lights shone on his face, lightening up his face till it seemed vibrant.

"Here's the thing, Carl. You have this extremely loyal fan. He keeps up with your various columns in the newspaper and is very supportive of your book. It sounds quite extreme, right?"

Carl Spicer acted surprised, but he actually loved it inside. "What? There is really such a reader? I didn't know about this."

Adrian Chiles nodded profusely. "Yes, there is. To show his support and love, he used his own money to buy a lot of copies of this book." He waved a copy of <The mysterious aura of Tony Twain—the man he is> in his hand. "He has a small request. He hopes that you can sign on every copy of his book for his collection."

This boosted Carl Spicer's ego so much he might even have forgotten what his surname was. He then waved. "No problem, I am never stingy with satisfying other people's requests."

Adrian Chiles snapped his fingers and a worker from the back of the live broadcast room pushed a trolley that was specially for goods out onto the room. Loaded onto it was a stack of neatly arranged books, almost one meter tall.

"Ha!" Carl Spicer laughed a little, "he bought all of these? Should I say if he is hardcore or crazy?"



He reached into his pocket to fish for a pen, but as he reached in, his hand stopped. Just now, he had been grinning so widely he could not close his mouth, but now he was so frightened that his jaw dropped.

Following behind the first trolley came a second which had another load of books neatly stacked into a metre-high column. Then came the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh... There were 10 exact same trolleys were placed right in front of the stunned Carl Spicer. The front of the recording studio was completely blocked.

The screen panned from the top to the bottom. Adrian Chiles applauded, then he took one book from the first trolley and placed in front of Carl Spicer, flipping to the title page, "You must satisfy this small request of your hardcore fan, Spicer!" Upon finishing, he turned and carried another 10 books over, placing them beside Carl's hands. Spicer knew he had been had, but there was nothing he could do but reluctantly pick up his pen and start signing his big name on the first book.

At the same time, the screen started rolling the credits — Special thanks to Tony Twain providing 11038 copies of <The mysterious aura of Tony Twain—the man he is>

After came the normal namelist of the productive crew.

Under the credits, Adrian Chiles said something that devastated Carl Spicer. "Sign slowly, Carl. This is not even 1% of all the books, there are still four more full trucks downstairs! Your reader is really both hardcore and crazy, but I don't envy you one bit..."

The pen slipped out of Spicer's hand, and he was not unaware of it at all. He only raised his head and gasped while looking at the host Adrian Chiles who was holding in his laughter. At the same time, in the productive room, Lineker and his crew could no longer hold it in and broke down into laughter.

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"This is the most exciting episode of <Match of the Day>! Hahaha!" Before the start of training, Nottingham Forest coaches were still excitedly discussing yesterday's television programme. At the start when Adrian Chiles signaled the crew to bring out the books, everyone had been as confused as Carl Spicer, not knowing what had happened. Only when the credits with the special thanks started rolling then they started breaking into laughter in front of their televisions.

"Tony played this beautifully! Did you all see the expression on Spicer's face? It was simply too exciting!"

What happened in Wilford was not just an epitome. After that day, discussions about how Tony Twain made Carl Spicer admit defeat spread like a wildfire. It was phenomenal; as the story spread, Twain sending Spicer four trucks of books eventually exaggerated into him sending ten trucks.

Carl Spicer also admitted on his own column that he was utterly defeated by Tony Twain this time. However, he would not give up on this promising career in going against Twain. "Despite being played by him, he still insisted that going against Twain was an interesting matter. Undeniably, people do look forward to what other ridiculous tricks Twain could possibly resort to."

Towards this, Twain's private evaluation was only a word — cheap. But Twain did feel that everyone started to get busy near the end of the year, including those reporters, because news relating to him suddenly skyrocketed.

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Once, Shania's news had been on a film magazine.

These magazines were booked for Shania, because of her interest in movies. Since it was her hobby, she would naturally want to learn more about movies. However, she went to the United States afterwards, and there was still a year before the subscription expired, thus Twain just took over and occasionally flipped through it to see if he could find any new good movies. Soccer coaches were human, too, so they needed to rest and relax as well; forgetting about all his worries and just letting his eyes flit about the pages of the magazine was naturally a good way to let loose. He was not some film critic who needed to search their hearts and use their brains to uncover a hidden meaning while watching the movies.

He discovered Shania's whereabouts in the latest magazine issue. She appeared with Tom Cruise on the cover page. This issue introduced the new movie produced by Tom Cruise, <Florida's Summer>. In the movie, Shania acted as a beautiful lady who participated in the stream party who had a one-line dialogue with the main character. Afterwards, she had another appearance without dialogue but a 5 minute close-up. This portion did not have screen time and had almost no bearing on the plot, so one could say her role was just for the sake of appearing with the other main characters on the cover page of the magazine. It was evident Cruise had other intentions for partnering up with this new friend of his.

There was a paragraph in the magazine allocated specifically for an interview with Shania. The paragraph was not long, it was almost as important as the other main characters'.

Actually, all this attention Shania was getting could be because of her relationship with Cruise, but it was also because of the reputation she had already been building up in the modelling industry. Before she started acting, Judy Shania Jordana had been famous in the global modelling and fashion world. She had been a global supermodel at a young age and a spokesperson wanted for many big international brands. It was natural for people to pay attention to such a personality when she started acting.

Shania's interview were no different from others. Other than being asked for the issues in her work, she was also asked for the difference between catwalking and acting in a movie, if there were any conflicts, and what she thought of the cast. Shania was a smart girl. When reporters asked for a male Hollywood star she liked, she immediately blurted out, "Tom Cruise", with a vibrant smile. The reporter continued to ask, "Is this because of the intimate relationship you two shared?" Shania shook her head, "It is not that. I have rewatched every one of his movies several times, I do like him a lot."

Twain pouted upon seeing "I do like him a lot."

Then he thought back to when Shania told him, "Uncle Tony, I love you."

Liking and loving are two different emotions, but Shania also started with liking Uncle Tony which then developed into love too right?

He continued reading. In the final portion of the interview, the reporter started to pry into Shania's private life, asking, "From what the public knows, you have no other boyfriends save from the few rumours that have spread in the past. Since you're still single, could you reveal your ideal type?"

"Yes, my standards are very special."

"Exactly how special is it?"

“I like... older men.”

The reporter was a little shocked. He wrote on the back of his handbook that he was indeed shocked by what Shania said, where he only responded after a long while. Thinking that revealing those emotions was ill-mannered, but he still emphasized, “It is ... very unique.”

Shania jokingly disregarded the emotions of the reporter.

Twain stared in shock at this final conversation. Uncle Tony counted as an old guy right? What was she trying to do, revealing her preferences so brazenly? While he was still stunned, he received a call from Shania.

“Uncle Tony! I’m going to come visit you the night after tomorrow. Help me tidy up the room ok?”

“Ah... the room has always been tidy, you can come anytime...”

“Ok, thank you Uncle Tony! See you on the day after tomorrow!”

Hanging up, Twain then reacted. Why was she suddenly coming back to England suddenly? There were no other words exchanged, saved for that redundant greeting. Was it possible that she still felt a little distant after that incident at the airport?

Indeed, he said he owed her an answer, but it was almost December now and this answer was not given to her yet. On top of that, the results of the team, the financial crisis and Chen Jian’s issue had made him so busy that he could not think it through properly sufficient times.

All of a sudden, they were to meet so soon. When that time came, how could he face Shania? What if she asked him for that answer he owed her? What should he tell her then? What a pain. On and off the field, there were issues giving him a headache.

### **Chapter 707: High Technological Inflatable Doll**

The ultimate rule of the natural world was as follows: no matter what humanity desired, the Earth would still rotate everyday and orbiting around the sun. Hence, despite Twain’s headache, Shania would still be here.

“How did you find the time to come over?” Twain drove her from London back to the home in Nottingham, a broad grin stretched across his face.

“To promote the movie in London.” Twain set her luggage down while she looked around downstairs. “It’s just one day, then I’m going to Italy after.”

In the absence of a woman, the house had become messy again; a bachelor’s life was just too tragic. In the past, she had a job too, but she would regularly clean the place when she had time off. After all, no woman would want to live in a dumpster. She wrinkled her brow as she took a deep breath, as if she had smelled something foul.

Her focus was everywhere, but she saw the few film magazines on the table. She was on the cover. Her face relaxed and the corners of her mouth started to rise.

Footsteps sounded from the top of the staircase. Once Twain came down, he immediately saw Shania reading the magazines but he did not sit down. He was quite embarrassed too, because the sofa was indeed too messy. He did not want the big star to just be lounging on a dirty and messy sofa.

"I'm really sorry. I wanted to tidy up yesterday, but in the end I was so busy I became drowsy," Twain apologised as he frantically tidied up the room.

Shania did not walk forward to help, she only stood at her spot to watch Uncle Tony being busy. "Are you very busy?"

"Yes, I am." Twain carried a pile of books and walked in front of the bookcase, slotting them back into their respective places according to their index.

"Did you miss me, Uncle Tony?"

Before Twain's birthday, everytime Shania asked this, Twain would giggle and reply like Feng Gong, "I missed you so much I could die!"

