

## Champions 821

### Chapter 821: The End of the Season

The press was still publishing numerous articles about Twain's hearing days after it had happened. Everyone wanted to know what were the exact words he said to the UEFA officials during the hearing that actually compelled them to let him walk away scot-free when it was clear that UEFA wanted to drive Twain into his grave.

Twain did not utter a single word about what happened at the hearing to the press, not even to Pierce Brosnan, who had called Twain to ask for some 'insider information'.

What happened at the hearing was destined to become a secret that no other person would ever know about. All people could hope for was that Twain would include some details about this hearing in his bibliography when he retires as a football manager.

The UEFA also made no further mention of the incident. It was as though the entire hearing had not happened.

The Catalan media was upset with how things had turned out, but what else could they possibly do besides to rant and moan in the papers and on TV?

They lost to Tony Twain both on and off the pitch. They needed some kind of way to vent their frustrations, and they could only achieve that through the various media platforms.

However, the Catalan media did not walk away from this 'battle' with Tony Twain empty-handed.

A few of the more level-headed reporters were able to point out that Nottingham Forest had actually paid a steep price for their actions despite successfully defeating Barcelona and evading punishment from UEFA.

In the first leg of the match against Barcelona, Tony Twain was served a four match ban for insulting the referee. He has only been banned for one match so far, and there were three more to go. What this meant was that Forest would have to play in the finals of the Champions League without the guidance of their manager, should they somehow manage to land themselves a place in the finals.

Tony Twain would certainly not be able to rely on the 27,000 Forest fans to be his mouthpiece then either.

Pepe was shown a red card in the first leg and was banned for two matches. He had served his ban for one match, and there was still one more match remaining.

George Wood was also shown a red card for his violent behavior in the second leg. Similarly, he also has to serve a two match ban, which would mean he will definitely miss out on both the semi-final matches.

Both Wood and Pepe are key players in the team. Their absence undoubtedly deals a heavy blow to Forest's defense.

In addition, Lennon also picked up an injury after being tackled by Yaya Touré during the second leg. His injury was determined to be very severe in the post-match examinations, and he would have to miss out on all the remaining matches for the season.

Nottingham Forest was truly down on their luck to have two of their key players severely injured and unable to play for the remainder of the season.

The four aforementioned points made it very challenging for Forest to win their semi-finals match.

The two most fatal points out of them, according to the Barcelona media, were the bans on both Wood and Twain.

The 'trick' that Tony Twain used against Barcelona has already been exposed to the public, and he would not be able to use it a second time. Furthermore, there would be supervisors from the UEFA who would be sitting with him throughout the following matches to prevent him from making use of his fans as his mouthpiece to convey his instructions to the team.

Nonetheless, one cannot deny that his method of using his fans to communicate with his team is truly ingenious...

Forest's opponent in the semi-finals would be Germany's Bayern Munich. They were a tough team to beat. Football teams from Germany have always been tenacious and Twain's psychological trick of trying to rile up the players during the match would not work against the Bayern Munich players.

Without Twain's onsite guidance, Forest would only be half as strong as they usually are.

If we were to add George Wood's absence to the equation as well...

Wood has always been Nottingham Forest's protective screen in the midfield. The influence that he has on the team is huge. Most people might not be able to tell how big of an influence he has on the team when he is playing on the pitch, but the difference becomes significant and discernible once he is off the pitch.

Anyone who knows football knows how important a defensive midfielder is to any football team, especially to a defense-oriented one like Forest.

Without Wood on the team, Forest's opponents would be able to threaten their defense directly. Tiago is clearly not well-suited to carry out Wood's role. He could not measure up to Wood in terms of both abilities and stamina.

Wood's absence from the team also serves as a crude reminder about an issue that has been largely ignored but has always existed.

The team has not been able to find a substitute for George Wood.

Now that Wood has been banned from playing for two matches, Forest has no other defensive midfielder like him that they can employ for the next game. Tiago is not a player who mainly operated in the midfield. Most of the time, he would move forward to join in the attack. He would play as a defensive midfielder occasionally, but even then, he would have Wood right beside him to support him. His inability to defend in the midfield would undoubtedly be magnified when Wood is not playing next to him.

Nottingham Forest's happiness was bound to be short-lived.

When an article that brought up all the aforementioned points was published, it was mocked by Nottingham Forest fans as being nothing more than 'Barcelona trying to console themselves over their loss'.

However, it was proven a while later that the article had hit the nail on the head...

"The match is over! Nottingham Forest has lost 0:2 to Bayern Munich in an away game. The final score is 1:3. Nottingham Forest is eliminated from the Champions League!"

The Allianz Arena erupted into cheers following three blows to the referee's whistle.

Bayern Munich's coaching staff and substitutes rushed onto the pitch in a frenzy, and they hugged the players on the pitch tightly.

In contrast, Forest's players stood rooted to the ground with their heads hung low on the other side of the pitch.

The camera immediately zoomed in on a particular corner at the stands, and Tony Twain's emotionless face showed up on the screen. He was surrounded by a crowd of crestfallen Nottingham Forest fans.

Twain was not able to make use of the home advantage to create trouble for their opponents this time round. His good luck appeared to have reached its end.

The match had only barely started for five minutes when Forest found themselves down by one goal. The accident messed up all of the team's plan, and the match slowly slipped away from Twain's control. There was nothing he could do at the stands.

The cheers from the Bayern Munich fans were all he could hear when the match ended.

Twain lowered his head. He then turned around and followed after a group of fans as they all made their way away from the stands.

"Tony Twain has finally lowered his arrogant head!" The commentator said as he watched Twain's actions.

Thereafter, he went on to tease, "Nottingham Forest has eliminated both Inter Milan and Barcelona consecutively, and those two teams happen to be the champions of the Champions League for the past two seasons. The British media hailed Nottingham Forest as the 'Champions Killer' ever since. However, this very name that they were given might have led to their downfall, because Bayern Munich has never clinched a Champions League trophy in years... The magical Forest appears to have lost their drive against a non-champion Bayern Munich team. This has led to their elimination from the competition..."

The commentator's explanation as to why Forest lost seemed to carry some truth in it.

Twain could only force a smile after hearing the commentator's words after the match.

It does seem like everything was meant to be.

The commentator's words helped to cast an interesting sidelight on the match.

Twain entered the locker room after the match had ended. He did not criticize the team, and neither did he give the players a dressing-down. All he did was to express regret at the team's elimination from the competition. Following that, he commended their performance. He told the players that they have all tried their best, and that they should not have any regrets in their hearts over the result. All they could do was look forward to trying to claim the Champions League trophy again next year.

Twain even joked towards the end of his speech to his players. "Actually, this all works out just fine. We have embarrassed UEFA too many times now. Lads, think about it. If we were to really make our way into the finals and become champions... It would mean that a team whose manager is sitting at the stands has actually managed to lift the trophy. How embarrassing would that be for UEFA? We can't make things too difficult for them."

Everyone in the locker room burst out laughing at his words. The despondence within their hearts slowly started to vanish after they laughed.

Twain relaxed after seeing that everyone had gotten into a better mood after his words.

There was no use for them to keep dwelling on the fact that they have been eliminated from the Champions League. It was all in the past now.

What he needed to do was to get his team back on track quickly so that they can continue their fight in the Premier League. Ensuring a top four finish and clinching qualification for Champions League next season were the most important things to Nottingham Forest this season.

"All right, lads! Head on home!"

Twain clapped his hands and ended the debrief. The players all stood to their feet one after another and began packing their belongings.

Twain was quickly located and surrounded by the sharp reporters after he exited the locker room.

Countless microphones came at him and were all directed at his mouth. Some of them nearly hit his lips. Twain could not help but lean backwards to avoid 'kissing' the microphones.

"Hey! Hey! Bring the microphones away from my lips!"

"Mr. Twain. Is there anything you'd like to say regarding your team's elimination?"

"There's nothing for me to say about that. All football teams win and lose games. I hope that Bayern Munich would become the final champions of this competition. That's all I have to say..."

"Mr. Twain! Would you agree that your ban has a huge influence on your team? Your fiery temper has directly led to your team's elimination from the competition..."

"Nonsense! My team is collectively strong. We won't become weaker just because we lose a certain team member. And you say I have a fiery temper? I am not to blame for the incident from before. UEFA has also agreed to it."

Ever since the hearing, Twain would always bring out UEFA's name to shut the reporters up every time they try to get him to talk about his 'feud' with Barcelona.

This move of his is indeed shameless, but no one can stop him from doing it.

“I’m just protecting my rights.”

UEFA’s name was certainly an effective weapon. Several reporters shut their mouths right there and then.

“All right, please give way. Don’t block the door.” Twain reached out both his hands and tried to shove his way out of the crowd.

“Mr. Twain, I have one other question...”

“Keep your question to yourself! Someday you might get your answer.”

“Mr. Twain! Mr. Twain!”

Twain disregarded the reporters’ reluctance to let him go. He shoved a way out for himself and rushed away.

The manager of Bayern Munich, Jürgen Klinsmann, chanced upon the scene where Twain looked a little worn out as he was being surrounded by the reporters.

He laughed. “A man who has been banished to the stands remains a cynosure. As expected of a famous manager.”

Nottingham Forest loss in the semi-finals did not come as a surprise to most. After all, Bayern Munich was the leader of Bundesliga. They are consistently ranked first on the ranking table.

Moreover, Forest was in a very bad situation going into the match. Several of their players had either been banned from playing or were injured. The fact that they were able to progress into the semi-finals was in itself a feat.

Some Forest fans even regarded the two matches against Barcelona to be just like the finals of the Champions League. They did not desire for anything else this season, as long as they defeated Barcelona...

However, such a desire would certainly be scoffed at by the Barcelona fans. They would deride Nottingham Forest for not setting their sights higher.

No matter what the Barcelona fans might think however, it was still a fact that Forest won Barcelona. As the victors, Forest has every right to ‘not set their sights higher’...

Nottingham Forest’s loss in the Champions League was not good news to their rivals in the Premier League.

It did not matter how much those rivals despised Twain. This was one of the few times that none of them would be able to say words like ‘I hope Forest gets eliminated’.

Forest’s elimination from the Champions League would signify that Twain’s ‘pack of wolves’ would now put all their focus on the Premier League.

Currently, Forest was ranked fourth on the ranking table. If they were to put in all their time and effort into achieving results in the Premier League, it would certainly not be a problem for them to climb up to second place. Only a few points separated the second placed team from the fifth placed team after all...

Every single one of Forest's rivals wanted Nottingham Forest to progress as far as they could in the Champions League.

There was one exception however, and that was Manchester United's manager, Ferguson.

His team had made its way into the finals once again. His wish would definitely be for Nottingham Forest to make its way into the finals, so that they would then be able to lose against Manchester United. The arrogant and obstinate Tony Twain would thereafter bow his head before Ferguson the master, and announce his transfer over to Manchester United as Ferguson's successor. Twain would then go on to lead the Red Devils to glory in both England and Europe...

That would mark a perfect end to his managerial career.

Thus, after Manchester United's qualification into the finals, Ferguson said, "I think it's a pity. If I could choose my opponent, I would rather meet Tony Twain in the finals. Of course, it's on the premise that he's not seated at the stands..."

His words led to unhappiness in Bayern Munich. The Bundesliga giant felt that Ferguson had insulted them with his words.

Ferguson immediately came out and explained himself shortly after, "My words are not targeted at Bayern Munich. They are a big and prestigious club, and I do think that it's great that I can meet them in the finals. I will treat every single opponent with respect... I just hope to be able to choose my opponent in the very last game of my managerial career...."

It did not matter how Ferguson tried to mince his words. It still sounded like he was looking down on Bayern Munich.

There were some media outlets that said that Ferguson was getting more and more muddled with age, and that all he was doing was just adding fuel to the fire.

But, what if the 'old fox' Ferguson had only said those words as part of his psychological trick against Klinsmann?

Twain did not involve himself in the entire issue. He was perhaps one of the few people who understood what Ferguson was up to. Ferguson had definitely said those words as part of his psychological battle against Bayern Munich.

It looks like the old man is very confident that he would clinch his last Champions League trophy of his managerial career...

His response to Ferguson's comments was, "I might go down to the stadium to watch the match. However, it's not because I care about the results. All I care about right now is the Premier League. We'd definitely challenge for the title again next season."

Ultimately, Nottingham Forest finished the season by coming in at third place, and they successfully qualified for Champions League next season.

Wenger's Arsenal successfully overtook Manchester United on the ranking table due to how the latter had put in more time and effort into playing the Champions League instead, and they were crowned champions of the Premier League.

It might be a pity for Ferguson to not be able to achieve the Double, but the final result was an embodiment of Ferguson and Wenger's long-standing battle over the past decade.

Alex Ferguson, Manchester United's 'godfather' who had announced his retirement as a football manager after the end of the season, led his Red Devils team to a 2:1 victory over the King of Bundesliga, Bayern Munich, at Arena AufSchalke, which serves as a stadium for Schalke 04. He was the one who had the last laugh in this clash between two giants.

Ferguson also fulfilled his promise from years ago:

I would retire after clinching one more Champions League trophy.

He lifted the trophy that signified the highest possible honor for all European football clubs in one of the best stadiums throughout the whole of Europe. However, the expression on his face did not look like one that belonged to that of a professional manager's. It looked more like one that belonged to an elder who should be enjoying his old age. There was no passion upon his countenance, only a look of relief that everything was over and that he was finally able to remove the burden weighing on his shoulders.

In that very moment, it seemed as though he had aged by another 10 years. Even the red hue on his cheeks seemed to have faded.

Tony Twain watched from the stands at Arena AufSchalke as Ferguson lifted the trophy before him. He suddenly felt like Ferguson was very far away from him at this very instant. They might only be separated by a short distance since one was at the stands and the other was on the pitch, but Twain felt like the distance between them was like the size of Europe.

He joined the other spectators in the stadium who had all stood up to applaud Ferguson for having reached the end of his managerial journey. The happiness in his heart was intertwined with a twinge of loneliness.

From this day onwards, I will face one less fierce competitor.

But, likewise, I will also face one less good competitor...

Farewell, Ferguson.

## **Chapter 822: Goodbye, My Friend**

A week after the Champions League final, the television stations, radio stations, newspapers, magazines, Internet... all the major media outlets were talking about Ferguson's retirement. It was indeed the most sensational thing to happen the football world in recent time. Although Ferguson had already announced his retirement in advance, when the day finally arrived, people still felt unwilling to let go.

Even Wenger, his archrival for years, sent well wishes to Ferguson's retirement. He said, "He has created an era. This is probably the only time I've praised him. He's done really well in his twenty-five years at

Manchester United. The league championship title? You know, life always needs to have such a regret for it to be beautiful, isn't it?" Wenger laughed slyly.

Even Klinsmann, who was defeated by Ferguson in the Champions League final, did not have any bad comments because Manchester United snatched away his title, "He is a role model for me to learn from and a target to catch up to. I'm happy that he could win another UEFA Champions League title before he retired. Manchester United performed better and they deserve the title."

In a television interview, Ferguson again spoke of the concerns of his successor.

"There are many great coaches in the world and I'm sure the board will pick the most suitable manager for Manchester United. Take note that I said, 'the most suitable' instead of 'the best.' I won't comment on how the club handles the personnel work anymore. Now I just want to go home and enjoy a relaxing time with my wife. You know... for the first time in so many years, I don't have to think about tomorrow's training plan and the weekend's lineup schedule. It's actually a very pleasant thing."

He did not name a specific candidate and apparently did not want to cause trouble for the club's selection process. Because if he had to state it, it would be "Tony Twain" but Tony Twain was certain that he would not come to Manchester United. It was not a good idea to say things that would cause embarrassment to everyone. He called Twain in private and sighed with some regret after he confirmed once again that Twain had no desire to join Old Trafford.

Just when Twain was tired of the media's extensive coverage of Ferguson, he finally heard a different news.

After the league tournament ended, the Forest team was dismissed, and the vacation had begun.

Twain also planned to take advantage of this holiday to fly to the United States to spend many wonderful nights with his wife, so as to continue their great "baby making project."

While Dunn would bring Tang Jing back to his hometown to probably meet his parents this time...

Before leaving, he suddenly gave Twain a call and asked to meet him alone.

Twain thought it was strange. If Dunn had something to discuss with him, he could talk about it over the phone if they were not together. Even if it was a major matter, there was no need to specially arrange for a face-to-face meeting alone.

Feeling odd, Twain still made it to the appointment. He even remembered to joke on the phone, "Are we going on a date?"

The place that Dunn set could not really be connected with "a date" mentioned by Twain. It was right at the Wilford training base.