But now...

He hesitated, but continued slotting the books. "Yes, I missed you."

"Liar," Shania pouted. "You sound so insincere. You didn't call or text, You've forgotten about our chat, haven't you?"

Twain felt his heart tighten. What was meant to happen truly was meant to be. He stood rooted to the ground, unable to decide whether the book in hand should be placed back on the shelf.

"I think we're drifting, Uncle Tony."

"You're in America, I'm in England." Twain threw out an excuse clumsily.

"No, since that incident, I've felt like that. Are you angry at me?"

"No, why would I..."

"You think I'm too capricious right? My dad used to reprimand me like this frequently, saying I was too playful as a girl, making things tough for them. I know I was being unreasonable. You have your life, you are you, and I am me. However..., nevermind, I should stop talking about this. I only came back to see you, Uncle Tony. Don't look so startled, alright? The more polite you try to be, the more it feels like you're trying to distance yourself from me."

Twain turned to look at Shania who was behind him, smiling. "Silly girl, I was afraid you'd scold me for being so careless when I lived alone. Look at this, my house is too messy."

As long as Shania did not bring up that matter, he could relax. He was too afraid Shania would ask him directly, "I love you, do you love me?"

If it came to that, he would not know what to answer. Twain could not reject her bluntly. There was no reason why, he just could not do it. He did not hate Shania, but did this type of "like" equal to "love"? He still did not know. What exactly was love? He was older than Shania by a whole 22 years, and this gap was hindering him from understanding his true feelings inside him. Developing feelings for a girl who

was younger than him his junior, was this “love” or just a platonic “liking”? Even if it was “love”, was it “love” between young couples, or “love” from an older person to a younger one?

Physical age gap aside, he was also emotionally older than Shania by a whole 14 years. He knew this world had no lack of old couples. Yang Zhenning even married a young lady who had a master’s degree. Though they had intense quarrels back in China, both of them still continued to live together. However, that was them. It is a whole new feeling putting it on himself, no matter how small the matter, it was still an issue to one’s self.

Thinking of this problem gave him have a headache. He was not an expert when it came to women. Though he was very thoughtful and confident, he was still relatively dull when it came to understanding women. He did not know what Shania thought of this; he just wanted to clear up how exactly he should think about this.

This girl, whose beauty was comparable to an angel’s, had a lot of potential in Hollywood, a superstar with large fame in both the modelling and the fashion world. They had already known each other for five years. When they were alone together, he had never thought of her the way the public did. In his eyes, Shania was still a person who had been brave enough to leave her house when she had not even turned 14, someone who went to the faraway England, a mischievous girl who met him on the streets then. Twain liked a girl like this, he definitely did, but did he love her??

“What do you want to eat tonight, Shania?” Twain decided to temporarily forget about the unspoken words and troubles that were plaguing his mind, because it was late and it was time for dinner. Although he was a bachelor, he was still somewhat confident in his culinary skills. At the end of the day, he was still a man from Sichuan; how could he not know how to make a few common dishes? However, Shania turned and vivaciously ran into the kitchen first.

“You clear the living room first, alright? Let me make dinner. I learnt a few new dishes in the States!” Right after entering the kitchen, she peeked out, staring at the helpless Twain, “You’re not allowed to say it’s bad!”

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After dinner, Twain went into the kitchen to do the dishes and clean the dining table. Shania went upstairs to fetch her Chinchilla doll, and sat on the sofa with the legs crossed as she watched the television. Just like any ordinary night, she did not pester Twain to go shopping, to nightclubs, or play around.

Twain finished the dishes and dried his hands as he stood at the entrance to the kitchen. As he looked at Shania who was sitting on the couch, a sort of misperception started to flesh out in his head. This was just like a regular family. No socialising, no flashing lights. The time after diner was for a family to enjoy in peace.

“I didn’t think you’d be able to make it. You coming actually makes me really happy.” Twain sat beside Shania and said softly, “Besides, your cooking skills are getting better.”

Shania beamed. “I’ll take that as the truth!”

Twain opened his arms, his face innocent and sincere, "I only speak the truth. I'm the most honest person; I have never lied."

Shania covered her mouth as she chuckled. As her laughter died down, she tilted her head back and leaned on Twain's shoulders. Twain tensed for a moment before relaxing. He did not struggle, letting her rest her head on his shoulder.

"Uncle Tony, do you hate me?"

"No, why would you ask this?"

"Hehe, then that's great..." She adjusted her posture, like a cat curling into itself, and snuggled into Twain. Twain's hands hovered for a while before he gently settled them onto Shania's shoulders.

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On the dawn of the second day, while the sky was still pitch black, Shania hurriedly rushed back to London to participate in the promotional activities for the movie. It was Mr Fascal who fetched her; Twain had not even been out of bed yet.

After he got up, he discovered a warm breakfast coupled with a paper slip. "Remember you still owe me an answer, Uncle Tony."

Beckham had already applied for leave yesterday in order to participate in this event. At the promotional activities in England, they had to get the most popular superstar. On account of their friendship, Twain agreed. He was not interested in these types of activities. Shania had even invited him to go together with her yesterday night but he rejected her. Beckham was a soccer player so missing some training was nothing much, but he was the head coach, so how could he leave his position?

In the blink of an eye, it was already December. The league schedule started to clutter, so he had to give a 120% worth of attention to deal with various issues.

After finishing breakfast Shania prepared for him, he carefully kept the slip in his wallet and walked out of the house. Just as he stepped out of the house...

"Snap!"

A blur of white flashed before his eyes and it almost knocked him to the ground. After he could see properly again, all he saw was a somewhat familiar car driving down to the end of the street, drifting out of his sight.

"F\*ck..." he cursed. "What the h\*ll is going on?"

Just as Dunn opened the door to walk out, he heard what Twain said, and looked at him filled with confusion. "What happened?"

"How would I know?" Twain answered sourly.

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Soon, Twain and Dull both knew what happened. Other than the both of them, everyone on the Wilform training ground, the whole of Nottingham, and the whole of England knew what happened.

The promotion team for Shania and Tom Cruise just left, and an explosive news just appeared on a star gossip tabloid, which the newspapers quickly spread to even more media companies.

One of the main characters was undoubtedly Tony Twain who had been quite popular recently and even had someone writing a book to evaluate him. As for the other main character, everyone was definitely not unfamiliar with her. It was Judy Shania Jordana, an international supermodel who officially recently left London. Everyone was definitely not strangers to the content of the news — the huge reveal of the relationship between Shania and Tony Twain!

It was the same news publishers and reporters behind this, but the main reason that this was completely different from the previous time, and why it attracted the attention of mass media so rapidly was because, this time, Lisa Aria had gotten hold of the most critical evidence which convinced the media and the audience that everything she said was true.

Photographs. The four photographs were displayed on the top of the title, and they were sequenced much like a four-panel comic.

In the first one, Twain and Shania were returning home and both were at the door. He was carrying the luggage while searching for the keys while Shania was beside him and holding his arm, seemingly intimate.

The second was taken when both were entering the house. Shania turned to close the door, the angle rendering her face visible. Even with the shades, her tall built and other distinct facial features made it hard to believe this tall girl was not the world-renowned model Judy Shania Jordana.

One look at the third picture made it obvious it was taken at dawn, under the dim light when the streetlights were still bright. Shania was walking out of Twain's house without her shades, and everyone could properly recognise her face.

The fourth was of her getting into a car and driving away.

These four suggestive pictures clearly explained all the happenings. From the timestamp on the bottom right corner of the pictures, these four pictures were taken over the course of the whole night. Hence, when Lisa Aria had vowed in her articles saying, "After Shania entered Tony Twain's housing, she was staying over there for a whole night.", there were no doubts to this.

But what did staying over entail?

In the past, though everyone knew Twain and Shania had a good relationship, both only admitted they were friends, so no one thought too much about it. On top of that, the age gap was so big that no one would assume they were a couple.

Even if staying over at Twain's house was not a big deal to the both of them, it was definitely not the first time. But to the media and the audience this was big news, because they did not know about this before the expose!

Lisa Aria staged a beautiful come back. In the past, people had mocked her for being a small reporter from the village who wanted to become famous so desperately she would make up lies and fabricate news. Now, no one was saying that. Seeing how these four pictures were personally taken by her, the public opinion was an uproar.

In the past, any conjectures the media had about Tony Twain's personal life were just that. There were even rumours that he was gay. However, no one would have thought a soccer coach who get together with a supermodel...

This rumour should have been one involving a soccer superstar instead. Professional soccer has developed for more than a hundred years, and there was an uncountable number of soccer players who had become superstars due to their high income and dated various superstar girls, living a life of luxury. But has anyone ever heard of a soccer coach getting together with a hot female superstar? Of all the great head coaches who had achieved numerous stellar results and left behind great legacies,, how many of them had rumours during their careers? There was not even one.

Tony Twain did it! No matter what measures he took, or what sweet nothings he said, it was a pixie who was 22 years younger than him, and a dream girl in the eyes of several fans' who followed this middle-aged uncle into his house and stayed throughout the whole night. The dreams of male teenager shattered. The hearts of middle-aged women were also shattered.

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Just seeing her name was enough to anger Twain. He called her and the first thing he said was, "Are you deliberately going against me, Lisa Aria?!"

"All I wanted to do was to prove I'm not a liar, Mr Tony Twain." Aria was not intimidated by him.

"How did you know Shania was coming to my place?" Twain could not be bothered to care about these details recorded by the other party. He immediately asked the question he wanted to know most.

"They were going to be promoting the movie here in London, so I knew she would definitely swing by Nottingham."

"You're actually quite smart, aren't you?" Twain grinded his teeth. Aria analysed something so trivial and spun it into a paragraph.

"Because I'm a woman, I understand the mind of a woman too, Mr Twain."

"But you don't understand me!" Twain roared, and then hung up.

In reality, when he was called this time, his tone was not as firm as it was the last time. He knew about Shania's intentions; if she saw this article, she might not be mad and might even feel happy about this. The one who was mad was him. This was as good as pushing him down the road of no return.

Thinking back how the article hinted on Shania not leaving throughout the night and staying over at his own house for an entire night. Regarding about what they did, it was only them both who knew...

Twain thought the audience definitely thought that he hooked up with Shania. But the problem was nothing happened between Shania and him. Although Shania confessed to him, and he did not agree to accepting these feelings, but their relationships still continued as per the past. How could he tell others about this relationship and the story behind it? Who would understand him?

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“Since the reporter, Lisa Aria, caught Twain and Judy Shania Judana returning to his house together, where Shania did not leave throughout the night, Tony Twain stood in front of the media and explained this incident for the first time today.”

It cut to the vibrant outdoors.. Tony Twain’s house entrance was already swarming with reporters from various places; they were all very concerned with the personal life of this famous tempered coach who was famous in the Premier League. Everyone wanted to hear him personally admitting his relationship with Shania. Once he admitted it, this forgotten relationship would be officially established.

Twain stood in front of this bunch of excited reporters, looking at the microphones which were almost stuffed into his mouth, and coughed. The live scene quietened immediately.

“I have nothing much to say, Lisa Aria’s every word can be believed. Shania and I are friends, but our relationship is not what you all are thinking of.” Twain was still stubborn as a mule.

“But it’s clear from her picture that you and Shania went home together...” Some of the reporters were unhappy, rebutting him with evidence, clearly wanting Twain to clear up everything.

Lisa Aria was also in the crowd. She raised her hand to attract the attention of everyone. “I can guarantee, on my dignity, all of these photographs are real and are definitely not fabricated or edited via Photoshop!”

Twain stared at this woman who was trying to making a promise to everyone. His peaceful and quiet life was totally destroyed by this woman. He thought that it was definitely due to his act of bribing her initially which hurt this woman who had strong self-esteem, so all of this is for her revenge!

This was too much. This was worse than when Twain gave Carl Spicer ten thousand plus books to sign on live scene!

“Your photograph is definitely not fake, Ms Lisa Aria.” Twain stared at her coldly and said, “But that is not Judy Shania Jordana. That is just my newly ordered inflatable doll.”

Once the word was out, everyone was shocked! Even Lisa Aria did not think that Twain would actually used this type of means to cover up his relationship with Shania. She screamed, “I clearly saw her walked in and out, how can the inflatable doll walk by its own!

Twain smiled, “Like I said, it’s the latest model. What’s so impressive about it walking? It can cook, too. With the press of a button, it will cook me anything I want. Ah, the wonders of technology”

Suddenly, everyone thought they were too stupid...

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The entrances of Twain’s house and the Wilform training grounds were filled with reporters who rushed from various places around the world. When they huddled to discuss, they buzzed like a group of flies.

After Twain’s speech on “inflatable doll”, the people who were surrounding the Wilford training grounds retreated first, only those who did not give up continued to camp at Twain’s housing entrance. They wanted to mimic Lisa Aria’s one-night stakeout in the car during the winter’s harsh winds, seeing if they could dig out some more breaking news.

Twain did not entertain them, he would wave to greet them when he entered and left the house, shouting in a Chinese accent, “Hi my fellow partners! You all worked hard!” Nowadays he would allow them to shrink their necks and snivels during the winter winds to camp for their “exclusive groundbreaking gossips”.

As long as his heart was at peace, these reporters blocking the entrance to his house posed no problem to him. In fact, he even wanted to thank them. Now that there were so many more reporters here, the security at Branford Garden street was a lot better and there were virtually no thieves or pickpockets.

Twain made a text on his column to remind the Nottingham police to quickly present a medal to these heroes who persevered in protecting the citizens’ property openly complimented them. After this move, the reporters who had no idea of how long they had to wait beat a hasty retreat.

In another face-off against the media, Tony Twain was clearly victorious. But his “backyard” started a little fire — he received a short protest from Shania:

“I am not an inflatable doll who knows how to cook, Uncle Tony! If you speak carelessly again, be careful I fly back to hit you!”

### **Chapter 708: A Narrow Escape**

Twain soon could not think about the stage at which his relationship with Shania should be. Once again, he was plagued by the many complicated and compressed competition schedule as well as the undulating and inconsistent condition of the team.

On November 15th, Nottingham Forest traveled north to the cold Newcastle and lost 1:2 to the opponent in the away game.

On November 24th, the Forest team returned to its home ground and struggled to beat Everton by 3:2 after a bitter battle. They finally managed to hold to the third place in the league tournament.

The Forest team’s results were not too bad purely based on the points table alone. Other than their point difference being a little far away from the top two teams, they were still in the top tier in any case.

But only those people, who were really familiar with Nottingham Forest, knew how dangerous the Forest team’s situation was now. Every game won was always full of twists and turns. It was scary while trying to win. Furthermore, the specter of injury was like a nightmare which could not be dispelled and always followed the Forest team’s onward march, ready to pounce and bite hard when the Forest team was tired.

Tony Twain himself had the illusion that he was walking a tightrope.

He did not know when the team would collapse if they were to persist continuing. From last summer until the end of this year, his players did not have any time to rest and their physical strength had reached the stage of collapse. How were they going to survive the cold winter? He had no idea at all.

They achieved victories by the skin of their teeth. If they slightly loosened the grip, they might fall like a house of cards. But the constant taut nerves might cause them to collapse earlier ...

“... I’m awestricken by Tony Twain’s approach to coaching and also admire the Nottingham Forest team’s fighting spirit and will to win. They reversed West Ham United and Manchester City to win, but lost to Liverpool at the last minute, and then overtook Everton to win... Tony Twain proudly declared after the game against Everton that his team was the only one in the world which could turn the tide against their opponents. But I think he’s just seeking to impress by exaggerating his abilities—which manager would want his team to win every game with such a thrilling reversal? I bet Tony Twain is eager for his team to take a two-goal lead at the start of every game, and then win by a comfortable margin...”

The pundits on the television station analyzed the current situation the Forest team was experiencing. Although Twain always said that his team was in a good shape and everything was normal to the outside world, plus the team’s results were not bad, any fool could see that he was putting up a front.

Any discerning person could see the team’s crisis at the first glance. Twain’s actions were nothing more than doing what his personality dictated.

Indeed, the crisis was not the kind of crisis in which they had been hit by repeated defeats in a row, and continuous decline in the points ranking. However, that kind of situation was likely to be the future for Nottingham Forest. Now the team was walking a tightrope, in case of a misstep, what was underneath them could really be the abyss...

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Twain brought an exhausted team and flew to Minsk, Belarus, to face the local team. It was a crucial battle over whether Nottingham Forest could finally make it out of the group stage. If they did not break through the group stage as the defending champion, then he and his team could really become the laughingstock of the entire world.

No matter how bad the team’s situation was now, Twain would never allow that to happen to him.

Therefore, he deployed the strongest squad he could send. Pepe, who had a minor injury, was also in the starting lineup as it was important to ensure that the team’s defense was worry-free.

By the end of November, Belarus had turned white all over the country. Pure white snow had covered the Eastern European country. When the team went to adapt to the venue, only to find that they simply could not adapt to the venue ahead of time—a thick layer of snow covered the pitch and the snowplows were plowing snow in the stadium.

Until the day before yesterday, it was still snowing here, and it was a blizzard. Although it stopped yesterday, the thick layer of snow was still a shocking sight. Twain frowned as he looked at the field in front of him.

FC BATE Borisov’s Dinamo stadium in Minsk did not have the same artificial turf field as Russia. If the geothermal and drainage system were not good enough, tomorrow’s game would be a mud pool ...

The players huddled around their necks and looked at the pitch at a loss. Could this kind of venue really allow them to play their best?

During the pre-match preparations, Twain also knew that the game would be tough. The tactics were repeated more than once. Now there was no need for talk. He just told the players that no matter what

difficulties they encountered; the game must be won. He said, "I don't care how you do it, even if you put the ball into the goal with your hand, as long as the referee does not see it!"

Now the Champions League was not just about his face. After the financial crisis affected the Forest team, the Champions League tournament also directly involved economic benefits— UEFA bonus was awarded for winning games. The more games they played, the more bonuses they received. The share in the final television broadcast fee was higher. The Forest team's financial losses would be huge if they were eliminated early in the group stage.