When Twain drove there, the exceptionally busy training base gate which was always crowded with a lot of reporters and people coming and going, was so quiet that the distant sound of birds in the woods could be heard at this time.

The guards were surprised when the manager suddenly came. Twain smiled and greeted them before he was allowed through.



Twain parked his car in the parking lot, and saw Dunn waiting at the door of the building when he got out of the car

He raised his hand to say hello, but did not hurry over, but strolled along in parking lot under the sun.

“It’s nice out today. Breezy and sunny.” He spoke of things that only Dunn and himself knew where the punchline was.

But this time Dunn was not amused by Twain. He stood within the shadow of the building, expressionless.

Twain waved at him and said, “It’s so sunny and beautiful today, and yet you’re standing there. Don’t you feel the chilly wind around? If you have something to say, we can talk as we walk. How about taking a lap around the training ground?”

Dunn nodded in agreement.

But before that, they did not talk and just walked along until they accidentally walked to the number three training ground. Twain smiled when he saw the training ground, which was still like a vegetable field. He said, “If Guardiola saw this training ground, I wonder if he would give Barcelona a similar piece in the training base?”

Dunn did not answer, so Twain turned his head and asked, “Do you have something on your mind, Dunn? Is Tang Jing giving you pressure to get married?”

Dunn rolled his eyes and said, “I do have something I want to talk to you about, but I don’t know where to begin.”

“Hey, this is us! We’re sworn brothers from our hometown in Sichuan. If you have something to say, just say it. You don’t have to worry about the wedding gifts.”

Dunn cleared his throat and said, “It has nothing to do with marriage. Tony... Well.” He started to talk and stopped again.

Twain frowned. He rarely saw Dunn overly careful with his words. “Do you have bad news?”

“No... I don’t know.” Dunn shook his head and said, “I... I intend to end my contract with the club early.”

Twain was taken aback. He thought he heard wrong. Was the bird song in the woods so loud that it affected his hearing?

Dunn’s contract with the club as the assistant manager expired in two years. Twain had planned to offer Dunn a new contract after the start of next season, with a longer extension. Maybe it would even be good to sign an eight-year contract like himself.

Seeing Twain looking incredulously at him, Dunn explained, “I’ve been thinking about this issue for a long time. I... Uh...” He wrung his hands, not knowing where to put them. “I don’t want to be an assistant manager anymore.”

“Why?” Twain asked. He did not want to make any comments now. He wanted to hear Dunn’s explanation.

“Tony. You probably don’t know... Initially, we... Before that, I really did not think about wanting to be a manager. Then you found me, and I thought it was okay if I could be an assistant manager. But after following you all these years, I suddenly feel... I feel like I’d like to try and be a manager.”

Twain looked at him and said, “Go on.”

“Well...” Dunn mulled over it for a bit and thought about where to start. He rarely said so much in one breath, but this time it had to do with his future life choices, so he had to say more.

“Honestly, Tony. During the time when you left the team due to the heart attack, I was the acting manager. When you were banned, it was also me... But this is your team, not mine. What I want to do is not to be the ‘acting’ manager. I want to be a real manager, but I don’t have a chance at Nottingham Forest.”

“I’m not complaining about anything, Tony. But Nottingham Forest is now your Nottingham Forest team, deeply marked by you. I can’t change that mark, so I struggled a lot to be the acting manager. You know what? Tony? Sometimes when I have to instruct the players, I have to borrow your identity to be effective.”

Twain only raised his eyebrows and did not say anything.

“I said to them—Tony thinks...so on and so forth. Tony says so and so. Then they’ll listen. The king’s name is no exaggeration. You’re really powerful, Tony.”

“Is this a compliment to me?” Twain did not laugh. “Simply put, you want to be a manager, but at Nottingham Forest, you can only be an assistant manager. That’s right, isn’t it?”

Dunn nodded.

Twain fell silent for a moment and then said, “It looks like I really... did not consider your feelings. I only thought about how you can help me a lot by keeping you by my side as an assistant manager... I should probably say to you generously at this time, ‘Go on. Go pursue your life ideals?’ But I still don’t want you to go. I’m a selfish person. I can’t help it. If you leave, it will be hard for me in my job.”

Dunn shook his head and said, “You are giving yourself an excuse to be lazy.”

“Okay. I’m trying to be lazy.” Twain nodded and admitted Dunn’s “allegations.” He said, “But regardless of the reason, don’t you think we’re golden partners? We’re invincible when we’re together! I want you to stay, Dunn.”

When Twain asked Dunn to do something in the past, he would always agree, whether he was willing or not. But this time, Twain’s move did not work. It looked like Dunn had made up his mind. He said, “It’s no use, Tony. I thought about it for a long time and felt I should leave the Forest team to try to a different path.”

“Perhaps is there a club inviting you?”

Dunn did not deny. He nodded in reply, “There is a club.”

“Ha!” Twain gave a dry laugh.

“An EFL League Two team.”

Twain really laughed this time. He seemed to have heard a funny joke. Dunn did not stop him and watched quietly next to him as Twain crouched on the ground and laughed.

“Ha... Let’s be honest, Dunn. Do you really think that leaving Nottingham Forest for such a team would do you any good for your future? EFL League Two, huh? A fourth-tier team is equivalent to the previous the Football League Third Division! Do you really want to go?”

Dunn said very seriously, “I really want to go.”

“Are you sure?” Squatting on the ground, Twain did not laugh, and just looked at him from the corner of his eyes.”

“I’m sure.”

“Is that good for you?” Twain stood up and asked angrily. He really could not understand Dunn’s choice, so he would rather think that it was Dunn’s excuse to deliberately get away from him.

“I don’t know. Tony. I don’t know if it’s good for me. But I want to try... Maybe I’m still terrible that I can’t even lead a League Two team well and be fired in the end. Who knows?” He spoke calmly about the terrible future. “But the idea has going around my mind every day. I just want to try... Even if I don’t succeed, at least I have tried.”

“Go and try to lead a team with your mark on it?”

“Yes. I envy you, Tony. I hope one day I can achieve accomplishments like you.”

Twain did not express any joy at Dunn’s praise. He still had a straight face and was in a very bad mood.

“I decided to start from scratch. I’m confident I’ve learned a lot from you which should help me. But I don’t have to be the type of manager like you are. I’m still not good at fight a war of words with people.”

“That kind of team... No name or no profit...” Twain still wanted to persuade Dunn to give up the illusional idea.

“I don’t care much about fame and profit, Tony. I just want to see if I have the ability to be a manager.”

Twain was still frowning and looked unhappy.

Dunn sighed when he saw him looking this, “Do you still remember Chen Jian, Tony?”

Twain stared blankly for a moment. He did not react to why Dunn would suddenly mention the Chinese kid. “I remember. What about him? He’s still training in the youth team and reserves. I haven’t gone to see him in a long time...”

“Do you still recall what you spoke to him about on the phone at the time and asked him to come to England to play? Do you still remember how excited you were after the phone call with him? Do you remember when you decided to train him using Wood’s training program and how you answer my question?”

Twain was rendered speechless by Dunn’s three consecutive questions.

“You ask me if I have any dreams. You ask me if I have the impulse to do certain things. You also told me, ‘Men will definitely have one thing in life that makes them want to complete it no matter what.’ Thank you, Tony. Now I have a dream and the urge to complete something, I’ve the one thing in my life that I want to finish no matter what.”

Twain was checkmated by Dunn using his own words spoken previously. He completely lost his anger.

He looked at Dunn for a long time, and then gave a smile, “You’re getting more and more slick with your words.”

Dunn felt relieved when he saw him smile, “Really?”

“If you really determined to leave, I can’t stop you. After all, you’re not my personal belongings. I have no right to interfere in your life. The kind of road you have to take, and how you will end up, have nothing to do with me.” Twain waved his hands in defeat. He was really tough, but he was not unreasonable.

When Dunn heard him say this, he suddenly smiled, “Your words are really callous.”

“You hurt me. Of course, I’m going to be a little heartless.” Twain glared at him and said, “But ... I said if, if. If you really can’t make it, then come back. The door at Wilford is always open to you.”

“Like Queiroz?”

Twain chuckled, “I think it’s incorrect that one should not go back to one’s past experiences. If you want to come back, give me a call. I’ll free up the assistant manager’s position for you.”

Dunn did not say anything. He felt more relaxed after he told Twain what he thought. From now on, he could pursue his own ideal. Although it was a bit cruel to Twain, after all, they worked alongside each other all the time and had a tacit understanding in the work, Twain would be caught unprepared with his sudden departure. But in fact, if he had not considered to minimize the impact, he might have left the season when Twain returned. The Forest team was on track this season, with a new group of young players such as Mitchell revealing outstanding talent which made him think that it was time. He could leave with confidence.

“Tony. Since I’m leaving, there’s something I want to say to you... In fact, my departure is a good thing for you.”

“How is that a good thing? I will be short a right-hand man.”

“You had always used the excuse that you’re not familiar with training for the team to let me arrange everything. But you’ve been in the team for eight years now. You should have observed enough to learn to do it, shouldn’t you? But I’m always here, so you leave everything to me. Now that I’m leaving and you can’t find anyone, you’ll have to do it yourself. I think it will further raise your level. Don’t underestimate yourself, Tony. You have the potential that you have not developed. It’s a waste and it’s a shame to waste it.”

Twain continued to laugh, “Are these words of a man on his deathbed coming from the heart?”

Dunn did not continue to get tangled with Twain on the subject. He believed that Twain had listened. “I have made everything clear to you, so I have nothing else to say.” He was going to say goodbye.

“Oh right, can you tell me which team asked you to be the manager?”

Dunn was unable to suppress a tiny smile on his face when he heard Twain asked.

Twain was even more curious and asked, “Which one?” If you need help at that time, I can loan you the Forest youth team players. You can pick the players you want. I won’t charge you the fees for the loan ...”

Dunn could not bear it any longer and laughed, “Notts County.”

Twain’s eyes widened and stopped mid-sentence. His mouth was agape as if he saw an alien.

“I did not hear wrongly, did I?”

“I thought you’d be happy that I don’t have to move out of Nottingham.”

“What? How can I be happy?” Twain felt that he’d been fooled. “Nottingham Forest’s arch enemy! I take back every word I said before! Want to loan my players from me? No way! Keep dreaming! The next time we meet, we will fight for real!”

“Ha! Are you finally interested in the city’s derby?” Dunn laughed happily.

Twain gritted his teeth and stared at him, “Are you still laughing? You did this on purpose, didn’t you? Of all the teams to pick from, you pick Notts County!”

Dunn spread his hands and said, “The other teams are not keen on me. Only they came to me. They don’t think there’s anything wrong with me as the assistant manager of the Forest team. I certainly will not turn them down just because they’re from Notts County.”

“You really... You really will do whatever it takes in order to be a manager, won’t you?” Twain felt helpless.

“The conditions they offered are also very attractive. Although the team is not in good shape recently, they promised that I make all the decisions in the team and also gave me control of the youth camp. I can build my team from the ground up and according to my own philosophy. This is the best condition.”

Twain nodded forcefully, “Very well! I wish you all the best to lead the team to move up three levels and appear in the Premier League. That way, I will have two chances to crush you bastard face to face every season!”

“I’m looking forward to that day.” Dunn replied with a smile.

Even though he scolded him, Twain still reached his hand out and said, “If you find that you can’t make it in Notts County and want to come back, I’ll still welcome you. You don’t have to worry about the pressure from the fans. I’m sure my words still carry some weight.”

Dunn also put his hand out and said, “Thank you, Tony.”

Two days later, the media report thanked him for all his contributions to the team and wished him all the best elsewhere.

Three days later, the Notts County officials announced the official signing of the former Nottingham Forest assistant manager, Dunn for a four-year contract as the team's new manager.

However, both pieces of news were drowned out in the flood of news about "Ferguson", and did not even make a tiny splash.

The Nottingham Forest and Notts County fans had taken note of the two pieces of news. They were divided on the issue. Some people understood and some people rebuked. But in any case, they could not interfere with the path that Dunn wanted to take.

Brosnan was going to interview Twain. He wanted to know the story behind the personnel change. But Twain, who had already flew to Los Angeles to be with his wife, simply turned off his cell phone. So, he could only give a sigh when he held a phone which emitted a busy ringtone.

After five years of working with Twain, Dunn chose to take a different path. Whether this choice was a blessing or curse for him and Twain, it was still unknown. The two of them chose two different paths. Would the two paths meet someday after a few years?

### **Chapter 823: A Crimson New Beginning**

While Twain and Shania indulged in their sensual activities every night in Los Angeles, Allan's negotiations with Hong Kong's Cheung Kong Holdings Limited were in their final stages. After a year of repeated negotiations, the two sides had basically reached an agreement. Cheung Kong Holdings Limited obtained the development and management rights to the land around Clifton's new Nottingham Forest stadium at the lowest price, while Nottingham Forest did not have to pay out of its own pocket for the development and other miscellaneous expenses of the new stadium. After thirty years of Chinese operation, the right to operate these areas would be gradually returned to the Nottingham Forest Football Club.

The previous deadline proposed by Cheung Kong Holdings Limited was fifty years, which Allan considered too greedy and unreasonable. The negotiations between the two sides were deadlocked. After a period of cold war, Allan took the initiative to call on them again with a thick skin, hoping to reopen the negotiations. Only the Chinese appeared to be rich during the world financial crisis...

The world economic environment was gradually improving, and the Clifton area development plan had restarted. It also added a lot of jobs in the Nottingham area. The Nottingham city council had given the greatest support for the project.

One must know that Nottingham was not a very safe city. Its crime rate had been ranked one of the highest in the United Kingdom all year round. The financial crisis had added many unemployed people and they became a destabilizing factor in this society. Since the Nottingham Forest Football Club and Hong Kong's Cheung Kong Holdings Limited could finally reach an agreement to provide nearly ten thousand jobs in the area, it was indeed a good thing that allowed the mayor to breathe a sigh of relief. Of course, he would support it.

Eventually, the day before Twain decided to return to Nottingham, the representatives of both parties formally signed a contract in Hong Kong. The next day, the first batch of staff from Cheung Kong Holdings Limited set out for Britain and began their overseas expansion plans.

The entire Clifton development was expected to take eight years to get the preliminary plans to take shape. Just the stadium alone was estimated to be under construction for two to three years. Nottingham Forest would officially move to the new stadium for the 2014-2015 season if all went well.

In order to show its sincerity for the cooperation, the Nottingham Forest Football Club originally intended to give the naming rights of the new stadium to Cheung Kong Holdings Limited, which invested in the construction of the project. It was to be called the “Cheung Kong Holdings Limited Stadium.”

But Victor Li, now the chairman of Cheung Kong Holdings Limited’s board of directors, rejected the name. He had given the new stadium a name that would please the locals as well as in keeping with the Chinese background of the investors.

The Red Stadium.

Red was naturally the main color of Nottingham Forest, while red was also the traditional Chinese representative color.

When the Arsenal club’s new stadium was named the “Emirates Stadium”, many fans protested the name which was unrelated to Arsenal, except that the voices of the fans clearly could not stand up to the Sheikhs’ oil money. But Victor Li was much smarter, and the name was cleverly pleasing. Whether they were Nottingham people or Chinese, they would love it.

Judging from the new stadium renderings given by Cheung Kong Holdings Limited, the main color of the stadium would also be the same as the Nottingham Forest jersey, a slightly darker red—crimson. Carrying on with the rectangular style of most of English pitches, it could accommodate sixty thousand spectators to watch the game at the same time. The sixty thousand seats would have backs. At the same time, in keeping with the expansion space, it could be expanded to a capacity of up to sixty-eight thousand people. There would be a luxury box above the stands on both east and west sides. This time it was a really authentic stand-alone box and not the small, shabby “box” in the City Ground stadium that looked like a corridor. It was estimated that there would be two hundred and twenty luxury boxes that could accommodate more than four hundred and forty VIPs to watch the game.

The north grandstand would still be home to the home team’s most hardcore fan pool, and the name “Robin Hood” would be engraved above the grandstand to inspire the team and the fans to fight ceaselessly like the brave Robin Hood.

The stadium had a retractable roof, so that even the worst weather conditions would not affect the game held in the stadium. Good geothermal and drainage systems ensured that the site condition was always at its best. This time, there would never be another repeat of the predicament in the Nottingham Forest’s home game against Barcelona in last season’s Champions League quarterfinal.

Guardiola must be in tears at this moment...

There was also a wide tunnel for both home and visiting teams to enter the stadium at the same time, as well as spacious, bright, clean and tidy modern locker rooms. The City Ground stadium's locker rooms with the obvious 1980s-style were practically like public toilets...