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Thankfully, there was no snow on the day of the game. Although dark clouds loomed over the city, the snow that Twain was most worried about did not descend upon them. The lights at the Dinamo Stadium were kept on till at night. The sky was calm and still.

The snow plowed yesterday was piled around the pitch, hemming in the green field in layers.

Twain was a little relieved.

At the start of the game, Borisov used a long shot that brushed out of the goal to warn the visiting team, which was intent on scoring. They were not pushovers that could easily be overpowered.

In the frigid weather, the Borisov players were able to move freely and with vigor. They played better than they did at Nottingham Forest's home game. On the other hand, the Nottingham Forest players, with the exception of Arshavin, a Russian player, were a little unaccustomed to the weather here. It was so cold that even if they had warmed up for twenty minutes before the game, their bodies seemed to be stiff.

The ground was slippery. With a little force, the footage of a complete mess would emerge. Clearly there were opportunities to shoot, but as the supporting foot slipped, the players would directly shoot the football into the stands behind the goal. They could barely struck the football, but the shots were weak.

The fifty-five thousand fans who came to cheer on the home team filled the stadium's stands to the brim. Their enthusiasm even melted the snow beneath the stands. There were also some valiant fans who were topless and rode on the grandstand railings to wave the scarves in their hands, sing and clapped loudly as they shouted for Borisov. The Borisov players' every move would elicit thunderous cheers. Furthermore, whenever the Forest players took the ball on the sidelines or kicked a corner kick, white snowballs would fall from the air and struck beside the players, splitting into numerous spatters. If the snowball was packed with a lighter, cell phone, coins or something else... it would be unthinkable if it hit someone.

The fans and team brought a double pressure to the Forest team, which could not enter the game form and its attack appeared to be messy.

The first half was basically Borisov besieging and bombing the Forest team's half of the field indiscriminately. The Forest team only had the strength to ward off the attacks but was powerless to retaliate.

But in the end they managed to keep it to a tie after much difficulty and did not lose the game yet.

In the second half, Borisov began to withdraw while the Forest team began to fight back, with both sides deadlocked near the midfield.

In the seventieth minute, van der Vaart was inattentive and fell to the ground when he picked up the ball in the front field because the ground was too slippery. The football was given directly to the Borisov player next to him. How could Borisov let go of such a big gift? They immediately organized a counterattack and rushed into the Forest team's penalty area after a series of quick passes. With a two-versus-one pass in front of the goal, they tricked van der Sar and easily pushed the ball into the empty goal.

The Dinamo stadium immediately erupted into thunderous cheers, vibrating and making everything groan in the stadium, as if the sky was about to collapse.

Looking at the dazzling white light in front of his eyes and listening to the roar in his ears, Twain only felt his chest tightened, as if a needle was stuck in it. He gritted his teeth and stood still.

The Borisov people reveled, while the Nottingham Forest players were dejected. Faced with such a weather, such an opponent, and such an away trip ... they were somewhat powerless.

Just as everyone was their wits' end, they heard Twain's roar from the sidelines, "What did I say? We must win! We must win! I will absolutely not accept anything less than victory! Absolutely not! I don't care what you do... Damn it!"

He suddenly turned around and summoned Žigić, "Five minutes!" He opened up five fingers on his left hand and said, "You only have five minutes to warm up. I want you to immediately come back after your warmup. Just go!" He pushed the big man.

Žigić stumbled and ran to warm up. Five minutes later, he stood in front of Twain again.

"We're going to change tactics. The ground coordination and breakthroughs from the two wings obviously won't work. I don't mind making the game looked uglier. The traditional English style of play is suitable in the face of such a situation. Do you know what to do when you go on?" He stared at Žigić and asked.

The Serbian player performed averagely after scoring one goal against Manchester City. He did not live up to expectations, and his inability to adapt to the pace of the Premier League made many felt like Twain had made an error of judgment again after Grosso. He himself was under a lot of pressure. He was a substitute at Valencia and ended as a substitute again when he came here. He was desperate to be able to prove himself again that he had not passed into oblivion because he was on the bench at Valencia.

He nodded forcefully and said, "Batter them in the penalty area."

"Make good use of your height and jump! Go up and tell them that when we have the ball, pass it to your head. Where you are, that's where the ball goes!"

After he pushed Žigić onto the field, Twain continued to stand on the sidelines. Now that Borisov's temperature at night had dropped below zero, Twain felt a little warm instead. He felt a layer of sweat on his forehead. He was perspiring on his chest and back, and his shirt was drenched. He had to open his black coat and unbutton the buttons on his shirt.

A cold wind flowed straight at his chest, and yet he felt more relaxed and comfortable.

If the team lost the away game to Borisov... Twain dared not even think that such a situation would happen to him. He must not let this come true.

Within minutes of bringing on Žigić, Twain replaced Lennon with Beckham. The situation was obvious. He wanted to use the side passes and headers in the middle to overcome the disadvantages in the field condition and weather.

Having done all this, he was basically out of moves. He had done all that was to be done. What was next? He did his best. Could he leave it up to fate?

Twain looked up at the dark sky.

He suddenly squinted his eyes. A chill passed over his face. This icy feeling spread from his face directly to the bottom of his heart—it was snowing.

After holding out for a day, the snow had finally fallen. The fluttering snow soon filled the air in the city and the sky above the stadium.

Could this be destiny?

Twain only felt the kind of needle-like pain in his heart became increasingly noticeable. He clenched his teeth and stared at the sky. White snowflakes were visible to the naked eye under the light.

In the area next to him came a smattering of cheers, the Borisov players and coaches saw the snow and knew the game was moving towards a situation that becoming advantageous to them. The Borisov's head coach was already plotting how to compete with FC Kyiv Dynamo for the other spot for advancement in the group.

“Nottingham Forest looks like it's going to be in trouble.” The ESPN commentator announced the Forest team's impending doom in a very calm tone, “Once it starts to snow, the team's performance will only be worse. I think their players must be freezing. The ground is completely wet and the drainage system at the Dinamo Stadium is terrible. But the Belarus team clearly doesn't have these troubles. They are totally used to the grounds and playing in the snow is as common as breathing. What does Tony Twain have in mind? Maybe he wishes his team has a home ground that is at an altitude of three kilometers above sea level...”

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“I don't accept failure!” George Wood said to the two full backs while the opponent was slow-going in preparing for a free kick. He had a serious expression as if a fire was burning in his eyes. “All of you go up during the attack. Just leave the back to me!”

“Is it going to be okay?” Rafinha was a little worried. Borisov was strong in its counterattacks.

“We still have more than ten minutes to go. What difference does it make if we concede one goal or ten goals?”

Bale nodded first in reply, “Got it!”

Rafinha followed suit and said, “No problem!”

Borisov’s free kick was slightly above the crossbar, which still drew cheers from the stands.

“Those bastards! The Belarus team is getting the better of us!” Twain was hopping mad and raining curses on the sidelines. He yelled, “Get your spirits up! We’re the damn defending champion! We can’t lose to a team like this! You have to run even if you can’t! If you don’t run now, you may not get a chance to run again in the future!”

He was aware of the players’ physical condition and knew that it was more physically draining to play in a stadium like this in today’s game. However, in the present circumstances, he could only let the players grit their teeth and persist. If they conceded here, the season would be over.

They must advance from the group stage whatever it took!

The Forest team’s full backs began to provide frequent assists, which were stronger than ever. Sometimes Pepe would dribble the ball himself to rush ahead and get involved in the attack. George Wood stood alone in the backfield, waiting for Borisov’s counterattack himself.

Rafinha dribbled the ball ahead and when he saw the opponent wanted to intercept his ball, he hurriedly passed the ball to Beckham. He ran forward, hoping to do a one-two combination with Beckham.

David Beckham did not pass the football back to him. He stood in place and suddenly swung his leg for a shot, ten meters away from the penalty area. It was a diagonal pass at a forty-five-degree angle!

Žigić was entangled with the opposing defenders. When he saw Beckham swung his leg for the diagonal pass, he suddenly charged out, and leapt high after a sprint!

“He’s so tall—GOOOOAL!! Eightieth minute! Nottingham Forest equalized the score!!”

Twain turned and threw a punch at the underside of the awning in the technical area.

The snow was getting heavier, but he no longer cared about such minor details.

“It’s not over yet!” After he vented a little nervousness, he turned back and made threatening gestures toward the field as he shouted to remind the players to continue to work hard.

Žigić also knew the team’s current situation. He did not wildly celebrate his goal. Instead, he picked up the football from inside the net and was surrounded by a group of teammates as he ran back.

“Aerial shots! High passes! Blow open their goal!” Following which in the game, Twain leapt and jumped on the sidelines as if he was deranged. Foul language spewed continuously from his mouth. He was caught in a dead end. Just like he warned the players, if they did not go crazy now, perhaps there would be no chance...

Borisov also had to give up the idea of a home win over the Forest team. They needed to try to play well defensively first. The two center backs were used to keep an eye on Žigić, and Beckham was also given extra attention. Then the Borisov players began to try their best to waste the time in the game.