There were also four huge LCD television displays in four sides of the grandstand, which could display the latest melees, scores, goal replays in real time and so on.

Up to a dozen gateways and links to the stadium's all-encompassing transport network ensured that sixty thousand people could leave within ten minutes after the end of the game. Even under exceptional circumstances, the busy and tense flow could still be orderly and calm.

Once the project was finished, such a stadium would be completely designed and built in accordance with the standard set by the UEFA for five-star stadiums. The UEFA would officially award it the honorary title of "a five-star stadium" after the inspection.

At that time, the Nottingham Forest Football Club could formally apply to host the finals of the UEFA Champions League and UEFA Europa League.

With a brilliant history and results as well as a brand new five-star stadium, Nottingham Forest were making big strides towards the goal of being "a powerhouse club."

Twain spent two wonderful weeks in Los Angeles with Shania and reluctantly bade farewell to the Los Angeles sunshine and his beautiful wife to return to Nottingham. Work in the new was about to start.

When the team regrouped, Twain first explained to the players the reason Dunn left. There was no contradiction, as some media had reported. Then he set out to rearrange the work and take over the job that Dunn had left behind.

When Dunn was still with the team, Twain simply did not have to worry about the daily training and miscellaneous matters. Dunn was someone who had a deep tacit understanding with Twain. Dunn knew what to do without Twain having to open his mouth and he did well.

It was indeed Twain's greatest fortune to have such an assistant.

Unfortunately, the fortune was gone now. He had to do everything personally. Fortunately, he had been in the team for a long time. He was able to handle these things when he was familiarized with them.

He was certainly more tired than before, but Twain also slowly realized how correct Dunn's words were at the time. He did improve ...

He used to make little headway before but when his reliance on Dunn was taken away, he found that he could actually do a lot more.

First of all, he had to determine the new season's lineup and matters like signings and transfers.

In the 07-08 season, the Forest team signed a contract with the Mexican young player, Martín Galván. He had finally reached the age of eighteen and could play abroad. He ended his career at Cruz Azul, packed up his bags and came to the unfamiliar England with his family. Living in the apartment provided by the club for their family, he still had to adapt from scratch with regards to the language, diet, weather and football style. For him, everything about Nottingham Forest was fresh and an impact on the past.



Twain did not expect him to come and be able to play for the team in the games. He still had to learn to adapt in the youth team and reserves for a while. It also made it easier for the Forest team's coaching staff to closely observe him. It was not that he would be famous and could do what he wanted in coming to England. No, on the contrary, if he did not perform well and was slow in adapting to Nottingham Forest's football, he would be likely to be sold again by Twain. Twain had a lot of affection for the old players, but he did not invest too much emotion in those young players. It was a cruel line of work. Nobody knew if they could make it.

Another person returning to the team was Adriano Moke, who was on loan at Blackburn Rovers and played outstandingly this season. He had twenty-three appearances in the league tournament, scored two goals and assisted five times. He had five appearances in the EFL Cup with one goal and six assists. In total, he had three goals and eleven assists. As a winger, he gave satisfactory results. After Moke's loan period, Blackburn Rovers wanted to continue the loan, but Twain refused. On the one hand, putting Moke on loan was to give him the opportunity to train. On the other hand, it was in hopes that this talented player's overly ambitious nature could worn down, so that he could keep his feet on the ground. In this way, it could help with his development.

Judging from the situation over the past few seasons, he had clearly met Twain's expectation. Moke's arrogant and opinionated character was much moderated. He was more pragmatic and down-to-earth. So, Twain thought it was time to reward him by getting into the First Team and bringing him back to the First Team. It was also convenient for Twain to observe his performance up close which would be conducive to his growth. After all, Moke was a Forest player. If everything went as planned, he would play for the Forest team in the future. Wandering around outside in other teams all the time would not help him develop a sense of belonging to his team and familiarize with the team's style of play.

Moke's return would not cause the midfield to be crowded. Lennon could play on both left and right wings and Fernández could also sometimes play as the defensive midfielder in the middle. Considering that the Forest team would definitely compete in multiple tournaments next season, the staffing of the midfield was actually reasonable. Only John Bostock needed to remain on loan because he was currently unable to occupy a spot in the Nottingham Forest midfield with his current ability.

There was no change in the rear defensive line. Gareth Bale was back in the team after his recovered from his injury. The competition for the left back position was fiercer than ever, but the strength was also greatly enhanced. Other than that, Twain had no plans to bring in full back in the summer. The past few seasons had proved that Nottingham Forest's defensive system was perfect, and he did not need to bring in any new players to disrupt the already tight and coordinated defense. Although Pepe and the others still received a number of transfer applications, Twain refused them all without exception.

The stability of the rear defensive line overpowered everything. He would break it up without any special circumstances.

In the forward line, Van Nistelrooy, who already retired at the end of last season, left Nottingham and returned to his hometown In the Netherlands to enjoy his days without professional football. He was living a comfortable and idyllic life.

Nicolás Millán and Victor Moses continued to be on loan. Although Moses was already twenty years old, the competition in the Forest team's forward line was too fierce. He would not even get to play if he did

not go on loan. Looking at the current Forest team's strikers—"Romani Rooney", Freddy Eastwood, who was Twain's favorite in the club and would always save the team at crucial moments; "Super Ibi" Ibišević, who was in excellent form, scored twenty-seven goals in the Premier League last season and won the Premier League Golden Boot; in addition, the talented giant, the second Ibrahimović, Aaron Mitchell, who broke out of the blue in the second leg against Barcelona; Although Gabriel Agbonlahor often played as the right back, he was still considered a striker and moved with a surprisingly fast speed that could serve him as the most lethal dagger during a counterattack. Adding to the number were Nicolás Millán that might appear in the future and Victor Moses which made up six strikers. If Twain was going to stick to his 4-5-1 formation for most of the season, then it was rather ferocity and cruel to compete for the six strikers to vie for a spot on the field.

Twain had been looking for ways to reduce that number, including not bringing in new strikers from the transfer market and allowing some strikers to try to play more positions. Agbonlahor himself could play multiple positions, which was obviously the best. And Nicolás Millán could also play in the wing and should have a place when he returned to the team. Eastwood was no longer a pure striker after a number of injuries. His passes and awareness could help connect the team's strikers and midfielders. He was more like a False 9. Sometimes he could even take Şahin's position, but then he was not tested for his playmaker skills. The work would be left to Wood and Tiago behind him. Although his shooting skills and awareness were still there, he was further away from the penalty area. He was still not the best candidate for the "1" in the 4-5-1 formation.

Ibišević, who was in his peak playing years, was the striker Twain would need to rely on in the coming years. Mitchell, on the other hand, was young. Despite his great talent, he needed to accumulate experience, step by step. Twain did not want to spoil things through excessive enthusiasm. At times he had to deliberately put the kid on the bench. Fortunately, Mitchell's personality was completely different from Bendtner's. He listened to Twain, who did not have to worry about being too harsh and pushing him away.

While Evan had promised Twain that he would have more funds invested in the transfer market this summer, Twain had no plans to be extravagant. He did not like those stingy owners who never want to give a little more money for the team to put into the transfer market like Grant. Similarly, Twain also did not like those owners who liked to throw money around to sign a bunch of players he did not need and stuff them in the team.

The change mainly happened in the midfield.

In the 4-5-1 formation, the two midfielders at the back were very important. In Nottingham Forest's current squad, George Wood and Tiago mainly played the positions. He did not have to worry about Wood as there was basically no big problem. The key here was Tiago.

The Portuguese midfielder had just celebrated his thirtieth birthday. Although his competitive form was still in its golden age, it was an indisputable fact that his competitive curve was about to decline. As he got older, problems would arise. Twain could not wait until the problem emerged to find a solution. He must plan ahead.

In any case, the position required at least three players to facilitate the rotation. There were a few good midfielders who played in the middle in the football world these days, such as Mascherano, Veloso,

Lassana Diarra... But none of the three players could come. One was the Reds, Liverpool's absolute main force, someone whom AC Milan could not even take away from Anfield. The second was the new darling of San Siro. The third was "the second Makelele" whom Real Madrid had been lacking for years.

Twain was interested in the Argentine midfielder, Gago, who had unhappy at Real Madrid.

With the presence of van der Vaart and Ribéry, as well as Diarra, Gago's space for survival at Real Madrid was getting smaller and smaller. Originally when he was playing in Club Atlético River Plate, he played with confidence and ease and was famous for his sense of the big picture in the game. But at Real Madrid, in order to fight for a chance to play, he had to change his style of play and became a midfielder like Gattuso. Although he was hard-working and not bad...the situation changed when Lassana Diarra came.

In terms of the defense abilities such as interception, tackling, marking, he was not as good as Diarra. In his ability to pass the ball and organize the offense with long shots to attack, he was not as good as van der Vaart and Ribéry. He appeared to be a little mediocre. His defensive ability was stronger than van der Vaart's. His offensive ability seemed to be slightly better than Diarra's. But he did not have one ability that had the prominent advantage, leaving him on the bench at in the star-studded Real Madrid.

He worked very hard the pitch, but he had played as a foot soldier for so many years and seemed to forget how to attack. He often made mistakes when passing the ball forward on the pitch. And as a defensive midfielder, once he made an error in his pass, the other side could directly counterattack and cause a mess in Real Madrid's rear defensive line.

Although he occasionally had some flashes of brilliance, it was too insignificant compared to his teammates around him...

Gago's chances for appearances at Real Madrid had been woeful these two seasons, while his Argentine teammate, Higuaín did very well instead.

Although he did not do so well, Twain saw what he needed—in his team he did not need Gago to be a foot soldier and tirelessly run around to tackle and foul in the midfield as he did at Real Madrid. George Wood could handle such tasks. What he needed was Gago's special features such as his strong sense of the big picture in the game, excellent passes and creativity. In addition, Gago had good endurance and a serious attitude, which Twain quite liked. He liked dedicated players, even if they were not geniuses.

Based on these circumstances, Twain found Gago's agent.

One side wanted the player and the other side wanted to leave. Both sides hit it off. Next, it was the Forest club's offer to Real Madrid.

Real Madrid also believed that Gago's role in the current team was not obvious. Rather than keeping him, it was better to sell him. After all, he was already twenty-five years old, and in any case could not be counted as a "young promising player." There was basically no hope to count on if he had not succeed at twenty-five. Playing for a powerhouse club was prestigious but the demands of a powerhouse club was much higher and more stringent.

Negotiations between the two sides went well, with Nottingham Forest's offer of ten million pounds accepted by Real Madrid. Although it cost them sixteen and a half million pounds to buy him at the time,

Real Madrid always did the same thing—to buy a player at a high price and then sell him at a low price or give him away for free. Anyway, the super wealthy Real Madrid did not care about the small amounts of money. Moreover, Nottingham Forest had sold a lot of players to Real Madrid, and the relationship between the top brass of the two teams appeared to be good.

In this way, Fernando Gago, the Argentine midfielder, who played four and a half seasons at Real Madrid and was once known as “the second Redondo”, put on Nottingham Forest’s number 16 red jersey.

He hoped to usher in a new chapter in his career in England. And Tony Twain hoped that under his own hands, Gago could restore his elegant style of playing like “the second Redondo” and inject a limitless momentum into the team’s offense.

But Gago did not seem to be adapting to the style of the new team. Whether in training or friendly games, he always played according to what he did at Real Madrid by participating too much in the midfield defense and contribute little to the offense.

Due to this, Twain specifically found him and talked to him about it.

In fact, the conversation was very simple and less than a minute. Twain only made a remark, and everything suddenly became clear at once for Gago.

At the time, Twain said, “You only need to care about passing the ball forward, don’t be afraid of mistakes. Don’t worry about errors in passing and dribbling. George is around you, isn’t he? Trust him and just boldly attack with confidence!”

A few years later, when Gago recalled his career, he still thought that Tony Twain’s words gave him the greatest help and encouragement.

#### **Chapter 824: Everyone’s on Their Way**

In the blink of an eye, Chen Jian has already spent two years in a foreign land. If he were to count the year in which he was sent here after participating in the talent show, then this was his third year in Nottingham.

He had initially stayed at the proclaimed Nottingham Forest’s most die-hard fan, Mr. John’s home. However, he later moved out because he wanted to learn to be independent.

Chen Jian might be having an apprenticeship with Nottingham Forest at the moment, but that did not stop him from continuing his studies at Nottingham University. He keeps a low-profile in school, and does not reveal his additional identity as a footballer to his school mates.

Having spent three years in England, Chen Jian no longer struggles with communicating in English. He is always the most hardworking and passionate player amongst his team mates, and the coaches would always use him as an exemplar to encourage his team mates to train hard.

His behavior piqued the interest of his team mates and they asked him, “Do all Chinese people work as hard as you?”

Chen Jian should feel lonely and left out since he was the only Chinese or Asian in his team. However, he focused all his attention on his training solely, and he did not think about any of these other trifles.

He knew that he was in a race against time. He would not be able to accomplish anything in his life if he were to slack on his training now.

He firmly believes in a principle that was brought up in many of the stories that he listened to while growing up:

A genius is only able to achieve success because he is working hard in the time that another uses to drink coffee. There is no such thing as a genius who is able to achieve success just by relying on his gift alone.

If even a genius needs to work hard, then there was no way an ordinary person like him could not work hard.

A genius would still have his gift without hard work, but an ordinary person would have nothing without hard work.

Chen Jian was assigned to train with the U15 team during the very first year that he joined Nottingham Forest due to his poor foundation in football. He might have stuck out like a sore thumb amongst a group of 14 to 15 year olds, but he was not embarrassed about the situation. He put his heart and soul into training his footballing foundation, and he did not care about the looks that were thrown his way.

It was difficult for him to find a training partner as a result of the age gap between him and his other team mates in the U15 team. Therefore, he could only practise by himself most of the time.

Chen Jian was also unable to participate in the U15 competitions.

In China, it was common for players to lie about their actual ages, but that was not the case in England.

In truth, Chen Jian longed to participate in the U15 competitions. Every time the team participated in a competition, he would sit by the side and become very engrossed in watching how the players play football.

The players might be younger than him by four or five years, but besides his physical build being slightly better than theirs, he was not able to find a single advantage that he had over them.

Chen Jian was also not able to participate in intra-team U15 competitions either. He was too old, and it would be too easy for him to take advantage of his physical build, which would make things unfair to the younger and smaller players in the team.

This situation lasted for close to a year.

In the second year, Chen Jian was promoted to train with the U18 team despite being nearly 20 years old by then. However, even then, he was still unqualified to participate in U18 competitions such as the FA Youth Cup. He was only able to play in intra-team U18 competitions, or some unofficial warm-up competitions. But, he was still able to participate in some kind of competition at the very least.

Chen Jian was actually a very intelligent person. His intelligence can be discerned from how he was able to converse in fluent English with his British team mates in just a short period of time.

Even if he was not selected to play in a particular game, Chen Jian would still make a trip down to watch the match in person. In fact, he never misses a match that Nottingham Forest plays in, be it a youth team match, a reserve team match or a first team match.

The best part about watching the match in person rather than on TV is that his view would not be restricted by the camera shot. He is able to get a complete view of the entire pitch.

Other than a few occasional appearances as a right back, Chen Jian mostly featured as a midfielder who operated down the middle of the pitch in the youth team. It was a position that required him to be able to see and grasp everything that was happening on the pitch.

He would mull over every action that a player takes while he watches the game from the stands.

Why did they choose to deal with the ball that way and not this way? What are the pros and cons of every possible method of dealing with something?

He would pay attention to the performance that the more famous players put in on the pitch. He would observe how they play football in general.

Chen Jian believes that watching football is also a form of training. A player who is willing to rack his brains and analyze the game being played out before him would definitely be able to learn a lot of things just by watching.

He also carries a small notebook with him whenever he shows up to watch the matches. He would jot down everything that he observed or thought of as he watched the match, so that he is able to refer to the notes again in the future.

A midfielder needs to be the most intelligent player on the pitch, because he needs to be able to analyze what is happening on the pitch at all times and make the best decision that corresponds with the situation. In this sense, the training that Chen Jian has given himself is apt.

Chen Jian did not only watch and analyze the games. He would also try to apply what he learned from the matches in his actual training.

All the coaches of the youth team admire his way of playing football in which he would make use of his brain.

Chen Jian did not have any advantage in his physicality once he was put into the U18 team. There were lots of professional footballers who were physically stronger than he was. Asians simply are not able to measure up against the Westerners in terms of physical stature and height.

In terms of explosive power, Chen Jian was not the weakest in the team, but neither was he the most outstanding. He was just average at best. The only thing that he could work on to make himself stand out from the rest of his team mates was his ability to make use of his brain. Unlike physical stature and height, a person's intelligence does not rely on his genes.

He might not be physically strong enough. He might lack explosive power and he might also not be fast enough. But, he can make up for all those weaknesses with his intellect.

A year has passed since Chen Jian trained himself to use his brains more while playing football, and he has managed to achieve outstanding results.

He might not be able to participate in the FA Youth Cup or the Youth League, but he was able to put up good performances in the intra-team matches.

Chen Jian typically plays as a defensive midfielder for his team. When he has to defend, he does not make use of his physicality to fight for the ball with his opponents. Instead, he would judge where his opponent would run to during his attack and then run over to the area before his opponent is able to get there so as to intercept the ball and stop the opposition's offense before it threatens his team's goal.

Similarly, he would not try to use his pace against his opponents when he is trying to bring the ball forward during an attack. He would always observe the situation on the pitch after he has received a pass, and he would then pass the ball over to where it should be passed to. Doing so makes his attacks easy, effective and straightforward. It also enables him to grasp any fleeting chance to catch their opponents off guard and launch an attack.

However, it did not matter how hard he trained and how well he performed in the youth team. He remained as an 'apprentice' in Nottingham Forest, and the club has never offered him a new professional contract. His salary was very low and it was only enough to let him live his life in Nottingham. He was not able to send money back to his parents, and neither did he have the money to spend on women to satisfy his biological needs.

His life was simple and dull. He spent most of his time at either the training grounds or his apartment, and he would drop by the university once in a while. It has been three years since he came to Nottingham, but he has only gone to the downtown shopping district five times so far, and he did not even know where the other places of entertainment were at.

He did not know how much longer such a life would last. He was not some monk doing penance. He craved to live a life of higher quality, but he needed to be given a higher salary in order for him to achieve that. He needed a new professional contract.

He still vividly remembers every single word that Tony Twain said to him in that very phone call.

"... You are just an apprentice. I won't guarantee you anything. I won't promise that you'd be able to fulfil your dream and become a professional footballer in the future. Don't even think about something like being able to represent the first team in competitions right now! The club will also not be able to promise you anything. Be it your pay, your treatment or a guaranteed contract... We won't promise you anything. We would not give you anything besides a chance. It is possible that you would still be in the reserves team fighting for a spot in the first team once you are 26. It is also possible that you would be kicked out of the club and be forced to join a semi-professional football team. There are even worse scenarios, but I leave those to your imagination..."

Will those scenarios become a reality?

Chen Jian did not return to China during the month's long vacation. He intended to use the time to continue with his practice.

His actions caused his mother to worry about him, and she took a month's leave to fly over to England to visit him. His father, on the other hand, was not able to fly over because he had to work. That was to be expected, since his family was not rich enough to be able to emigrate over to England to be with their son.

Chen Jian could be considered to be working right now, and it was good that he no longer needed to ask for money from his parents.

Both his parents were doing jobs with a low salary. It would take them a long time to plan their finances before they are able to pay for a trip to England.

Chen Jian hoped that he would be able to receive a professional contract from the club soon. This would increase his salary and he would then be able to reduce the financial burdens on his parents.

It would mostly be a lie if he were to say that he wanted to play football because it was his passion. His wish was to turn his passion into his profession. There would be nothing more blissful to him in this whole wide world than that.

His mother brought numerous bags of items with her when she came over to England. Most of the items were specialties and condiments from Sichuan.

She had brought them along because she was worried about her son's inability to taste authentic Sichuan cuisines during his time in England, and because she wanted to save money, since the cost of living in England was much higher as compared to Mianyang City, their hometown.

However, Chen Jian could not eat any of the Sichuan food products she brought along, be it the Sichuan bacon or sausages, because he was a professional athlete and he could not eat any of those food.

In truth, he really wanted to eat them, but he had to force himself to stay away from them. If he was not able to persevere with this strict diet, then he should just give up on being a professional footballer entirely.

His mother could not understand why he would find boiled chicken delicious. Despite their disagreements over food however, the two still spent a happy month with each other. Chen Jian did not feel as lonely with his mother by his side.

Every night after training, he would bring his mother out to shop. At times, he would also bring her to watch Forest's first team matches at the stadium. He wanted to let her experience the crazy atmosphere. However, his mother did not want to go after a visit or two because she found the atmosphere too noisy and she did not think that her heart would be able to take it...

When the time for their separation drew near, Chen Jian began contemplating about what he should get for his parents as a gift. He eventually decided to bring his mother over to London during the weekend to buy a gift for both of them.

Oxford Street is a famous business district in London. Nearly all of the luxury brands in the world have set up a retail store in this district.

Every year, large numbers of tourists make their way over to shop for branded products at Oxford Street. They come here to shop not because of the appeal of the luxury brands, but because the products here are slightly cheaper as compared to other places.



Despite the cheaper price however, the expression on Chen Jian's mother's face changed after she glanced at the price tags on a few items. She immediately pulled on her son and urged him to leave. She looked like she would never go near any of these shops in her life again.

Regrettably for her, Chen Jian was adamant about buying them gifts as his way of showing filial piety towards them.

It was only natural for Chen Jian to want to buy gifts for his parents, considering what they had done for him in the past.

His parents were the only ones who stood up for him at a time where all his close friends and relatives were against his decision of dropping out of the Tianjin Police Academy to pursue his footballing dream in England.

They did not think that Chen Jian was talented enough to make a name for himself in the footballing scene. One of his relatives who had no knowledge of the state of football in England used the state of football in China as a way of deterring him from going over to England.

"Jian, look at the reputation surrounding Chinese professional football! Listen to me. Don't think about the quality of the school that you are enrolled in. All you need to do is to get a certificate. When you graduate and return here, I will use my connections to land you a job at the court. Don't become a professional footballer, okay?"

If Chen Jian could still vividly remember the spectacle whereby all his relatives made a trip over to talk him out of his decision, then he would certainly remember how his parents had supported him in the face of his relatives even more clearly.

His relatives intended to get his parents to stop him from pursuing unrealistic things. They knew that there was a chance that Chen Jian would not listen to their words, no matter how good a relationship they might have with him. However, a son would surely not disobey his parents should they tell him to give up on his impractical dream.

Chen Jian's parents gave a unified response to their relatives when asked. "It's up to Chen Jian. We as parents can't interfere with his decision. If he wants to go, then we'd let him go."

His relatives could say nothing else when his parents were supportive of his decision. Chen Jian subsequently flew over from Sichuan to England and began his journey to realize his dream.

Chen Jian did not know what he would be doing now if not for his parents' open-mindedness.

Perhaps he would have gotten a job at court through his relative's connections, and also end up owing his relative a huge favour in the process. Or perhaps he would have become a security guard in Tianjin after graduation.

Who knows?

He definitely needed to do something to reciprocate the support he received from his parents.

However, he needed an excuse to get his mother to accept his gift wholeheartedly. Thus, he told his mother that he had just signed a new contract with the club before she arrived in England. He was no

longer just an apprentice but a professional footballer. His salary was one that a professional footballer would draw and definitely could not compare to the salary he was getting as an apprentice.

Therefore, it was not a problem to spend a bit of money to buy gifts for them!

His mother was happy for him after hearing the news. Chen Jian felt like it was worth lying after seeing the smile on her face.

As for how to cover up his lie afterwards, he would just think about it another time.

In the end, Chen Jian used up his two years' worth of savings to buy a tuxedo and a casual outfit for his father, and a handbag and skirt for his mother.

His mother wore the skirt and walked out of the dressing room happily. She looked a little embarrassed as she looked at herself before the mirror.

"My son is a famous football star now." She quickly averted the topic to hide her embarrassment from her son. "Your dad will also be very happy when he hears this."

"I'm just a professional footballer. I'm not a football star, mum..."

He might have feigned composure before his mother, but worry still crept onto his face when he walked over to the cashier to make payment.

He was not concerned about the money he had to spent to buy the gifts for his parents. He was just worried that his lie would be exposed one day. He could not imagine how disappointed his parents would be then...

His mother's flight was scheduled to take off on Tuesday afternoon. Chen Jian went to find the youth team manager, Greenwood, to request for a day off during training on Monday.

Greenwood did not accede to his request straight away. Instead, he grinned at him and said, "You came at a good timing, Chen. I received a call from South Wilford earlier. They told me to inform you to make a trip over and find Manager David Kerslake when you reach."

Chen Jian was confounded. "I'm sorry, Manager Greenwood. I didn't catch your words. Can you repeat yourself once more?"

Greenwood coughed lightly. "The first team assistant manager David Kerslake wishes to speak to you."

"Me?" Confusion was written all over Chen Jian's face. He did not interact with the first team coaching staff before. Why would the first team manager want to speak him?

Greenwood could not hold back his words after seeing the foolish look on Chen Jian's face. He slapped him on the back and said, "He's going to tell you to sign a new professional contract! You are not going to be an apprentice after this."

Chen Jian would have thought that he must be dreaming if not for the fact that Greenwood's slap was painful.

"You mean... They want to sign a professional contract with me?" He asked in disbelief.

“That’s right, Chen. Are all the Chinese as cautious as you? I’ve already repeated myself so many times, yet you still don’t believe in me. If you don’t believe in me, then I’m going to call them to put away the contract...”

Before he could finish his words however, Chen Jian had already run away from him after giving him a curt bow.

It took a while before the words, “Thank you, Manager Greenwood!” reached his ears.

Greenwood smiled. “Why are you thanking me? You should thank yourself, Chen.”

The first team training session had concluded a while back, but both Tony Twain and Kerslake had stayed behind to wait for their man in the office.

Sounds of hurried footsteps and rough breathing could be picked up down the corridor. The two looked at each other and smiled.

Their man was here.

Chen Jian stood before the closed door. He was not in a hurry to knock on the door. He held up a fist, lowered his head and closed his eyes. He tried his best to calm himself down and slow down his breathing.

No one could blame him for feeling so worked up after hearing the news. Nonetheless, it would still be very embarrassing to enter the room looking the way he was right now.

A while passed before he finally raised his hand to knock on the door.

“Come in.” Kerslake’s voice rang out from behind the door.

“Manager Twain. Manager Kerslake.” Chen Jian politely greeted both managers as he made his way inside.

Kerslake was full of smiles when he responded to his greeting. “Hello, Chen.”

Twain, on the other hand, was more composed and only nodded his head as acknowledgement.

“Judging from the way you look... I suppose you already know why we want to speak to you today?”

Chen Jian nodded his head forcefully. He was afraid that they would change their minds if he were to nod too softly.

“We have always kept an eye on your performances for the past two years. You have performed well in the youth team. Tony thinks that you are talented. If we were to count the year where you became a part of us after joining the talent show, then you have improved very fast in these 3 years.”

The first image that surfaced in Chen Jian’s mind was his mother’s smile. He no longer had to worry about the lie he told her earlier.

I did not lie! I’m really going to be given a professional contract now!

“You still don’t have an agent yet right?”

Chen Jian nodded his head.

“Hmm... It doesn't matter. It's just a normal contract like any other. Go through it yourself.” Kerslake passed the contract over to him.

Chen Jian scanned through the contract. He did not care about what was written on the contract. He only paid attention to the duration of the contract and his weekly pay. It was a four year contract, and he was going to be given 1500 pounds a week.

It was not a high salary, but it was much better than the salary he was drawing as an apprentice right now.

“I've finished looking through it. I have no issues with it! Can I sign on it now?” Chen Jian wished that a pen would magically appear in his hands right now.

Kerslake was about to open his mouth, but Twain cut him off.

“Don't be in such a hurry, lad.” The manager who had not spoken a single word since Chen Jian entered the room stood to his feet. “I want you to think about it carefully. Is this your final goal?”

Chen Jian did not understand what Twain was trying to say. He looked at him in confusion.

“We might have given you a professional contract, but based on your current abilities, you would still not be able to play for the first team. Even if we were to put aside the issue of the work permit, you would still not be able to appear in any of the first team matches. You also can't play in any of the reserve team matches.”

Chen Jian felt as though someone had doused cold water over him after hearing Twain's words. He was instantly able to cool down and think rationally.

What Twain said was right. Even if he signed the contract, he would still not be seen as an official member of Nottingham Forest, because he would not be able to represent Forest in any of its matches.

What good is there in being a professional footballer if he was not able to participate in matches?

Was he just going to go to the training grounds to train every day and then draw a salary for it?

I am indeed playing football to earn money, but this is not how I want to earn money.

Chen Jian shook his head. “If I'm not able to participate in matches, then why are you still giving this contract to me? I don't understand, Mr. Twain...”

Twain glanced at Kerslake, before continuing, “The reason why we called you here alone is because we have a special arrangement with regards to your contract with us... By signing this contract, you are undoubtedly a member of Nottingham Forest. We would be responsible for your professional career. However, as you know, the work permit is an issue. You won't be able to play for the team. We also wouldn't sign a player and leave him to train on our training grounds for four years. It'd be too much of a waste.”

“I do think highly of you. You have the potential to become a star player in the future. I believe that what you need right now is to play in matches against decent teams. There's little you can learn by

training in the youth team. But, as you know, you can't feature in matches if you don't have a work permit. It does not matter how talented you might be." Kerslake said. "This is a vexing issue, Chen."

Twain went on to say, "Let's not think about your personal abilities and potential for now. Let's focus on the work permit for now. Actually, there are many ways to obtain a work permit. It just depends if you are willing to do them. One of the ways is to marry a British woman."

Chen Jian was shocked. He was only 20 years old this year. He has been preoccupied with becoming a professional footballer for the past few years, so he did not have any time to spare to find a girlfriend.

How could someone like him possibly have contemplated about marriage?

Twain smiled after seeing Chen Jian's reaction. "Looks like this is a dead end. The other way is to apply for British citizenship."

Chen Jian was not as shocked this time round. He immediately shook his head. "This is impossible, Mr. Twain. China does not allow any of its citizens to hold dual citizenship."

"Then just change your citizenship." Twain told Chen Jian with a stoic face.

Chen Jian became even more animated. "No way! Definitely not! I have never thought about something like that. I am Chinese. How could I possibly give up my Chinese citizenship? My parents would never agree to this either..."

"Okay, let's say you get selected to be a member of the Chinese national football team and you manage to play in 75 per cent of your national team's 'A-ranked' matches. The Chinese national football team would also need to be ranked in the top 75 teams in the world... I don't think that's possible based on their current abilities. I also think it's a pity for you to be playing football in China..." Twain furrowed his brows and continued to speak to Chen Jian gravely. "I still think it's better for you to consider doing one of those two things that I told you about earlier. Either you marry a British woman or you change your citizenship."

Chen Jian continued to shake his head. "Mr. Twain. I am really grateful that you think so highly of me. It doesn't matter if my abilities are good enough to get into the Chinese national football team or not. It also doesn't matter how poor the Chinese national football team is. I will never reject being a player for them as long as they request for me to do so. It's impossible for me to change my citizenship, Mr. Twain. Perhaps you do not understand this strong sense of belonging that we Chinese feel towards China... I don't know how to explain this feeling to you either. Anyway, I won't ever change my citizenship. I can't do something like give up my Chinese citizenship to play football..."

Chen Jian suddenly felt as though the contract he was holding in his hands was very heavy.

He was prepared for the worst. He was prepared to either give up the opportunity to sign a professional contract with Nottingham Forest and return to China, or to play football in another country that did not require a work permit.

Twain shrugged. "I certainly don't understand. Isn't your dream to become a true professional footballer? Then why are you hesitating now that the chance is right before you? I think it's very normal to change your citizenship. Look at all the famous professional footballers. They all hold multiple

citizenships. Didn't the Brazilian football star Aílton give up his Brazilian citizenship to join Qatar so that he could participate in World Cup?"

Chen Jian furrowed his brows as he explained to the British manager, "It's not the same, Mr. Twain. The Chinese are different from the people from other parts of the world. Why is there a Chinatown in almost every country? I might not harbor such thoughts if I was born in England. But I was born and raised in China..." He started becoming more and more exasperated as he spoke. He did not know how to explain his feelings to the manager before him.

He bit on his lip and contemplated for a while. "A dream is just a dream, Mr. Twain. My dream is to turn my passion into my profession. However, neither my dream or my job would ever become more important than my 'motherland'. The word 'motherland' also refers to the land of your mother. How could anyone turn their back on their mother just for money? Being filial to your parents is one of the many Chinese morals that we are taught, and it is also the most important. How can I still call myself a human if I push my mother aside just to play football?"

Chen Jian got more and more worked up as he continued to try and explain his thoughts to Twain.