The slightest touch would send them falling painfully to the ground. In quick succession, they would hold their calves and fall to the ground with cramps. If they kicked the ball from the goal, the ball must be repeatedly placed twice. To throw in an out of bounds ball, they would definitely wait for the full backs to slowly walk up before they launched...

Every time he saw the Borisov players fall to the ground because of an “injury” and the Forest team kicked the football out of bounds on their own due to sportsmanship, Twain’s chest would violently heaved up and down off the field. Fury would rush out and he could immediately explode if a spark were to be lit.

It was not the first time he had witnessed such a “reasonable” use of the rules of the game to delay the game time. But he felt extremely unpleasant to personally experience it... he was so out of sorts that he almost blew up.

One of the Borisov players fell to the ground during a scuffle with the Forest players. Pepe did not see what happened behind him. He intercepted the ball and passed it to George Wood in front of him.

The Borisov player was still holding his wrist and lay motionless on the ground.

The Nottingham Forest players did not see it, but the Borisov players did. In fact, in the final stages of the game, they were basically watching their players at all times other than defending. Whenever someone fell to the ground, a series of hands were raised to signal that they were injured and asked the Forest players to kick the ball out. While the Forest players really carry forward the spirit of sportsmanship and politely kicked the football out.

But this time, when the players raised their arms to ask George Wood to kick the football out and let their player receive treatment, George Wood remained unmoved. He bypassed the opposing players easily, and the Borisov players could not believe what just happened in front of their eyes.

When George Wood bypassed another man, no matter how much the Borisov players on the opposite side gestured, and no matter how many people in the stands booed him, he continued to dribble the ball forward and attack as long as he did not hear the referee stop the game with his whistle.

When he bypassed the second man, the Borisov players finally understood. Nottingham Forest simply did not intend to carry out any sportsmanship this time!

One of the players charged up and wanted to use an aggressive foul to shove Wood along with the ball to force a halt to the game.

Wood did not give the other side a chance to foul. He passed the ball to Bale in the wing, and then jumped up to dodge.

Bale also seemed to hesitate. The Borisov player across from him stepped back to defend while asking him to kick the ball out.

But George Wood yelled, “Keep attacking!”

He sent the football into the penalty area.

The Borisov players were bewildered by the Forest team’s attack. Some of them rushed to face the attack, which simply could not make up an effective defensive protection.



When the football flew toward their goal, no one cared about sportsmanship and how the Forest team acted shamelessly ... the arrow on the bowstring was ready to be fired!

Žigić leapt high again and the two center backs jumped close to him, trying to squash him.

The Serbian player did not shoot his own goal, and he ferried the ball to the unmarked Arshavin behind.

Arshavin did not hold back. He swung his leg to kick right away and the football volleyed into the net!

“Arshavin! Arshavin—Nottingham Forest turns the game around! Now they’re ahead! Although the goal is somewhat controversial, the referee signaled that the goal was valid!”

Twain knelt with both knees on the ground and point two fingers at the sky. He opened his mouth wide and shouted in Mandarin, “If this is Heaven’s Will, then I will defy you wily God!”

The Borisov players angrily blocked the referee and tried to reason. The others came at George Wood in a rage, looking murderous.

The Forest players rushed over before they could celebrate the goal.

“This is so lacking in sportsmanship!” The young Borisov manager, Goncharenko, roared angrily at the fourth official on the sidelines. Sometimes, the fourth official was a pathetic character that the two teams’ coaches would vent at... and the fourth official could only treat it as one ear in and one ear out and not take it to heart.

“This is disgraceful! We want to appeal!” He yelled at the fourth official in broken English.

“Where are you going to appeal, Mr. Goncharenko?” Twain, who had finished giving vent to the sky, had a smirk on his face as he appeared on the other side of the fourth official. He looked at the somewhat hysterical opponent and said, “My players have the right to decide whether to kick the football out of bounds. As long as the referee doesn’t blow the whistle to stop the game and we don’t kick it out, what can you do? The FIFA rules do not state that if the opposing player falls to the ground, the player with the ball must suspend the attack. You won’t win if you appeal to FIFA!”

“You... No sportsmanship!” He pointed to Twain’s nose this time and scolded him.

Twain gave a shrug and said, “At least my players did not deliberately waste the game time. A manager, whose goalkeeper was shown a yellow card for procrastination, is unqualified to say that about me.”

After saying that, he turned around and walked away, letting the poor fourth official continue to suffer the venting from the already thunderous Goncharenko. The UEFA also did not want a team like Borisov, which had no market prospects, to advance to the final sixteen teams in the Champions League.

Nottingham Forest at the top was easier to deal with. Borisov, which played in the Champions League for the first time, was really tender...

The situation on the pitch was a bit chaotic. There was physical contact on both sides and the referee had to show four yellow cards to four players in a row before the situation was brought under control.

George Wood stood at the heart of the struggle. No matter how angry the opposing players were, he just clenched his fists and celebrated the decisive winning goal with his teammates, completely ignoring the other side’s anger.

It was his blatant attitude that infuriated the Borisov players, making them want to punch him.

After the players on both sides squandered the game time, there was really little left. Once the experienced Nottingham Forest team overtook with a goal, it completely defeated Borisov's fighting spirit. They felt ill at ease and were completely unable to concentrate on the game itself. Their minds were full of anger and unwillingness, grievance and regrets ...

How could such a team pose a threat to Nottingham Forest?

The snow was still falling, but no one cared anymore if it would affect the Forest team.

Nottingham Forest had won because the game was over! Tony Twain won!

When the final whistle sounded, Borisov's head coach immediately rushed to the pitch and got hold of the referee to demand him why he did not decisively whistle to suspend the game when his player had fallen to the ground and was injured. But due to his aggressive words, coupled with his pulling actions, he paid the price for his recklessness and youth as a result—he was directly sent off by the referee with a red card!

Twain was not in the mood to watch the young manager's passionate performance. He did not even hug and celebrate with his players who had a narrow escape. He slumped in a chair and took a deep breath. A weight was lifted off his chest, but a heavier weight was hoisted up, hanging above his heart.

A life like a roller coaster was almost the entire trajectory of a professional manager.

Even if it was clamorous around him, he could still clearly hear the rapid throbbing of his heart as if it were echoing in his ears.

The game was over, and he won, but the sound did not slow down because of it. It kept beating at that pace, just like the speed in which Nottingham Forest had suddenly risen in the European continent for the last three seasons.

This was really worrying. He did not know when that taut string would break ...

## **Chapter 709: Eight Months!**

On the flight back to Britain from Belarus, Twain would occasionally recall what happened, scene by scene, at the Dinamo Stadium in Minsk. Then he felt the lingering fears and his heart would beat faster.

By the time he brought on Žigić, he could have guessed how many media outlets would have been sharpening the knives in far-flung England, ready to take the defeated Nottingham Forest apart. If he did lose the game, he did not have to consider the pressure from the club's senior management. Just the domestic public opinion could hang, draw, and quarter him.

Even if he had won the game now, the debate about the game would not stop there. The Belarusian media shouted unjust treatment, lashed out at Nottingham Forest for its lack of sportsmanship and said that Britain did revere fair play (the spirit of fair play), but as a Briton, Tony Twain had no concept of fair play at all. He stole three points from Borisov in the game with an unfair advantage.

Some of the British media also derided that it was a pity Twain had fallen to the point where he had to resort to the strategy of robbing with force to ensure that they advanced out of the group stage.

He could foresee that the pressure shrouding him would not diminish at all with the victory of the game in the near future. He was still in the middle of the maelstrom and was still unlikable.

In addition to thinking about how to deal with the enemies on the pitch, he had to rack his brains to cope with the media.

The immense pressure exhausted him. No matter how loud the noise was on the plane, he just went to sleep the moment he tilted his head and shut his eyes.

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Twain recently felt that his sleep was not restful, and he was in a bad mood every morning when he got up. The moment he opened his eyes and looked at the ceiling, the troubles which he temporarily forgot while sleeping would surface thick and fast, which caused him to suddenly lose all interest in life—there were worries every day on top of more worries. His brows did not have a moment to smooth out at all.

He forgot from where he had heard the phrase “The mood of the day is decided by your mood when you wake up.” At the moment, he felt that this phrase was too appropriate. He was in a bad mood every day when he got up, so he was in a bad mood all day.

During this period, he headed more frequently to the Forest bar, where he downed one drink after another with a cigarette constantly in his hand. Everyone in the bar also knew that Twain had been under a lot of pressure lately and that the team’s results were daunting. Even playing against the weakest opponent in the Champions League group stage was a narrow escape. Carl Spicer continued to attack Twain in his column because he sent him ten thousand books to embarrass him in public. Furthermore, after his relationship with Shania came to light, numerous rumors swirled around him.

As a football manager, the pressure was already greater than it would be for a normal person, on top of so many things out of the football field to bother him. He could not find any other way to relieve his mental stress other than drinking and smoking.

John and the others were unable to help however much they wanted to. No one could help Twain share this kind of pressure.

No...

Actually, there was someone.