Eventually, he decided to just return the contract to him.

"I would rather give up on this chance if I really have to give up on my citizenship to play for Nottingham Forest, Mr. Twain."

Neither Twain nor Kerslake picked up the contract. Instead, the two broke out laughing.

"What did I tell you, David? Don't underestimate a Chinese's stubbornness! Ha!"

Twain then looked at the dumbstruck Chen Jian who could not make sense of what was happening.

"Don't worry. There's no one here who would force you do anything that you don't want to do. As for what citizenship you want to choose, that's entirely up to you. Your decision would not affect the validity of this contract. We still want you to sign this contract."

"Then... Just now..." Chen Jian was at a loss.

"That was just a joke."

The expression on Chen Jian's face turned solemn. "But I don't think that was a very funny joke, Manager."

Twain became a little embarrassed after hearing him say that. "All right, I'd apologize to you. I'd apologize to you sincerely for that. I definitely understood what you meant and how you felt earlier. I'm not joking about this. After all, I am a British who knows a thing or two about China."

Chen Jian's happiness had completely vanished due to the 'joke' that the two had pulled on him.

He looked at the contract in his hands and suddenly began thinking a lot more about his future. He was not as excited as he was at the start.

That's right. Even if I do sign on this contract, I can't guarantee that I'd be able to succeed in the future. This is just the first small step in the long journey ahead of me. If I can't play a match for Forest, then

where should I go four years from now? Will I be able to continue playing professional football? If I can, where can I go?

The work permit. The Chinese national team. My citizenship...

All these various issues continued to linger and encircle his mind.

Twain seemingly read his mind. He placed his hand on Chen Jian's shoulder. "Don't think about things in the future. You should focus on playing well for now. If you really possess the skills needed to represent Forest in matches, we would apply for the work permit for you. Thus, the work permit is not an issue. The only issue is whether you have the abilities to represent Forest. Do you understand?"

Twain's words enlightened Chen Jian.

That's right. I might not be able to get the work permit in the end, but as long as I have the abilities, then isn't it the same no matter where I play football? My dream was never to play for Nottingham Forest either...

Chen Jian eventually signed on the contract by penning down the Chinese characters for his name.

Twain received the signed contract from him. He scrutinized his signature for a while, before he smiled and said, "You sure wrote your name nicely."

He passed the contract over to Kerslake before turning to face him once again. "I heard your mother is in Nottingham?"

It was only then that Chen Jian remembered why he tried to find Manager Greenwood earlier.

"Yes, but she's flying back tomorrow. I was going to request for a day off from Manager Greenwood to send her off..."

"No problem. You can just make a request to me. Anyway, I approve of your request. Go ahead and send your mother off tomorrow. After you are done with that, I want you to start packing your things. You have to prepare to leave England as well."

The news caught Chen Jian off guard.

Are they trying to chase him away now that he has signed the contract?

"What kind of rubbish are you thinking about now? Why do you always like to think about all these useless things? Greenwood said that you are an intelligent player, but you need to use your intellect on other things! Without a work permit, you can't play in any matches here. Why would we keep you here? Can you develop your skills just by training? You obviously need to participate in matches! That's why, you are already on loan to Volendam, a Dutch football club that is playing in the Eerste Divisie. Develop yourself while you are there!"

Chen Jian did not think that he would be able to play in an official league match so soon. It might only be for a club in the Eerste Divisie, but he was not picky.

It was great that he was able to play in a match after being deprived of any chance for three years. How could he possibly still be picky?

“There’d be a language barrier, but you need to get used to it. No matter what, I still hope that you’d be able to perform well over there. From my point of view, I don’t want any player that walks out of Nottingham Forest to become a laughingstock to others. From your point of view, you need to perform well for your own good.”

Chen Jian nodded his head forcefully. “I promise you I’d do my best over there!”

Twain smiled after seeing the way he reacted to his words. Chen Jian reminded him of how a member of the Young Pioneers [1] would act when they were inducted into the organization...

“Word is cheap. If you fail to perform over there, then this would be the very last contract you are getting from us.” Twain pointed at the contract in Kerslake’s hands.

Then, he paused a little and changed the tone and language that he had been using up till then.

“Chen Jian.”

“Huh?” Chen Jian did not expect Twain to suddenly speak in Sichuan dialect at all. It took him aback.

“You are a player who only started playing football recently. You know what you lack, don’t you? It’s time. It doesn’t matter how hard you train. This is something that you can’t make up for through training. Three years of training...” Twain raised three of his fingers. “Is definitely a very short time for any player who’s aiming to become a professional footballer. But you don’t have a choice. It doesn’t matter where you are playing football. You have to remember one thing. You do not possess talent, and you also do not possess time. You cannot afford to make mistakes, and you also do not have the right to complain about your circumstances. You are incredibly lucky to even be able to get to where you have today. So, from now on, I want you to keep pushing ahead, no matter what obstacles lay in front of you. You don’t have another choice. Do you understand?”

Chen Jian nodded his head. “Yes, I understand.”

Twain smiled and then reverted back to speaking in English. “Don’t think about anything and don’t care about anything. Just keep moving forward. Keep moving forward...”

Twain’s voice started to trail away and eventually became a whisper. His vision became blurry as he spoke as well.

Isn’t it the same for him?

Ever since the day he transmigrated, hasn’t he also just kept moving forward? He also has to keep moving forward now and in the future as well...

Destiny chose him and he does not have a choice either. Just like Chen Jian, there was no way back for him.

“Keep moving forward!” Twain’s voice changed back to how it was earlier, and his vision also started to clear up.

He looked at Chen Jian. “You will definitely achieve your dream someday. Don’t forget that expression that you made just now when you were adamant about retaining your Chinese citizenship.”



Chen Jian bowed deeply to Twain.

A day later, Chen Jian sent his mother off at the Heathrow Airport. He also told her that he was going to play football in Netherlands then.

His mother wished him all the best after hearing the news.

Two days later, Chen Jian packed his belongings and made a trip over to Netherlands all by himself. There was no attention from the media over his departure, and there were also no fans to send him off at the airport. He was going to start chasing after his dream in a new and foreign country.

At the same time, Dunn began his journey to achieve his dreams over at the Meadow Lane Stadium that was situated north of the Trent River. He was being revealed for the very first time before the press as the new manager for Notts County, and he displayed a slightly bashful smile before the cameras.

As for Tony Twain, he continued to lead Nottingham Forest, a team that has his name deeply engraved upon it, towards a brand new tomorrow.

The radiant morning sun rose up slowly from beneath the horizon, and it shone light onto the faces of everyone who were on their way to achieve their goals and dreams.

## **Chapter 825: Two Years Later**

The rays of the morning sun seeped into the room through a small gap between the curtains.

Twain got off bed gently, before turning around to glance at his sleeping wife. He then donned on his pajamas and left the room quietly.

He turned on the tap and squeezed a lot of toothpaste over his toothbrush. He then put his neatly folded bath towel next to the sink. He was all prepared to wash his face and brush his teeth so as to get refreshed for the new day.

The moment he raised his head however, he became dumbstruck.

The man he was seeing in the mirror was foreign to him.

He looked like someone who had not slept in ages. The crisscross wrinkles on his face seemed as though they had been engraved onto his face with a knife, and his eyes were bloodshot as well.

However, what he found most unsightly was not his wrinkles or his bloodshot eyes, but rather the clump of dishevelled white hair on top of his head.

Twain tilted his head and stared at his reflection in the mirror for a long while. He did not care about how the tap was still running and how his toothpaste had already slipped down onto the basin.

He welcomed his 45th birthday a month ago, on 9th September 2013.

Time passed by really quickly. Before he even knew it, it has been more than 10 years since he transmigrated.

If not for the fact that he transmigrated, he should only be 32 years old right now and should still be considered young. He would have been at an age where he could still afford to mess around in life and pretend to be someone young on the internet. He also would not have to care about any complex philosophical issues such as where life comes from and where it leads to.

However, as a result of his transmigration, he was already 45 years old this year.

It is said that you have lived half your life when you reach 50 years old. But, how many people in this world can live till they are 100 years old? One is considered to have lived a long life if he or she is able to live till they are 90 years old. Hence, being 45 years old signified that he had already lived half of his life.

A thought surfaced in Twain's mind for the very first time as he stared at his aged self in the mirror:

It does not matter if I never suffer a second heart attack. I am not far away from death either way. The time I have left will not be longer than the time I have lived.

Melancholy gushed up within him at the thought.

When would he too, turn into an old man who is gibberish, confused, unable to speak loudly, perpetually wheelchair-bound and who required assistance wherever he went?

He had always thought that he still had a long way to go before he would end up in that state. But, why does he feel like those things would happen very soon now?

The sounds of the running water caught the attention of Shania, who had been lazing around on bed.

In truth, she had woken up when Twain got off the bed. She lied on the bed and tried her hardest to suppress her smile as she watched her husband get off the bed gently so as to not wake her.

The sounds of running water emerged shortly after Twain made his way into the bathroom. However, it has been almost 10 minutes since he went in, and the sounds have not ceased.

The smile on Shania's face disappeared. She sat up on the bed and called out, "Uncle Tony?"

There was no response.

Shania's heart began to beat wildly. An unpleasant thought surfaced in her mind.

Did Tony's heart attack relapse?

At the thought of that, Shania jumped off the bed in a panic. She did not care that she was only wearing an underwear then, and she did not bother trying to put on her slippers either. She ran into the bathroom next door without anything on her upper body and her feet.

The first thing she saw was not Uncle Tony lying unconscious on the floor. She heaved a sigh of relief and broke into a smile when all she saw was Twain holding onto a toothbrush and staring at his reflection in the mirror with his head tilted to the side.

"You scared me to death, Uncle Tony."

No one responded to her.

"Uncle Tony!" Shania had to raise her voice and shout.

“Huh? What? Oh...” Twain saw the way that Shania was dressed, and he immediately understood what had happened.

“You must have let your imagination run wild again, right?”

Shania rolled her eyes. “You look like a corpse and you didn’t answer when I called you. Of course I’d be worried.” She walked over behind Twain and hugged him from behind.

“What were you looking at? You were so engrossed earlier.” She whispered by Twain’s ear.

“I was just looking at my white hair.” Twain forced a smile.

“You can just dye it.” Shania kissed the back of Twain’s neck. “Besides, it’s not like all your hair has turned white. It’s just your sideburns.”

The pair were being intimate with each other, but somehow, the sight of it seemed a little jarring when viewed from the mirror. The man looked old while the woman’s naked body emanated youth and passion.

If the two of them had not been doing such intimate acts, one would have thought that they shared a father-daughter relationship.

“Dye my hair?” Twain contemplated about it for a moment, then nodded his head. “That’s a good idea. But I’ve never thought that there’d come a day where I need to dye my hair.”

Shania smiled. “Every human being ages with time. I might look young to you now, but 10 years from now, I would be just like you as well. My dear philosopher, you will age faster if you keep having such deep thoughts about life every morning.”

Twain’s nether region slowly started reacting to the sensation of two lumps of plump flesh against his back. However, now was not the time to be doing those things.

He turned around and grasped Shania by the shoulders before trying to push her out of the room. “Put on your clothes. Don’t catch a cold.”

The eagle-eyed Shania noticed the abnormality with his nether region. She smiled proudly and said, “Look at that, Uncle Tony. We already did it yesterday, but you are still lustful in the morning! It’s proof that you haven’t aged at all!”

She then giggled as she finished her words and ran away right as Twain raised a hand and pretended that he wanted to hit her.

Twain saw Pierce Brosnan when he drove over to the training grounds at Wilford. The way in which he stood with a cigarette in his mouth and his brows furrowed made him look much older than he was.

Twain realized that he now has a tendency to observe the changes in the outward appearances of every person he interacted with. It might be due to what happened in the morning.

Time changes many people. He wanted to see what those changes are exactly.

“Hey, Mr. Bond. Why do you look so depressed in the morning?” Twain poked out his head from within the car and greeted Brosnan.

“Ah, Tony... The interview that you promised me...”

“I will arrange for it to happen some other day.”

“Not another day, Tony. My boss told me to get the exclusive interview with you today or else... Help me out please...”

“All right, all right. Let’s do it this afternoon then. At the restaurant in Wilford. We’d chat while we eat.”

More reporters rushed up to Twain when he finished dealing with Brosnan. They were all fighting for the chance to ask him questions.

“Mr. Twain! Can you discuss about Lennon’s transfer...”

The reporter’s question touched a nerve with Twain. He glared at him fiercely. “That is something that happened almost two months ago. What else do you want me to say? If you really can’t find a question to ask me, I’d suggest that you ask me about what I had for breakfast this morning, or what I intend to eat for lunch or dinner!”

Indeed. That was something that happened two months ago...

Aaron Lennon’s outstanding performance in Forest has allowed him to cement his position as a starting left winger for England’s national football team.

Currently, both the right and left winger positions on the national team are taken up by players from Forest, namely Bentley on the right and Lennon on the left. Walcott, who was nicknamed ‘The Little Tiger’, was forced to sit on the bench whenever the two could play.

Of course, Fabio Capello would not be displeased with such a situation. He was very fortunate to be able to choose from a number of high quality players for the same position.

Lennon’s ability to play on both the left and right wing has benefited his career significantly, because he was able to obtain more chances to play in a game as compared to others. The numerous chances to play in games allowed him to improve his skills and become more mature as a player, and his good performances eventually led to interest from other football clubs.

There were numerous football clubs that had put in a bid for Lennon this summer. They all wanted to buy a player like Lennon who could play on both the left and right wing.

However, Twain insisted that Lennon was not for sale. Lennon was a player whom he personally groomed. He was a player who climbed through the ranks from the youth team all the way to the first team, and he was also a player who was well-liked in the team.

Why would Twain think about selling a player like that, especially now that he was in his prime?

Despite Twain’s refusal however, Lennon still left Forest in the end. The reason was simple.

Inter Milan had put in a bid that Forest could not reject: 30 million pounds!

Allan Adams did not care about Twain’s refusal to sell Lennon and insisted on involving himself with the transfer. He forcibly sold Lennon to Inter Milan, and his actions led to a huge rift between the two.

Things got very bad between them, and the two nearly engaged in a physical fight before Evan Doughty.

When the press started publishing articles about how the two did not see eye to eye, Twain did not offer any clarifications to the issue.

I'm not clarifying anything because I obviously don't get along with that money grubber!

Sometime later, Kerslake consoled Twain by telling him about how Lennon was also intent on leaving the club because Inter Milan had offered him a higher salary as well as other bonuses.

Twain was well aware that Inter Milan's offer was an attractive one. However, he felt that he would have managed to keep Lennon at the club for another two seasons by making use of his personal charisma. If Lennon wanted to leave the club after those two seasons, Twain would definitely not stop him then, because Adriano Moke would have developed into a good player by then.

But, Allan's interference had completely foiled his plan.

He was not upset about Lennon's sale. He was upset that Allan Adams had gone against his word, because they had come to an agreement previously that Allan would not interfere with his job.

As someone who liked to have control and authority over everything, Twain saw Allan's actions as a humiliation.

The only reason why he did not resign and walk away from the club was out of consideration for Evan Doughty and the team. It would be very easy for Twain to leave the club and find a higher-paying job elsewhere based on his achievements. However, it would be very difficult for him to groom another team like Forest in a short period of time. Forest was a club that he had spent 10 years to groom. It was his everything.

Twain still has yet to bear a child of his own with Shania, but Nottingham Forest was just like his son. He had developed a deep bond with the team, and he just could not toss this 10 year old son of his aside.

Brosnan, who was well aware of Twain's temper, did not dare to bring up Lennon's name before him for the past two months.

The reporter who just asked him the question clearly looks like a newbie...

Twain was left in a bad mood due to the reporter's question. He decided to take out his anger on all the other reporters at the scene by refusing to answer any of their questions. He pulled a long face and drew up his car window before driving into the training grounds.

Some of the reporters began ranting about the situation.

Of course, their rants were not directed at Twain, since they were well aware of his fiery temper after years of interviewing him.

Their rants were directed at the young reporter instead.

"Are you new to the job? How could you not know the rules?" A middle-aged man questioned the young reporter with a voice brimming with hostility.

“Who was it that got you to ask such a stupid question? Which news agency do you work for?” Another bespectacled man who looked like he was a gentle and well-mannered person also questioned the young reporter through gritted teeth.

“That’s a piece of news that had been widely reported two months ago. Why are you still asking about it now?” This reporter was the only one who asked his question in a nicer tone.

“Do you know who exactly you are interviewing? It’s not the ‘Mr. Nice Guy’ Kevin Keegan! It’s Tony Twain! Tony Twain! You must be an intern reporter... I really hate newbies who do not know anything...”

The crowd of reporters left after reprimanding the young reporter. Brosnan looked at the young reporter who looked helpless after being chided. He walked up to him, gently patted him on the shoulder, and left without saying anything.

The incident made Brosnan recall his experiences as an intern reporter. He did not need to tell the young reporter anything. The young man would definitely come to understand how it is normal to make mistakes as a newbie.

The reporters who congregate around Wilford are perhaps the most unique group of people in the whole of England. The various news agencies would only send their most talented or most experienced reporters to carry out interviews here at Wilford. It was very rare for any agency to send a newbie here because they would just end up humiliating themselves.

The job of interviewing Tony Twain, who was known as the hardest man to deal with in the whole of England’s footballing scene, was not something that any newbie reporter could handle. Additionally, a newbie reporter would also find it hard to fight for a piece of news amongst a group of veteran reporters.

Every single reporter who frequently appeared here at Wilford was a veteran reporter who has wrote articles about Nottingham Forest for more than three years. They have all picked up numerous strategies about how to deal with the moody ‘King of the Forest’ through their long-standing ‘battles’ with him. They were all more familiar with Twain than they were with their own wives and children.

Many of these veteran reporters are known as the ‘wily old foxes’. They are called such because they know how to observe and analyse a situation. They know when they should ask a particular question, and they know what are the questions that they must never ask him. They also know what questions would potentially elicit a fierce reaction from Twain that they could then report about in their articles. Last but not least, they also know what is the best way to ask their questions so as to elicit the best results.

They learned everything through experience. It was no different from how a professional footballer develops himself. A footballer would never be able to grow if he is not able to play in games...

New football players would become seasoned players one day, just like how newbie reporters would also become capable, veteran reporters through time.

A certain inept manager was also only able to lift two Champions League trophies, two Premier League trophies, one EFL Cup trophy, one FIFA Club World Cup trophy, two Community Shield trophies, two

UEFA Super Cup trophies and become known as the 'Manager of Champions' after suffering a concussion by the side of the pitch.

The City Ground Stadium was usually silent when there were no matches being played. However, there were times where the silence would be broken by visitors who had travelled all the way over from thousands of miles away.

A big luxurious bus was parked at the parking lot outside the City Ground Stadium. A group of yellow-skinned Asians wearing red caps over their raven black hair followed a slender white-skinned beauty into the trophy room within the City Ground Stadium.

"This is Nottingham Forest's trophy room. This room holds all the trophies and honours that Forest has earned ever since it was formed." The beautiful tour guide was British. Her Chinese pronunciation was not very accurate, but she could still use it to communicate with others as a tour guide and translator.

"The team has obtained one EFL Cup trophy after its current manager Tony Twain took over." The tour guide said as she pointed at a small but exquisite trophy in the cabinet.

"They were also crowned as the champions of the Community Shield twice." She then pointed at two silver trophies that were shaped like a shield.

"They were also able to obtain two UEFA Super Cup trophies, one FIFA Club World Cup trophy..." The beautiful tour guide introduced the trophies of varying sizes to the visitors behind her. The trophies were all exquisite, and they shimmered under the light.

"And two Premier League trophies. The one on the right is a trophy that they obtained during the 2007 to 2008 season. That very season was also the season where Nottingham Forest was able to achieve the Double. The trophy on the left is very new. It's the one that Manager Tony Twain was able to achieve in the previous season."

She walked towards a big glass cabinet in the center of the room before stopping in her tracks. She then pointed at the four trophies within the cabinet, and then introduced them with pride,

"These four trophies that are shaped like big human ears are the trophies that signify the greatest honor possible amongst the European football clubs... The Champions League trophies!"

Some of the visitors who understood football led out gasps of astonishment, while the others remained emotionless. They simply stared at the trophies and wondered if those silverware were truly made of silver...

The visitors crowded around the glass cabinet. There was a rule that stated that they were not allowed to take photos, but there were still football fans amongst the crowds who secretly fished out their digital cameras or handphones to take a photo.

After all, it is not every day that one is able to see four Champions League trophies all in one place.

The tour guide did not notice the visitors' actions. She continued to introduce the significance behind the trophies to everyone excitedly.

"The number of European football teams who have managed to win four or more Champions League trophies can be counted with two hands. They are the nine-time champions Real Madrid, the six-time

champions AC Milan, the five-time champion Liverpool, the four-time champions Ajax, Bayern Munich and Nottingham Forest! It is possible that Nottingham Forest would clinch a fifth trophy under the guidance of Manager Tony Twain soon!”

A visitor amongst the crowd raised his hand to ask a question. “Miss Tracy. Are you a die-hard fan of Tony Twain?”

The beautiful tour guide smiled after hearing the question. “Half of the people in Nottingham are his die-hard fans.”

The four Champions League trophies sat quietly within the glass cabinet and accepted the looks of wonder and admiration from the people beyond the glass.

There was an extraordinary story behind every single one of the trophies.

In Munich, Twain’s ‘swordsmen’ unsheathed their long swords from their shafts and shocked the whole of Europe during their very first appearance in the Champions League.

In Madrid, Forest was able to retain their champions title by defeating a tough team that had the then European Footballer of the Year as its player.

In Athens, Forest, who made its return to the top-flight European football competition, was able to put in a performance that made the King, AC Milan, pale in comparison. At that time, Tony Twain even shouted arrogantly that he would ‘jump into the sea’ if he could not win, but sadly, no one was able to get him to fulfil his promise.

In Moscow, Eastwood was able to clinch the winning goal against Chelsea amidst a heavy rain and help Forest defend its champions title for the second time. They were also able to achieve the double in that season as well.

If one were to quiet down and listen carefully, one could almost hear the sounds of muffled cheers that had been transmitted over from a distant time and space reverberate within each and every trophy.

“... The match is over! 1:0! Nottingham Forest, the club from England that made its maiden appearance in the Champions League has been crowned champions!”

“... Robson’s goal! The match is over...! Brian Clough has successfully led his team to retain the Champions League title at the Bernabéu! This is the highest ever honor for any football club! They are the Kings of Europe...”

“Freddy Eastwood! He has scored the goal needed to seal the victory for Forest! Tony Twain has finally led his team to clinch the Champions League trophy! They have defeated the mighty AC Milan!”

“It is pouring in Moscow right now, but the rain does not dampen the passion within the Nottingham Forest fans! It’s Freddy Eastwood once again! He has scored the goal needed to seal the victory for Forest again! The ones to topple under Robin Hood’s arrow this time round are the Blues! This is Nottingham Forest’s fourth Champions League trophy! All hail Forest! They have achieved the double!”

The visitors from China have left. Most of the lights in the trophy room were switched off and the room went dark, but the trophies continued to shimmer faintly within the darkness.



## Chapter 826: Destiny

“The defending champions of the Premier League, Nottingham Forest, has run into some troubles recently. They have gone without a win in three consecutive matches in the league, and the gap between them and first-placed Arsenal has increased to seven points. They were also eliminated by a Championship team in the EFL Cup. However, those are the least of Twain’s worries. His favorite player, Freddy Eastwood, has picked up another knee injury in the previous match, and that has left Twain in a very bad mood lately. The reporters who frequently appear at Wilford have all chosen to stay away and avoid asking him for comments.”

On November 1st, Matchday 11, Nottingham Forest faced Tottenham Hotspur in an away game.

Eastwood was knocked onto the ground when Michael Dawson tried to intercept his ball during the 54th minute of the match, and he was unable to get back to his feet after the collision.

Dawson was successful in snatching the ball from Eastwood, but he quickly kicked the ball out of bounds after realizing what had happened so as to allow Forest’s medical staff to get onto the pitch.

Dawson had intended to say a few comforting words to Eastwood, but he was pushed away by Forest’s medical staff who had rushed over to Eastwood’s side before he could say anything.

He might have been Nottingham Forest’s captain in the past, but he was now regarded as an enemy in the eyes of the Forest players.

Fleming and his two assistants carried out a medical examination of Eastwood as he laid on the ground moaning in pain.

“All right, all right. You’re going to be fine! You’re going to be fine!” The first thing Fleming did was not to check Eastwood’s knee. Rather, he looked at his expression instead. The sight of the Romani’s face shocked him. Tears had welled up in both of his eyes.

As a team doctor, Fleming would often get to see the expressions on the players’ faces up close when they lay injured on the pitch.

The expression on the players’ faces was all he needed to get a rough gauge of how serious their injury is most of the time, because it is said that we always know the state of our bodies the best.

Fleming knew of only one other example where a player cried after picking up an injury.

It was when Ronaldo collapsed on the pitch for the second time during the match with Nottingham Forest a few years ago.

Eastwood had opened his mouth wide and he looked as though he wanted to moan in pain. However, he was unable to produce a single sound. He resembled a fish that had just gotten out of the water.

“Stretcher. Stretcher.” Fleming called for the stretcher. The medical staff gingerly placed Eastwood onto it.

“You’d be just fine. Believe me. You’d be fine...” Fleming bent over to whisper by Eastwood’s ear as the latter was being carried off the pitch on the stretcher. He kept repeating his words as though he was performing a chant.

When they had gotten off the pitch, Fleming looked up and noticed Twain’s questioning gaze on him. He shook his head gravely in response, and he saw Twain swear.

The next day, Twain received even worse news.

Eastwood was seriously injured and was out of action for four months. In addition, he also needed to undergo an operation one more time.

“... This is very unfortunate. This is the third time Eastwood has to undergo a major operation for his injuries. His first came when he represented West Ham’s youth team in a match against Nottingham Forest’s youth team, and he picked up a serious injury after being tackled by George Wood. He had just celebrated his 30th birthday two days ago. Who would have thought that he’d receive this for a birthday present...”

“The 30 year-old Eastwood’s professional footballing career can be said to be legendary. He was once seen as a youth player with high prospects in West Ham’s youth team, but he was eventually discarded by West Ham after picking up a severe injury during the match against Nottingham Forest’s youth team. He then went on to play football in a semi-professional league, and also worked as a salesman selling second-hand cars...” The TV commentator spoke as though he was reciting a eulogy at Eastwood’s funeral.

“He was then brought over to City Ground Stadium by Tony Twain, and that was when he was given a second chance to play professional football. He scored the winning goal in the Champions League finals twice, and he has since become a legendary striker for Forest. He was the third highest goal scorer in the league during the season when Tony Twain returned to manage the club after ceasing treatment for his heart attack. He might have picked up one injury after another ever since then, but he was still able to score ten goals and above every season... This injury of his has probably dealt the heaviest blow to him so far. It might even lead to him ending his career in advance... According to his American operating doctor, Richard Steadman, Eastwood’s right knee is just like a bunch of torn cotton that had been stuffed together messily. There’s a possibility that he would get injured again after the operation...”

“Bastard!” Twain slammed his hand onto his desk. Kerslake, who stood beside him, did not dare to take a breath.

Twain was not reprimanding Kerslake, and neither was he reprimanding any other person.

He was reprimanding this terrible destiny of his.

He has never been able to have a healthy striker in his team ever since the day he brought back the Romani player from the soccer field in East London.

Eastwood was a brilliant forward when he was not injured. Twain firmly believes that Eastwood has the capacity to become one of the top strikers across the whole of Europe, but sadly, his injuries have become the fetters around his feet, and they have restricted his ability to run about freely.

Twain could not help but feel pity towards Eastwood over how life has toyed with him.

There was one other thing that infuriated Twain terribly as well.

Eastwood had called him an hour ago and told him personally that he had decided to retire as a professional footballer after his operation.

The two had a heated debate, or perhaps, argument, over the phone regarding his decision.

Twain refused to accept Eastwood's decision to retire. He did not even want to hear the word 'retire'. However, Eastwood had set his heart on it. He was going to follow through with his decision and was even going to oppose the King by arguing with Twain over the phone.

"Listen, Freddy! I won't allow you to say the word 'retire'! I won't agree to your retirement either! You are just 30 years old. Why would you retire at this age? What I want you to do now is to go through with your operation, rest for four months, then return to the pitch and continue to play football! What are you so depressed about?"

"Boss, I know my own body the best! I really can't go on like this anymore... Nine years ago, you told me to persevere and choose the path that I wanted to walk on. I listened to you, and I have walked on the path that I really love for nine years... It's been nine years, boss. It's been a long time. I really can't walk any longer..."

Twain heard sobs coming from the other end of the phone. He fell silent and did not know what he could say to console him.

If Freddy were right before him this very moment, he would have hugged him without hesitation. However, they were separated by an icy cold telephone and intangible electromagnetic waves right now. There was nothing he could do.

Eastwood regained his composure after sobbing intermittently for a while. His voice was hoarse when he spoke. "Actually, I've been running a lot less during games recently. I would not be able to contribute much to the team even if I were to return to the pitch after my operation... I'm really tired, boss. Do you know what's my biggest dream right now? It's to take care of my horses and my kids, and to be with Sabina... That's all I want. It's not been an easy journey for me so far. I've gotten really tired from persevering all this while. I want to rest now..."

"Freddy..."

"Don't try to talk me out of it, boss. I've made up my mind. I..."

Twain raised his voice and cut off Eastwood curtly, "Do you remember our promise? I'm going to become the legendary manager, and you are going to become the legendary striker! Do you remember, Freddy?"

"I'm sorry, boss. I'm sorry..." Eastwood's voice was low and he was choking back sobs.

Twain abruptly raised his head after hearing those words from Eastwood. He pulled the phone away from his ear and pursed his lips, trying to hold back his tears from falling.

Fortunately for him, there was only one other person in the office besides him. No one else would be able to see the King of Nottingham Forest in such a state.

Twain successfully held back his tears. He then put the phone back to his ear.

The call had not ended. Eastwood was still on the other end.

“Freddy.”

“Boss?”

“Drop by Wilford once you are done with your operation. Say goodbye to everyone. I won’t tell them anything for now.”

“Okay.”

“Call me when you are coming.”

“I will.”

“Rest up for now, Freddy...” Twain hung up the phone quickly. He was worried that he would cry if he were to continue with the call any longer. His voice was starting to quiver towards the end.

You are going to retire right now! Right now! I want to arrange for a farewell match for you at the f\*cking least! Freddy! You... Why would you choose to retire right now?

Twain walked about his office aimlessly. His chest rose and fell furiously, and he was not able to calm down for a long while.

Twain regarded every player who has worked with him for numerous years to be his friend, and he would feel devastated every time any of them left.

From Fernando Hierro to Demetrio Albertini to David Beckham to Ruud van Nistelrooy and now to Eastwood...

What he did not wish to see the most was a player retire before him. He would feel better if the player was just going to transfer to another club, because it meant that he would still be able to see their familiar faces at other places.

But, retiring was different.

Twain would go into a slight daze every time Albertini appeared before him formally dressed as an official for the Italian Football Association.

How time flies...

No one else besides Twain and Eastwood knew about the latter’s decision to retire from football. However, the media still managed to pick up on it through the numerous rumors that had been floating around.

A post-match conference was held following the Champions League group stage match against Lyon. During it, a reporter asked about Eastwood’s injuries.

“... Based on the numerous reports going around, is there a possibility that Eastwood would retire?”

Twain's face darkened at once. "I don't know. I'm not a professional doctor. I can't make any comments about his injuries."

Another reporter raised his hand. Before he could open his mouth however, Twain had pointed a finger at him and said, "If it's about Eastwood, then I'm sorry. I refuse to reply. It has nothing to do with the match."

The reporter opened his mouth and looked like he wanted to say something, but he eventually sat back down.

Clearly, he had intended to ask a question about Eastwood.

"Let's talk about the match." Twain changed the topic. "We defeated Lyon in an away game, and we are already guaranteed of a spot in the next round of the competition with two matches still to play. I'm very pleased. I'd like to thank the team for being united."

Why would the reporters be interested in hearing those words of his?

Sadly, they were not given a single chance to ask about Eastwood's injuries at the press conference. No one knew what the outcomes of Eastwood's injuries were.

The reporters decided to switch targets and ask the players for comments since they were unable to obtain anything valuable off Twain.

"Freddy? We all hope he can recover quickly and come back to the team soon! The locker room just isn't as lively without him around! Ha!" Pepe laughed as he spoke.

"I hope that he can recover quickly. But, there's no use in rushing things either. He should take the time to rest up properly before returning. That's much safer for him."

"Freddy! You can do it!" Ibišević raised his fists and shouted at the camera after scoring a goal during the match. During his celebration of the goal, he had lifted his jersey up to reveal a shirt with the words 'This goal is for Freddy' beneath.