The fans in the bar were talking and laughing with drinks in hand. They discussed the latest interesting happenings. Football was not the only topic being talked about here. The fans who often gathered here knew each other well and could talk about anything.

Twain was still sitting alone in the corner, drinking and smoking.

John leaned over and propped his bent elbows on the bar. He looked at Twain in the corner and said to himself, “It’s really hard to see Tony like this. Unfortunately, we can’t help him... Can’t play football and help him win good results; can’t help him deal with the media, can’t help him raise money to buy players in January...”

“It’s hard behind the glitz...” Skinny Bill sighed too.

As one of the best in a new generation of managers, Tony Twain had a high-profile and many admirers and followers. What the people, who liked or hated him, saw was nothing more than Twain’s arrogance and domineering appearance plus his bright and dazzling achievements. Who could see the Tony Twain of the present moment?

Burns wiped the glasses and softly spoke, “Bone weary from the day, he returns home all the time to a dark and cold house. Even the smallest amount of pressure will slowly accumulate to become something bigger?”

John looked back at him.

Burns held up a glass and looked at it under the lights to see if there were any stains that had not yet been cleaned. “A forty-year-old man, still single and doing such a high-stress job. How many football coaches have you heard who are single?” He looked up at John and asked.

With a bang, Twain stood up and knocked over the glass placed on the table. He waved goodbye to Burns, John and Bill, as he wove out of the bar alone.

“Who can spend all his life in a bar?” Burns looked at the swaying door and said.

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Every day after work, he would go to Burns’ Forest Bar to get drunk and then sleep in a drunken haze. The next day, he would get up and frowned as he thought for a while only to realize the new day held nothing that could make him feel better. The international financial situation was deteriorating every day and the club’s finances could only shrink further. He was worried that the next day Evan would find him to say that the club could no longer afford to pay the big star players their high salaries. The players’ exhausted stamina could not be fully recovered with a few days’ sleep. There were always a few names on the injury name list. Sometimes a person would leave, and another person would come on.

This was Twain’s “happy life” nearing the end of the year.

Although he could not think of any good news that would make him happy when he got up every morning and sat by the bed, he still had to drum up his spirit and forcibly put on a pleasant face to go work in Wilford.

He had to supervise the training, develop a week’s work plan, communicate with the physiotherapists and team doctors to know the recovery status of the injured players every day, communicate with the fitness coaches to keep up-to-date with the team’s latest fitness, observe the players’ condition during training, and occasionally pay some attention to the youth team and reserve players, listen to the latest reports from the football scouts from around the world. He also had to search for talent within the database of players specially crafted by Sports Interactive for the Forest team, hoping to rely on Sports Interactive’s vast network of scouts around the world to allow him to unearth one or two unknown wonder kids and young bosses. He continued to deal with the media’s various tricky questions at the regular press conferences, studied the next opponent’s latest intelligence, and worked with Dunn to develop a detailed campaign ...

Since the pressure was too enormous to be solved, he simply worked harder and kept busy to make himself temporarily forget the pressure.

This was the “stress reduction” approach that Twain used to face the pressure.

It could be said that this method was effective at work. He was frantically busy and basically had no time to consider the amount of the pressure. It was only at the end of the day when work had ended, that the feeling would surge up like a tide coming ashore, and increasingly stronger than before.

When he returned home after he “relaxed” at the bar and saw the dark painted colossus from the outside, he had the urge to not go in and turn to leave.

It was cold outside. It was just as cold at home.

Standing on the dark doorway, he broke out in a cold sweat after drinking as a gust of icy wind blew at him.

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On November 29th, the fifteenth round of the league tournament, Nottingham Forest defeated West Bromwich Albion at home by 3:1. In the other games played at the same time, Chelsea and Arsenal tied at 2:2 while Liverpool easily beat West Ham United by 2:0. Manchester United and Manchester City shook hands on a 1:1 draw at the Manchester Derby. Thus, Liverpool overtook Chelsea to take the top spot in the league table with thirty-eight points, followed by Chelsea with thirty-six points, and Nottingham Forest at the third place with thirty points. Manchester United, which originally had the same points as them, was in the fourth place with twenty-eight points. Arsenal was in the fifth place with twenty-seven points.

Nottingham Forest had finally pulled ahead of Manchester United in points and was no longer in third place in the league with the other teams. Chelsea’s winning streak was held back by Arsenal. At thirty-six points, they only a six points difference with the Forest team, once again giving the Forest team a glimmer of hope to catch up and overtake.

In the game against West Bromwich Albion, the team also put in a spirited performance rarely seen in recent games and easily won against the opponent at 3:1.

It was reasonable to say that these were all good things, but neither Tony Twain nor the media clearly thought that was the case.

Van Nistelrooy was replaced by Žigić after he was injured and fell to the ground in the 70th minute of the game against West Bromwich Albion.

According to a preliminary diagnosis after the game, he needed to take a break for the injury for two months.

The figure had made Twain’s already knitted brows creased even more.

Van Nistelrooy knew what troubled the boss. In an interview, he even smiled with ease that he was fine to lessen the pressure on Twain. He said, “It’s only for eight weeks. I’ll just have a good rest for two months. I’ll be back!”

As a result, when he flew to the United States for further examination, a staggering piece of bad news came out.

The previous estimation of two months of recuperation did not include the option of surgery. The team doctors did not think that there was any need for surgery and he just needed to recuperate. Of course, it was from the club's point of view. After all, the team doctors knew the Forest team was currently short of players. Beckham and Eastwood had been injured, while Pepe's injury was also further aggravated in the game against Borisov. He had to sit in the stands completely, and Sun Jihai was also injured for a month.

Under the circumstances of the team being strapped for players, they did not consider the surgical treatment option at all.

The doctor in the United States had no such concerns. The famous doctor, Richard Steadman who diagnosed van Nistelrooy, bluntly pointed out that the Dutch man should have surgery right away and...

<Eight months!!>

<The Sun> printed the big and somewhat shocking black headline.

Eight months was the estimated time for van Nistelrooy to recover from the surgery—eight to nine months.

When the news came from America to Nottingham, Tony Twain could hardly believe his ears. He thought the other side had mistaken "eight months" for "eight weeks."

How could he be wrong?

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"... At least eight to nine months and it's only the time for recovery from the surgery. It's at a year away from him being able to play again!"

How could Tony Twain's most loyal opponent, Carl Spicer not be around during such a sensitive time? In an interview with a television station, he broke the news and pushed Tony Twain further into the heart of the struggle.

"The players normally have at least a month to undergo muscle training to regain their forms during the initial stages of recovery from a serious injury. Any intense exercise during the one-month period can cause the newly healed injury to flare up again. Van Nistelrooy's injured knee meniscus is the most likely part of the body that can cause the old injury to recur from any collision. The most classic example is Ronaldo. Can any of you count the number of times the Brazilian O Fenômeno's knee has been injured?"

"No, no. I won't say the kind of foolish things like van Nistelrooy will definitely say goodbye to the season. I'm just saying that the Dutch will have a ninety-five percent chance of completely retiring! Is this alarmist talk? I'm not doing that. Well, I'll pray for the Dutchman's successful surgery and perfect recovery from the injury. Then he will be able to start a simple muscle strength training, and then gradually strengthen to participate in the team training with the whole team. And he can slowly ... begin to compete again. There will be no twist and turn during the period, and a year will have passed." On the television football program, he wrote and drew on the board. He spoke frankly with assurance about

van Nistelrooy's serious injury, "Remember, there will be no problem during this time. He will recover well, and he hasn't had a relapse in his right knee. Then he will be thirty-four years old."

Spicer spread his hands and said to the host with a smile, "Do you know what thirty-four years of age mean for a striker? In a fast-paced and fierce competition like the Premier League, what can a thirty-four-year-old striker, who has just suffered a serious knee injury...do? Will Nottingham Forest renew van Nistelrooy's contract? I don't believe Evan Doughty will be a philanthropist under such terrible financial climate. That's why I said he had a ninety-five percent chance of retiring directly!"

"Well, I made myself clear about the unfortunate Dutchman. Now let us see who's the cause of all this and who was responsible for van Nistelrooy's tragic fate!" He saw the host's mouth open and hurriedly stopped him with a gesture, so that he can continue to add, "That's right, I'm referring to—Tony Twain!"

From the beginning of the new season, van Nistelrooy is already injured and has not been in good shape. He basically plays in a few games and takes a break during the first half of the league tournament. At the start of the season, van Nistelrooy already announced his retirement from the Netherlands national team and focused on playing for the Forest team. Twain overjoyed by this. After he drove Bendtner away, van Nistelrooy is the only center forward he can rely on. The Serbian simply couldn't adapt to the Premier League football. The team's performance is not good and the entire team's condition was up and down. Coupled with the impact of the financial crisis, Tony Twain knew he has to obtain good results. Under immense pressure, he can only continue to rely on van Nistelrooy..."

Having said that, Carl Spicer leaned calmly against the back of the chair, with a mysterious smile on his face.

"I have inside information that just before the game against West Bromwich Albion, Nottingham Forest's team doctor had warned Twain that it was best not to let van Nistelrooy play or he would risk an injury. But Tony Twain still forced to bring the Dutchman on and did not heed the team doctor's warning for the sake of his manager position. And what did everyone see in the end? A manager who only cares for his own position regardless of the players' health. Some people may say that he rules with an iron fist. But I scoff at this!"

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While Carl Spicer's talk show was on the television, Twain was drinking his troubles away in Burns' bar. Van Nistelrooy's serious injury was indeed a heavy blow to Twain. Žigić was still slowly adjusting to the Premier League, Eastwood was constantly suffering from minor injuries and Arshavin was more of a winger than a scoring center forward. The only one who could be trusted was the dedicated van Nistelrooy. As a result, he became injured and it was going to take eight months... He completely had no idea how to resolve the task of goalscoring within the team the rest of the season.

While he was troubled, he naturally came to the bar to drink and drown his sorrows.

He was surrounded by John and Bill, who were both trying to comfort him.

Then he heard the news of Carl Spicer looking smug on television and jabbering about the scoop.

At the time, his body swayed as he stood up, holding a thick beer glass in his hand, and was about to smash the television. Fortunately, John and Bill acted quickly. One of them held him and the other man reached to take the glass. But the beer in the glass drenched Twain.

“The bitch-faced bastard!” He punched and swore.

“Why do you care what that idiot do, Tony? Drink up, let’s drink!” John signaled to Burns to continue serving.

But Twain did not keep drinking. He sat in the chair in a daze and still looked back on what happened before the game.

Carl Spicer was right with one thing. Fleming did warn him that van Nistelrooy’s body was close to collapse and could not be used like this again. Therefore, Twain decided to rotate and rest van Nistelrooy to give Žigić, who had not adapted to the Premier League yet, to start in the game. Anyway, West Bromwich Albion was just a newly promoted team which they could cope with. Even if Beckham, Eastwood, Pepe and van der Vaart were injured, they could always cope.

But van Nistelrooy looked for him and insisted on playing. He was aware of the team’s current predicament and knew that the boss had no one available whom he could use.

Twain thought about it for a long time before he nodded and agreed.

He just did not think that what he feared would come into fruition. Van Nistelrooy really got hurt in the game and was seriously injured for eight months!

It was really unfortunate. He was out of luck...

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The next day, a lot of reporters were at the gates of Wilford and they wanted to come here to confirm if what Carl Spicer said on television last night was true.

Twain’s hoarse voice in front of these reporters sounded a little soft. The troubles, which came one after another these days gave him a sense of powerlessness and he could not act tough even if he wanted to.

“Don’t make wild guesses...” He waved his hands and said, “It was my decision to let Ruud play, and I’m not going to shirk my responsibility for it. I feel sorry and shocked that the team has lost such an important striker, but my team will persevere. We are ranked third and in good condition. An injury is a normal occurrence. I don’t see what you call a crisis. That’s it, goodbye everyone.”

With that, he turned and walk inside.

A group of reporters rushed forward at the back and shouted, “Mr. Tony Twain! I have one more question!”

“Mr. Twain, I heard you forced van Nistelrooy to play injured with the use of local injections?”

Twain turned and glared at those reporters and coldly said, “I am in a bad mood, don’t bother me! If you’re curious, go ask Carl Spicer. Didn’t he claim to have inside information? Let him give you all the inside information he knows!”



After he marched ahead to shake off the reporters, only then Twain stopped to look up at the gloomy sky.

At least eight months...

When van Nistelrooy returns from the recovery of his injury, who knows what the situation will be like at that time?

Will the global economic crisis be over? Will we have any money? Can I wave my checkbook to buy people all over the world? What will happen to the team? Can we win the UEFA Champions League title for the third time in a row? Can we still defend the Premier League title? What kind of breakthrough can we made in the FA Cup?

What's going to happen to Nottingham Forest and I... a year later?

### **Chapter 710: Powerless to Stage a Comeback**

Ruud van Nistelrooy had already left Nottingham, and was undergoing final preparations prior to his operation in America.

No one knew if he could return to the pitch after the operation. It was also unclear if Nottingham Forest would still want the 34-year-old at the club when he returns. His current salary is relatively high amongst all the players at the club, and his contract is due to expire by the time he recovers and makes it back to the team.

The uncertainties surrounding van Nistelrooy's future left everyone feeling uneasy about his trip to America.

Twain was the only one who forced a smile and comforted him, "Come back alive and kicking, I am waiting for you!"

Van Nistelrooy's injury had further aggravated the team's woes at the front. There was now a complete lack of attacking options in the team.

However, that was only one of the many issues that his injury brought about. A bigger issue was how the team's morale suffered a heavy blow as a result of his injury and departure.

The usual scenes of perpetual laughter were nowhere to be seen at the Wilford training grounds. Everyone would sigh collectively when the word 'injury' is mentioned in the dressing room and would say nothing else afterwards. Everyone prioritised their own safety and chose not to give their all during training.

It was safe to say that a fear of injury had spread and manifested itself throughout the entire team.

Twain was clueless as to how to deal with everything that was unfolding before him. He could not berate the players and tell them to give their all during training, because that would cause the players to slightly, or even completely, lose trust in him.

The players' fear of picking up an injury was even more evident during a match. Their opponents seemed to have honed in on their fears as well, and they would all show their strong and aggressive side before the Forest players during the game and make use of boorish defending to control the flow of the match.

Most of the time, the Nottingham Forest players could only choose to give up the ball against such crude defending.

George Wood was the only player who remained unchanged and unaffected by any external influences. Sadly, he was not able to carry the entire team on his shoulders alone.

A low team morale. The players' lack of stamina. The constant state of anxiety that the players were in due to their fear of injuries. All these factors led Forest to two consecutive defeats in the league.

On 6th December, Nottingham Forest lost 0-2 to Arsenal in an away game. On 13th December, they lost 0-1 to Blackburn at home.

Following their two consecutive defeats, Nottingham Forest slipped from third place to seventh in the table. Aston Villa and Everton were ranked above them, and Hull City was ranked eighth.

On 16th December, Forest travelled all the way to Japan to participate in the FIFA Club World Cup.

The exhausting plane flight coupled with Twain's indifference towards a match of this level resulted in a loss for Forest against Fluminense Football Club, who was the champion of Copa Libertadores, in the finals of the FIFA Club World Cup. Forest missed out on bringing the trophy back home.

The only positive for the team came during the last round of the Champions League's group stages. Nottingham Forest clinched a 4-1 victory over Kyiv Dynamo at home amongst the cheers from their 30,000 fans, and managed to secure the last spot into the knockout stages.

They were able to hold onto both their spot in the Champions League and the money that they can get by remaining in the competition.

At least they have funds going into the next season.

The team might have made their way into the knockout stages of the Champions League, but the media's criticisms of Twain did not relent and had only increased instead. The reason for it was because they realized that Tony Twain would most likely be unable to make a comeback in a short period of time this time round, so they did not need to worry about getting slapped in their faces by Twain after he started to win games.

Many criticized how he only had his sights on victories and turned a blind eye on the players' fitness levels, which led to the disaster that befell van Nistelrooy.

Others criticized his powerlessness to do something that would help bring his team out of the pinch that they were in.

Some derided him over how he spent most of his time squabbling with the media, but did not spend any to build up his team's fitness levels.

A few believed that the reason behind why there are very few managers who get embroiled in a lot of off the pitch news is because those news would lead to the manager becoming distracted during his training and guidance of the team. Managers like that cannot be counted as incompetent, but have certainly failed as managers.

“... We can criticize a player if he performs badly when he gets overly caught up with affairs that have nothing to do with his job as a footballer. The manager can drop him to the bench or send him to the stands to let him reflect on his actions. But, what about a manager who gets so distracted that he is unable to give his all for the job? Are there any ways for us to punish him? Tony Twain thinks he is the king of Nottingham Forest. I have no intentions to debate over whether he is the king or not, but if a country’s king encounters a problem and makes a mistake, where should the country go from there?”

All sorts of criticisms besieged Twain. He would come across at least two columns lambasting him every single morning when he flips open the newspapers.

He eventually stopped reading newspapers all together. This was also how he got rid of his bad habit of reading the news while eating breakfast.

He was not scared in the slightest of how the media admonishes him. It was not the first time it happened to him anyway. The only difference was that the media seemed to be concentrating their attacks together this time round instead of the scattered, individual attacks in the past.

What made him feel growingly pressured was the intent from the higher-ups of the club.

It did not matter how good of a relationship he had with Evan on a daily basis. The fact was that the team was performing badly right now. He could not escape being summoned to the office by a grim-faced Evan to discuss about the situation for an hour.

Evan did not reproach him. He only talked about how the team was in a difficult position right now, and how he hoped that Twain would divert the attention away from the club’s financial issues and change the image that people have of Forest currently by winning matches.

As long as they won matches, all the problems would stop being problems.

As long as they won matches, the fickle media would start to cheer for Forest again...

The words that Evan said were what made Twain feel immense pressure.

Evan was an owner who only sat in the office the whole day. He never cared about the club. He has no idea how hard it is for the team to win matches with the situation that they are currently in, but Twain was different. He understood it best as the manager of the team.