Interviewing George Wood was the hardest, especially since the reporters wanted to ask him for his opinions regarding Eastwood's injuries. Everyone knew that Wood was to blame for Eastwood's rocky footballing career. Eastwood's current team mate and captain was the first to injure his right knee that has since undergone three operations.

"I... I think he'd return..." Wood sounded uncertain when he spoke. "Probably... Will return."

Wood hastily left after making the comment. It seemed as though he was escaping from the question.

Eastwood's teammates were generally positive about his recovery and return to the team.

Three days later, Freddy Eastwood underwent the third operation on his right knee in America.

When the operation was over, his operating doctor told him that things were not looking good for his knee. He was not sure if Eastwood could return to the pitch following the operation.

Eastwood responded to the doctor's remarks with a smile. It was as though he did not take it to heart even though it was a piece of bad news.

He flew back to England under the accompaniment of his wife after resting for a week. He then gave a call to Twain as promised.

“Boss, I’m going to drop by and visit everyone.”

Twain understood what his words really meant.

It was time for goodbye.

Freddy Eastwood appeared at the training grounds during the morning training session the next day.

It has been quite some time since the Nottingham Forest players last saw him, and everyone was just glad to see him even though it was clear that he would not be joining them any time soon since he was still on crutches.

“Hey, Freddy! It’s been a long time! How’s the weather like in America?”

“I heard the operation was a total success? Do you still need to rest for another three months?”

“Have a speedy recovery and come back soon! Everyone misses you.”

Eastwood’s teammates swarmed up to him. They patted him on the shoulder and on the head and asked him about his condition and his life.

Kerslake was pleased to see all the Forest players crowding around Eastwood and did not say anything to stop them.

Twain, on the other hand, had a grim look on his face while he stood by the side with his sunglasses on.

Even George Wood, who hardly spoke to Eastwood, went up to greet him. “We... Uh... We are all waiting for you to come back.”

Eastwood has never treated the ‘chief culprit’ who caused him to be in the state that he is in now kindly. Likewise, George Wood has always been a man of pride, and he would never admit his wrongdoings before Eastwood either. As a result, the relationship between the two has always been bad. The media had also widely reported about their ‘feud’ before.

However, Eastwood felt that it was meaningless to keep harping over such things now that he was about to retire.

He smiled at Wood for the very first time. “Thanks.”

Some of their teammates began whistling at the sight of Eastwood’s smile. They then called for them to shake hands and give each other a hug.

This is going to be one of the biggest news ever! Who would have thought that these two players would actually bury the hatchet after years of harboring a deep hatred for each other?

Despite their exhortations, the pair did not shake hands or hug each other.

Twain stepped forward after seeing that the conversations had gone on for quite a while. He coughed once to signal everyone to quiet down. Thereafter, he pointed at Eastwood and said, “Freddy came here today because he has something he wants to say to everyone.”

When he was done saying those words, Twain retreated to the side and gestured for the Romani player to move forward.

Eastwood slowly limped forward with the help of his crutches.

Everyone looked at him in confusion. They did not know what exactly he wanted to say to them.

“Uh... Umm... I nearly changed my mind earlier.” Eastwood clamped the crutches under his armpits and scratched his nose with his hand.

“I really want to play football with everyone again. But I know it’s not possible for me to do that any longer...”

Commotion broke out.

“Hey, Freddy. What are you saying?”

“I’m sorry, Freddy. Your English pronunciation is poor and you speak really fast too. I totally didn’t get what you were saying!”

“It’s not April’s Fool today, Freddy!”

Eastwood only continued speaking once everyone had calmed down slightly. “Guys, I’m not lying. The doctor told me after the operation that my knee would not be able to handle the strain that playing professional football brings. If I don’t want to keep walking like this in the future then...” He patted his crutches. “I better give up.”

“Let me finish my words first.” He noticed that some of his teammates looked like they had something to say, so he immediately gestured to stop them from talking. “I’ve thought about this for a long time... And I also discussed it with the boss.”

Eastwood turned around to glance at Twain. Twain looked emotionless with his sunglasses on. He almost looked like he was trying to act cool.

“I’ve decided to retire from football.” He finally said the words that he wanted to say.

Kerslake looked at Eastwood with surprise written all over his face. He then turned around to look at Twain. Twain had already lowered his head by then.

His teammates reacted fiercely. They all began shouting at the top of their voices agitatedly, and some even wanted Eastwood to take back his words.

“Eastwood! You... Do you know what you just said?”

“We are all waiting for you to return! How could you choose to run away?”

“Hey! Everyone! Calm down...”

“Why should we calm down? He has undergone three operations on his knee. He has pulled through the previous two times. Why can’t he do the same this time? You are only 30 years old! Why are you thinking about retirement?”

A cacophony of angry voices assaulted Eastwood's ears. However, he did not seem to be affected. He leaned against his crutches and smiled at his agitated teammates.

Twain could not help but yell, "Shut up!" when he noticed that the scene was getting out of control.

Everyone obediently shut their mouths, but there was still indignation in their eyes.

"If you truly treat Freddy as a close friend, then you should respect his decision!" Twain's face had gone dark and the expression on his face was quite unpleasant. "He knows his own body the best. What do you all hope to achieve by yelling like that?"

After he finished chiding the players, Twain turned around to speak to Eastwood. "You said your dream is to take care of your horses, your kids, and to be with Sabina. But, I have also prepared another gift for you. I hope you will accept it..."

Eastwood was a little taken aback by Twain's words.

"There's not a single person here..." Twain turned around and pointed at all the players and coaching staff behind him, "Who wishes to see you leave."

Everyone nodded their heads in agreement.

"Therefore, I don't intend on letting you go either. I've given you a new contract..."

Eastwood widened his eyes.

Why is he in the dark about this? Isn't he going to retire? Why is there a new contract?

"Are you willing to become a member of the coaching staff after you retire?"

The players who had been a little dazed started whistling once Twain finished his words. They all wanted Eastwood to accept the new contract.

"Coach!" Someone teased Eastwood by calling him 'coach', but before long, everyone else had joined in as well. The coaching staff laughed as they watched the Forest players tease Eastwood.

What should have been a sad occasion became a happy one.

Eastwood looked at Twain, before turning around to look at his teammates who were all cheering for him. The expression on his face changed several times, but eventually it settled on a smile.

"I'm worried that I'm not cut out for the job, boss..." He said with a smile.

"Take it slow. It's not like you were born to be a professional footballer either, right?"

"I... All right, I accept."

Cheers erupted.

Everyone was too busy cheering and they failed to notice something amiss with George Wood. Wood was the only one at the scene who looked as though he had something on his mind, and he was also the only one without a twinge of a smile on his face.

## **Chapter 827: A Legendary Tribute**



After he bade farewell his teammates in Wilford, Eastwood held a press conference where he would officially announce the news of his retirement to the media and the outside world. Not one media outlet was aware of the news beforehand, although some of them might have guessed it.

The press conference was held at the City Ground stadium. There was already some media buzz ahead of the press conference—Eastwood would not have announced good news at the press conference. Some of the Forest fans who cared about Eastwood gathered outside the stadium and anxiously waited for the latest news from the press conference.

When an impeccably dressed Eastwood appeared in front of the reporters, accompanied by Twain, the raucous press conference suddenly quieted down.

Sitting in his seat, with countless microphones and recording pens in front of him, Eastwood was not in a hurry to speak. He needed some courage to make his decision public for the first time.

Twain sat next to him and gently patted him on the back.

The room was silent. After a while, Eastwood took a breath and spoken in his distinctive accent, “I have made a decision. When I had my surgery in the United States, my doctor told me that even if my knee recovered, I wouldn’t necessarily be able to continue to bear the pressure of professional football. I thought about it for a long time, and I have decided to retire.”

While some people had already guessed the reason for Eastwood’s surprise press conference, they were still shocked to hear the words coming out of his mouth in person. There was an uproar at the scene.

After he had said his piece, Eastwood was no longer concerned with the reporters’ intense reaction. He got up and walked out together with Twain. Some of the reporters who reacted first squeezed to the front row to ask him some questions, but he waved them off and said, “I have nothing to say, thank you everyone.”

With that, he left with his head lowered.

Someone took aim at Twain.

“Mr. Twain! Mr. Twain...”

“I’m sorry, I have nothing to say too. That’s the way it is. We’ll arrange a farewell ceremony for Freddy in one of the home games in the league tournament in more than half a month later. That’s it, thank you everyone for coming...”

Twain waved his hands and declined any further questions from the reporters.

“The Romani striker announced his retirement!”

“With three serious injuries to his right knee, it’s the end of his career!”

“Tony Twain lost a major player. Eastwood waved goodbye in tears!”

“A list of three serious injuries in Eastwood’s career. His retirement bound to happen as early as a decade ago!”

“The cause of Romani’s retirement was someone else, and not the former Nottingham Forest captain!”

...

All sorts of shocking and attention-grabbing headlines appeared in the media.

All of a sudden, everyone knew the news of Eastwood’s retirement. Numerous reporters flocked to Wilford in hopes of scouting out further information. Although Eastwood had never really been among Europe’s top strikers, the two winning goals he scored at the two UEFA Champions League matches spread his fame across Europe and the world. There were even media reviews of his career which reported that without Eastwood, Tony Twain definitely could not bring back those two championship trophies.

The Nottingham Forest fans had long regarded him as the best striker in the world, and their love for him went without saying. When they heard that Eastwood was retiring, they could not accept it for a while. Every day outside the Wilford training base, there was a large number of fans holding Eastwood’s portraits, posters and slogans to urge Eastwood to stay. Unfortunately, the hero in their minds was not in the training ground but recuperating at home.

The atmosphere at the training ground was not the same as it used to be. Everyone felt bad seeing so many signs with slogans to urge Eastwood to stay. But the boss was right. Since they were like brothers, then they must respect a brother’s decision. Eastwood had chosen his path which no one else had the right to interfere.

Fans flocked to the online message forums to post emotional messages in the hope of persuading Eastwood to change his mind.

But none of it was going to work.

Some reporters wanted to interview Eastwood directly only to find that the other man had turned off his cell phone.

As a professional player, it took more than courage to make a decision to retire at the age of thirty. Even if he had made the decision, it would have been really hard for him. Eastwood was feeling down during the twenty days of recuperation at home.

His wife, Sabina took it all in and sometimes she joked with her husband as she played with the cards in her hands, “The Fate says you can still go back and play football.”

Eastwood glared at her and said, “If I were to fall for what you’re trying to do, then I’m not a Romani. Don’t bring it up, Sabina. I’m not going to change my decision...”

“You’ve been playing football for so many years and suddenly one day you don’t want to play anymore. Don’t tell you can get used to it?”

“Why would I not be used to it? I haven’t played football during this period. I’m doing fine, aren’t I?”

These days Eastwood was really not in contact with football. After he was able to walk freely without the crutches, he had been in the stables to care for his horse, Blanc which had been with him for ten years.

Sabina grinned and stopped talking about it. "You're going to the stadium tomorrow. Aren't you going to bed early?"

Eastwood shook his head and said, "I'm not one of the players who are going to play in the game."

Sabina kissed her husband on the forehead and said, "Then I'll go up and see if the children are asleep yet."

"Okay." Eastwood replied somewhat distractedly.

When he was alone in the living room, Eastwood buried his face in his hands. Sabina had said something right—Now that he suddenly did not play football, he really could not get used to it.

He had just been injured at the time when he called his boss. At that moment, he thought he was really tired of living like this as he looked at his knees. He even thought he would spend the rest of his life in a wheelchair. At the time, he decided to bid farewell to the past ten years without hesitation. He was convinced that he had made the right choice.

He still thought he was right to retire. But his heart was no longer as determined as it was half a month ago. Sometimes when he closed his eyes, a tsunami of cheers from the City Ground stadium would ring out in his ears, and everyone was calling his name. When he was fast asleep, he dreamt that he had returned to the field and had a pair of healthy knees. Then he would run on the field to score goals and enjoy the cheers of the fans.

When he woke up from the dream, he realized that he really could not live without football.

He really could not continue to play with his knees again, but the boss gave him a coaching job. He was still happy. At least he was not thousand miles away from football and had nothing to do with it. He was still able to fight alongside his brothers. He only changed his identity.

Football is no longer simply a hobby or a job for me.

Football is my life.

Eastwood had already risen from bed when the early morning sun still loomed behind the clouds. The rustling sound made as he got dressed, woke his wife up.

Sabina groggily looked at his busy husband and asked, "Didn't you say you're not playing?" What're you doing up so early?"

"Going to ride the horse to warm up." Eastwood's answer was the same as when there was a home game.

Sabina heard this and sat up from the bed, "But you're not playing..."

"Go back to sleep, Sabina."

His wife ran her fingers through her messy hair on top of her head, shook her head and muttered, "I'll make you breakfast."

The faint sunlight shone at an angle through the window. Dust motes danced within the column of light, and the dusky stable appeared very quiet. The silence was soon broken by the squeak of the door.

Eastwood stood at the door, took a deep breath, and sniffed the familiar scent.

The creature in the stable sensed that someone was here. It gave a snort as a way of greeting.

“Blanc.” Without the lights on, Eastwood waited for his eyes to adjust to the darkness of the interior before he walked in.

It gave another snort.

Eastwood stopped in front of a black horse. He reached out his hand to stroke the black horse’s neck. His caress was gentle, as if he was touching his lover.

The black horse, Blanc also leaned his head next to his master and stamped its hooves affectionately.

Eastwood did not answer his wife’s question just now. He just told Sabina to go back to sleep. Because he could not explain to his wife the mood he was in—he would only ride Blanc in his own field in the early hours of the day when he had a home game. Otherwise, he would not do it. So why did he want to do that today?

He was not muddled. He knew he was just going to the stadium to say goodbye before the game today. He was not going to play football. But his body wanted to do some laps by riding Blanc at this time. Was it a physical habit?

Eastwood untied the strap to hold the horse, put the reins on Blanc, and slowly led it out of the stable.

The outside was clearly brighter than the interior. He and the horse looked at each other. Eastwood looked at Blanc with a smile and said, “Hey, old friend. I’ll retire today, so you’re retired too. Shall we ride one more time?”

While he was still at Grays Athletic, he rode the nine-year-old Blanc on the road to warm up. He lived in a modernized caravan and parked his home inside the woods within the green belt. Everyone else had looked at him in a strange way. But he never cared. He prided himself on being a Romani. Now that he had money and children, he did not have to live in a caravan, but he still kept the strange habit of riding early in the morning of every home game to warm up.

A reporter once interviewed him before and asked why he could always score winning goals at the most critical times to help the team win. He always gave his lucky pony, Blanc as the reason.

Today, the “lucky pony” had become the “lucky old horse” and he himself was also thirty years old.

Eastwood patted Blanc on the back and stepped on the stirrup to straddle.

“Let’s go, old friend!”

He lightly patted the black horse’s behind, and Blanc trotted off with his master.

The cold morning breeze blew in Eastwood’s face and Blanc’s mane fluttered in the wind. Eastwood felt a long-lost comfort. He was eager to give a whoop on the horse.

“Oh, oh. Blanc! You gallop really hard! In fact, you can still run, you’re not old, right!”

Blanc ran around the track, and then Eastwood simply loosened the reins. He threw his arms open, leaned his body back, and closed his eyes to enjoy the wind blowing around him. Lost in a trance, Blanc became his legs. He ran on the field as much as he wanted and tirelessly. No matter how fierce the collision was, it could not stop him in his pace. He ran and ran like this, leaving all his pain and sorrow behind him. As he ran, he threw the sound of the out of his head. He kept on running..

“Freddy, do you want to play professional football?”

In the cold wind, a few water beads spilled from Eastwood’s face.

His young daughter, Chartwainay, heard a clanking sound coming from the kitchen when she got up to use the bathroom. Curiously, she went downstairs only to find out that it was her mother.

Still sleepy-eyed, she rubbed her eyes at the door and asked, “Mom? Where’s Daddy?”

Sabina turned and saw her young daughter. She said with a smile, “Daddy went horse riding.”

“Does Daddy have a game today...” The six-year-old young daughter did not know much about her father yet, but she knew only one thing—once her father was out riding in the early hours of the morning, he must have a match in the afternoon or evening. Then she would have to wait to watch her father in front of the television.

“Yeah, the last game.” Sabina came over and gave a kiss on her daughter’s young face. “Go back to bed. You’re not wearing your slippers. Be careful to not to catch a cold.”

“Mommy, have you seen my new football boots?” The voice of her eldest son, Llewellyn came from upstairs, followed by the sounds of urgent footsteps.