Nonetheless, Evan was still his boss, and what he said was right as well. Nobody would wish to see their team lose matches. Losing matches was not the way for him to reduce the stress placed on him either.

What to do? Brace yourself, grit your teeth and face it head on, of course.

Twain agreed to do as Evan said.

They will win their next match. They had to win. The situation would definitely turn for the better. The issues that they have on their hands were only temporary...

But who was their opponent for the next match?

On 20th December, matchday 18, Nottingham Forest was up against Manchester United in an away game....

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Ferguson might be Twain's drinking and horse racing buddy, but it would be a pipe dream to expect him to let Twain off the hook because of the friendship that they share.

How could Ferguson pass on the chance to obliterate the arrogant Nottingham Forest who had tyrannized the Premier League for two seasons?

Even if he was willing to go easy on Forest, Manchester United's players and fans would never assent to it either.

Think about it. Who was it that snatched the Premier League Champion's trophy from them during the final game of the previous season?

The Nottingham Forest who did that to them is currently in a sorry state. Twain could not even gather 11 players to play for his starting team.

Manchester United was not a charity organisation. They have no obligation to help them get over their hurdles.

Rumors circulated before the match that if Twain were to lose again, he would likely get the boot.

A banner with the words "See Tony Twain off with a victory. Die, Nottingham Forest!" appeared at the Old Trafford stands during the match as a response to the rumors.

The Old Trafford stands were teeming with animosity towards Twain. Many of the fans were desperate to rush down and dismember him.

There were endless insults thrown Twain's way from behind his manager's seat.

The British were certainly creative. They came up with all kinds of ways to scold him so that he would not feel lonely for 90 minutes.

Van Nistelrooy has left the team indefinitely due to an injury. Van der Vaart is out with an injury for a month and so is Pepe, who is out of action for half a month. Similarly, Beckham is out for a week, Eastwood is out for two weeks, Petrov is out for 10 days, Tiago is out for a week and Sun Jihai is out for a month...

Who else do they have on the pitch right now?

How could they hope to win against Manchester United with such a team?

If Ferguson knew about the promise that Twain made with Evan prior to the match, he would definitely fly into a rage and say that Twain was looking down on him and his team.

All Twain could do was to force a smile. He knew how hard it was to win Manchester United as an away team. However, there was no way back for him now. The team's morale would take a hit if he were to show his weak side at a time like this.

Twain stood by the side of the pitch and kept flailing his hands about agitatedly as the match progressed.

Seeing that, the Sky Television's commentator joked, "Tony Twain probably longs to get on the pitch himself and help the team win the match personally."

The team was in a slump. The players who had performed well in the past were unable to re-enact their past good performances.

Şahin, the Turkish gifted youth player who was playing as a replacement for van der Vaart, quickly became invisible in the game after being closed down in Manchester United's midfield.

Rafinha was close to becoming disoriented after dealing with Cristiano Ronaldo's repeated breakthroughs.

Kompany could not stop Rooney and Tevez's interchanging attacks all by himself.

George Wood kept on running, but he was unable to defend both sides of the flanks at the same time.

Žigić was isolated at the front of the pitch and was unable to produce anything without support from the midfield.

Lennon tried to find a way to break through, but his attacks were too predictable and were easily stopped by his opponents...

Twain raised his head to the skies. There was nothing else he could do...

Everything had gone well for him during the past few seasons. There were a few occasional injuries, but those injuries did not affect the team as a whole.

Maybe lady luck was smiling at him back then?

Unlike the past few seasons however, every unlucky thing came at him at the same time this season. The way that they happened one after another in such a short span of time made Twain feel as though they were all pre-arranged.

God, are you trying to drive me to my grave?

He felt a sudden pang at his heart.

Twain gave up directing the match by the pitch. He turned around, languidly walked away, and languidly sat down on the manager's seat.

His face was one of utter stupefaction.

The score for the match at that moment was 3-1. The home team's score comes first, followed by the away team's.

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Nottingham Forest suffered their third consecutive defeat and they continued to slip down the ranking table. This time, they fell all the way to 11th place!

Amidst the state of chaos for the team, Real Madrid made a move once again to throw things into further disarray. They openly announced their interest in Forest's Ribéry, and how they hoped to buy him during the winter transfer window.

This was not a joke published by the Spanish media outlets. It was also not that a screw came loose in the heads of the higher-ups in Real Madrid.

The reason behind why they wanted to spend big money to buy a player who participated in the Champions League before was simple.

Real Madrid and Nottingham Forest were both facing the same issues: injuries to players and a dreadfully incomplete team.

They had lost Robinho in the summer, and it weakened their already weak offense down the flanks. To make matters worse, Robben picked up a serious injury during the last match and was expected to be out for two to three months. This left Real Madrid in a situation where they have no wingers in the team that they can employ during games. Drenthe was too inexperienced and could not be played either. Schuster had made it clear that the Dutch was not a part of his plans as well.

Hence, it was imperative for Real Madrid to buy a winger in the winter transfer window.

Cristiano Ronaldo is still intent to leave Manchester United, but he will not agree to a transfer during the winter transfer window. The earliest he would agree to go would be during the summer next year.

After searching around, the only player Real Madrid could buy who would be risk-free, with a proven track record, and who would be able to get in the team and play straight away was Franck Ribéry.

Due to the fact that Nottingham Forest is currently going through a financial crisis, Real Madrid believes that the club would not play hardball and refuse an offer this time round.

After all, they are in desperate need of cash to turn their financial situation around, and Ribéry's salary of 130,000 pounds per week was a heavy burden to the club as well.

Real Madrid put in a bid of 50 million euros for Ribéry after taking everything into account.

The reporters swarmed up to Twain, all wanting to obtain the latest information regarding the potential transfer from him.

Twain only shook his head and repeated his statement that he had not heard any details regarding the offer, and that Ribéry was happy at the club and would like to stay.

In contrast to Twain's words however, Allan later came out and admitted that the club had indeed received an offer from Real Madrid during an interview with the press, but did not comment when asked about how the club intends to deal with the matter.

The media believes that Nottingham Forest would find Real Madrid's offer in euros to be irresistible given the current economic downturn.

Twain was definitely aware of how tempting Real Madrid's offer is. What he said to the media earlier were all lies.

Bruno Heiderscheid, Ribery's manager, gave Twain another call to discuss about the matter, and he expressed his wishes for Tony Twain to let his player leave.

"It will help ease the club's financial troubles and lower the wage structure. At the same time, Franck would be able to get what he wants. It's the best of both worlds. I don't think it is a bad offer."

Everything he said made perfect sense, but Twain's face was cold as ice and he just refused to nod his head.

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Stress over the team's results, stress from the difference in players' thoughts, stress from the media, stress from the higher-ups and stress over finances...

Twain felt like he would only see a sea of black when he raised his head, even if the weather for the day was actually all sunny and bright.

It has been an exceptionally difficult winter for him.

What made things especially difficult for him was not the stress that continued to loom over him, but rather how he was completely clueless as to how to get rid of the stress that was weighing down on him.

He has no money to buy players and no time to make adjustments to the team and let the players rest. As long as the team continue to be depleted, there would be no chance of turning the results around, unless a miracle happened. The stress would only continue to accumulate if the terrible results keep coming one after another, until the day it gets so massive that he can't endure it any longer and collapse.

When that happens, it did not matter how he, the Monkey King, struggled, he would just be crushed under the 'The Mount of Five Fingers' and not see the light for 500 years... [1]

It did not matter how tortuous the road was. As long as there was light before him, he could still get the entire team to grit their teeth and get through it by giving their all.

Sadly, the road that stretched out before him now was not only extremely tortuous, but without a glimmer of light as well.

If things were to go on as they have been, the team would likely face swift elimination despite qualifying for the knockout stages of the Champions League.

The multi-faceted problem that they have on their hands is not only shown in the club's financial situation, but also in the various competitions that the team competes in.

Twain has to give up a goal or two and invest his all into ensuring that he can at least attain one of his goals.

The problem is, should they fight for a top four finish in the league, or should they fight to leave their name in history as the three-time champions of the Champions League?

If the team is unable to finish in the top four in the Premier League, then they will miss out on Champions League next season and can only watch as others get busy and celebrate.

The prospect of being crowned as the three-time champions of Champions League is certainly enticing...

Twain contemplated for a long time, and eventually decided to prioritize getting a top-four finish in the Premier League.

He felt that regardless of how tough a situation he is in now, there would come a day where his luck would turn for the better. Things might not be going his way right now, but who is to say that luck would not be on his side after the winter passes? Misfortune might just be a blessing in disguise.

Twain did not think that it was mission impossible to secure a top-four finish with the current Nottingham Forest team.

Now that he has set his goal, all he needed were results to help him make his goal a reality.

Christmas was around the corner, and Nottingham Forest was ranked 11th in the league table. This result was a far cry from where he wanted Nottingham Forest to be, which was to not be too far away from first place.

He needs to win games...

Twain wanted to pull his hair out at that thought.

When has winning a game ever been easy?