“Why are you all getting up so early today?” Sabina looked at her two children in front of her and asked. “I did not see your new boots. You always throw your things around. You can’t find them when you want to use them, can you?”

“I asked my friends to play football in the morning.” The eleven-year-old Llewellyn reached for a slice of bread on the table but was speedily slapped away by Sabina.

“Go brush your teeth and wash your face!”

“Where’s Dad?” Llewellyn did not get on with it immediately. He turned and looked around. “Did he go to the stables early to chat to Blanc?”

“No, he went riding.”

Llewellyn whistled. Then he turned around and headed upstairs to wash up.

“Llewellyn, bring your sister’s shoes down with you!” Sabina shouted from downstairs.

“Got it!”

Sabina picked up her well-behaved little daughter and placed her on a chair to keep her bare feet from touching the cold floor.

It was a pity that her efforts were in vain.

The sound of the door opening sounded outside the dining room. Chartwainay jumped out of her chair excitedly and ran barefoot to the door.

“Daddy—”

“Chartwainay! Good morning, my little beauty!”

“Good morning, Daddy!” The little girl gave her father a kiss on his face.

“Go wash your face and brush your teeth, Chartwainay. Llewellyn! How long more do you have to dilly dally? Quickly bring down your sister’s shoes!” In this house, it looked like Sabina was the head of the family. Eastwood, on the other hand, did not manage anything but eat.

“Coming! Coming!” The eldest son ran down like the wind. He tossed the shoes in front of his sister and ran up again. “Good morning Dad!” The sound of his greeting came by time he was upstairs.

As the family of four gathered to eat, the father announced a decision, “Llewellyn, Chartwainay, you guys will come with me to the City Ground stadium in the afternoon.”

Chartwainay did not object. At a young age, she was happy to be with her dad. She did not have much time to socialize yet. Llewellyn was a little surprised and said, “I’m going to meet Hesh and Andy...”

“Llewellyn.” His mother’s stern voice rang, “Your father wants to be with you all at that time.”

Llewellyn Eastwood looked at his stern mother and at his smiling dad again, before he nodded and said, “Okay, Dad.”

His sister was still young and might not know what retirement meant. But the eleven-year-old Llewellyn could definitely understand. It was really more important than going out with his mates.

Eastwood reached out and rubbed his son’s head. “Thank you. Llewellyn. To make it up to you, I will spend more time playing football with you in the future.”

“You must mean what you say, Dad.” Llewellyn felt that his father seemed to prefer to spend time with Blanc. The horse had long been a regular member of the family. When he was not yet born, his father already had Blanc. Their relationship was rock solid. Sometimes he would feel aggrieved when he thought of this— exactly which one of them was his father’s son?

Eastwood smiled and gently pinched his pouting son’s cheek and said, “Cross my heart.”

The City Ground stadium in the became livelier earlier than usual. The Nottingham Forest fans was informed by the various media outlets earlier that today’s game was different. Their favorite striker, Freddy Eastwood wanted to bid farewell to Nottingham Forest before the league match against Arsenal.

Although Eastwood was not a player cultivated by Nottingham Forest, he had been here for ten years and it could be said that he had devoted all his career to Nottingham Forest. It had long been forgotten that he was once a member of the West Ham United youth team.

The first half hour of today’s game belonged to Eastwood and no Forest fan wanted to miss it. They arrived more than half an hour earlier than before and waited to say goodbye to the Romani striker who had brought them two UEFA Champions League trophies.

As the players from Nottingham Forest and Arsenal warmed up on the pitch, Eastwood, wearing a casual jacket, brought his family along to chat with the club's chairman.

"It's a shame to retire so early, Freddy." Evan Doughty said as he patted his former player on the shoulder and shook his head, "I still remember the way you reported at Wilford the first day. Towing a caravan with a horse and bickering nonstop with your wife at the entrance... You gave me a fright. Haha!"

Evan laughed, and Eastwood laughed as well. But when he recalled that time, his smile was a little wry. He was only twenty at that time...

"I'm glad you accepted the coaching contract Tony gave you. To be honest, I always felt that the club owed you a lot."

Eastwood shook his head and said, "Please don't say that, sir. It was an honor to play for Nottingham Forest. When I played for Grays Athletic, I never thought I would be able to lift the Champions League and Premier League trophies. Never mind twice."

Because it was the official farewell to Eastwood before today's game, everyone was in low spirits. Although Eastwood agreed to be the team's coach, everyone had more affection for Eastwood as a player.

Even the boss who always liked to say something before the game was not himself today. He just sat at the door without saying a word. No one knew what was on his mind.

The atmosphere in the locker room was a bit awkward.

George Wood was probably the quietest one of all. He kept adjusting the captain's armband on his arm. He would put it on, take it off and look at it in his hand. Then he would put it on again, and take it off again...

He seemed to have a lot on his mind.

Twain looked down at his watch. The uncomfortable silence finally ended.

"Okay, guys. It's almost time. Go on out there. We still have to say goodbye....to Freddy."

Wood was the last player to come out of the locker room. Since he was the team captain, he should normally be walking at the forefront.

After the two teams came out of the tunnel, they did not line up to take team photographs, exchange team flags, do the coin toss or shake hands... They lined up outside the tunnel, waiting for a person to appear.

Arsenal was very accommodating at this time as an opponent which had nothing to do with Eastwood. To show full respect to a legendary striker who was leaving, Twain was grateful to Arsène Wenger for his willingness to do so. Perhaps he should be glad that the game was not played against one of his archrival team...

Eastwood stood in the tunnel, surrounded by the staff who were responsible for maintaining order. He was currently holding his eleven-year-old son, Llewellyn in his left hand and his six-year-old daughter, Chartwainay, in his right hand, as he waited nervously for the signal.

A unified voice had rang out in the stands outside. All the fans were chanting his name in unison which could be heard clearly.

“Daddy? They are shouting your name.” Chartwainay listened for a moment and said to her father.

“Yes, Chartwainay. They’re calling Daddy’s name. Do you like what you’re wearing?” He touched Chartwainay’s forehead with his nose. He was referring to the red Forest jersey worn by his daughter, with his name “Eastwood” and the number “11” on the back.

“I like it!”

“Why?”

“Because it has Daddy’s name on it!” Chartwainay said excitedly.

Compared with Chartwainay’s excitement, Llewellyn was silent as he held his father’s hand. He did not think it was a very interesting thing like his sister. Although his father would have more time to spend with him after his retirement, in his heart, he still liked his father running, scoring goals and cheering on the field. His friends would always be envious when they mentioned his father and said to him, “Llewellyn, you have a hero for a father! If only my dad were like your father...” “Llewellyn, your father scored again in yesterday’s game! That goal was so cool! A lob!” “Llewellyn, please help me get your father’s autograph...”

He pressed his lips together. The more he thought, the worse he felt. Tears pooled in his eyes as if they were going to fall at any moment.

My father is a hero! I’m a hero’s son, I can’t cry!

He thought hard.

Feeling his son hold his hand with force, Eastwood turned to his left. He looked at his quiet son with his head bowed and smiled.

After a segment of music was played, the announcer’s voice rang out on the live broadcast, “This is not a happy news for us. Our Romani star player, Freddy Eastwood has decided to say goodbye on this day...”

The staff at the entrance signaled to Eastwood, indicating that he could go out.

“Let’s go, Llewellyn.”

Eastwood then led his son along and carried his daughter as they walked out.

When Nottingham Forest’s number 11 led his two children wearing his jerseys as they walked out of the tunnel, a tsunami of shouts erupted in the stadium.

“Freddy! You’re our hero!”

“You’re amazing, Romani!”



“Goodbye, Freddy! Goodbye!”

“Change your change, Freddy! Please!”

“Don’t go, Freddy... Look around you, are you willing to leave this?”

“Freddy, we need you! Tony needs you! You can’t do this!”

...

With a smile on his face, Eastwood let go of his son’s hand, and waved goodbye to everyone. But there were already two lines of tears on his face.

The Arsenal and Nottingham Forest players stood next to him and applauded him. Some people even gave him thumbs-up.

Chartwainay watched the scene curiously. She might not understand the feelings of these people. But she knew her father was very popular. The expression on Llewellyn’s face looked worse. He was almost going to cry in public.

Sabina stood up in the box to applaud her husband, like everyone in the stadium.

In this way, he walked all the way to the middle of the field, bent down to put his daughter down, and took the wireless microphone from the staff.

At this, the sounds in the stadium gradually subsided. They knew Eastwood had something to say, and they did not want to miss every word he said.

“Thank you... thank you very much everyone.” Eastwood curbed his emotions and tried to get his trembling voice back to normal. He spoke slower so that everyone could heard his words clearly. “When I was still an amateur player, I never thought I’d have such a farewell one day. I’m so happy that you’ve all come to see me off...”

After a moment’s silence, Eastwood tried not to let himself cry on the spot. No matter how he forced himself to smile, he had no desire to smile in his heart at this time.

“I want to thank the Nottingham Forest Football Club and my teammates. More than anything, I would to thank Manager Tony Twain. If it wasn’t for him, I would never have the chance to stand here and say thank you to you all.

The telecast gave Twain a close-up. He stood in front of the technical area with his arms across his chest and a serious expression on his face.

“My professional career had only lasted a decade... But I don’t think it was short. In these ten years, I had received all the honors I had thought of or never thought about. I am very satisfied and happy. I am happy every day of the ten years I’ve played at Nottingham Forest because I’m doing what I love and in the environment I love.”

“But now it’s time to say goodbye to you and my teammates.” Tears streamed down uncontrollably from Eastwood’s eyes. “Ten years ago, the chief once told me that I would be a legendary striker for Nottingham Forest... I’m really sorry, Chief, to disappoint you, I’m sorry...”

Eastwood stuffed the microphone into the hands of the staff and leaned down to hug his daughter, Chartwainay.

“...” Kerslake heard Twain swore under his breath next to him, “You’re a bloody legend, Freddy.”

The Englishman, who always shouted at the top of his lungs and played the role of a stern assistant manager in front of the players, could not help but burst into tears.

“Daddy? You’re crying...” Chartwainay looked oddly at her father. That familiar face was wet.

“Daddy is not crying, Daddy is... happy.” Eastwood forced a smile on his face, “I’ll have more time to spend with you, Chartwainay. Are you happy?”

Chartwainay looked at her father for a moment and then opened her mouth to chirp, “Happy!”

“Let’s go back.”

He picked up Chartwainay again and took Llewellyn’s hand.

“Freddy Eastwood, once an amateur player who had a broken leg before when he joined Nottingham Forest on January 1st, 2004, was in his twenties at the time.” Motson, who was responsible for the commentary on the match, said enthusiastically, “He’s now in his thirties. He’s taking his family to say goodbye to the Forest fans. He said that he was not a legendary striker, but in the minds of the Nottingham Forest fans, no one is more legendary than him.”

“An amateur player who scored the winning goal in two UEFA Champions League finals to help Nottingham Forest regain the Champions League title after a twenty-eight-year hiatus. His right knee suffered a serious injury before he became a Forest player, but he had been dragging the injured leg on the pitch to play for Nottingham Forest for a decade, scoring a total of one hundred and thirty-seven goals. He is not the player with the greatest number of goals scored in the history of the Nottingham Forest Football Club, but he is definitely a player who scored the most valuable goals in the history of the team! Two goals scored and two UEFA Champions League titles! His experience was enough to be made into a movie for all the football-loving kids out there. He showed people that even if you had been seriously injured, even if you had been drive out of the team you once played for, even if you had fallen into the amateur league and had to sell second-hand cars, as long as you did not give up on your ideal of the heart, you could still create a legend!”

“We salute the legend of the decade! Goodbye, Freddy! Goodbye, Nottingham Forest’s Mr. Buzzer Beater!”

As Eastwood led his children slowly down the tunnel, the fans’ unified singing voices rang out in the stands. They were singing a song dedicated to Eastwood. It was after Eastwood scored a crucial goal to help the team overcome AC Milan to regain the long-lost UEFA Champions League title after twenty-eight years. The fans composed a hero’s song for him.

“With the game down to the last minute, do you think it’s over? There’s little time left as the referee looks at his watch and your heart goes, ‘Forget it, we still have the future.’”

“The cheering song gradually loses its voice, and some people begin to leave early. A bunch of beer cups are strewn about in the stands, and it’s a mess!”

“The opposing players laugh at our final struggle, and the opposing fans celebrate their victory in advance!”

“The Forest team’s number 11 steps forward and he said, ‘No! The game isn’t over yet! Don’t be too happy!’”

“Don’t be happy yet!!!”

“He’s like Robin Hood. His arrow shoots through the enemy’s heart!”

“The enemies scream in horror, “Who is he?!””

“Who—is—he!!”

“His name is Freddy Eastwood! He’s the Forest team’s Mr. Buzzer Beater!”

“His name is Freddy!” He never gives up!”

“Freddy, Freddy! The privilege is yours to fall under his arrow!”

“La la la! Freddy! La la la! Robin hood!”

“La la la! Freddy! Freddy! La la la!”

Whenever Eastwood scored another crucial goal, the song would ring out in the home stands. Eastwood would run wild on the pitch with open arms, with the number on his back flying like a flag over the City Ground stadium and the number “11” on the back like two sharp arrows. He was indeed the “Robin Hood” of Nottingham Forest.

But this time, Robin Hood was shot in the knee by the poison arrow of fate. He could no longer stand up to continue the fight. He fell under the great oak tree where he had once gathered with his comrades-in-arms to rise up to fight. He bade farewell a little unwillingly to those brothers whom he had fought side by side with, leaving behind a legend to let future generations look forward to the future while they fondly recalled the legend—while he was still around, what a heroic time it must have been....

The stirring singing voices sand continuously until their Robin Hood disappeared into the tunnel.

Tears glistened on the faces of the fans present. They applauded “Mr. Buzzer Beater” of their hearts one last time and bade farewell to another legend of “Robin Hood.”

## **Chapter 828: Not Friends**

During Eastwood’s farewell game, all the Nottingham Forest players were stirred by the scene of Eastwood’s tears at the stadium. As if they were collectively doped on performance enhancing drugs, they crushed their arch-rival, Arsenal by 2:1 at home. It was a farewell gift for Eastwood.

But everyone did not care much about the result of the game. In the post-match press conference, the reporters asked more questions about Eastwood.

Nottingham Forest was rumored to have offered Eastwood a staff contract. He would remain with the Forest team. The reporters seek confirmation on the validity of the news.

Twain told them it was true that Eastwood would remain in the team as part of the First Team coaching unit.

A reporter was also concerned whether the loss of a leading striker in the middle of the season would have an adverse impact on the team's prospects. After all, the team's results were not ideal. It was almost December and Nottingham Forest was in sixth place in the league tournament.

Twain rebuffed this statement. While Eastwood's departure was a big blow to him, it was not enough to ruin his plans for the entire season.

The atmosphere of the press conference was good. Twain did not take his anger out on the reporters just because he had lost his cherished player. He tried his best to answer everyone's questions, and his good attitude surprised everyone.

But if it continued to develop in such a manner, then it would not be a press conference with Tony Twain present.

Finally, someone stood up and asked a question that angered Twain.

"Mr. Twain. Do you agree with the view that Eastwood's retirement today was already conclusive before he joined Nottingham Forest? If it hadn't been for George Wood's ferocious foul at the time, the Romani's career could at least last until the age of thirty-four." The man who stood up and asked the question, had a smiling, but his face looked extremely ugly in Twain's view.

The man who asked such a vicious question was Twain's old nemesis, Carl Spicer, who still had a shaved head to this day....

There had been media reports of this matter before. They think for Eastwood to choose to retire so early, the culprit was George Wood and not in Michael Dawson. To that end, they listed out Eastwood's career information when he played for West Ham United's youth team, proving that what they said was true.

While Twain did not blame Dawson as the killer for cutting off Eastwood's professional career, he strongly disagreed that Wood was the culprit. The reason why he did not have a war of words with the other media in his column to refute the issue was not because he had a guilty conscience, but because he did not want to get caught up in the media's treachery. It would not be a good thing for Wood and Eastwood as well as the entire team if the matter was blown up.

However, now it was clear that some people were not happy about Twain's silence.

If you don't want to say it, I'll force you to say it in front of everyone!

The reporters were in an uproar when they heard Spicer ask such a question. Actually, many people wanted to ask such a question except they knew Twain's limit. It was a difficult question to ask and they absolutely could not receive an answer if it were asked. There was nothing good in it for themselves to ask it.

Now the "hero" in their hearts had appeared! Carl Spicer clearly did not expect an answer from Twain. He asked the question for a simple reason—he was trying to make Twain angry, and all the source

material for his news came from it. He did not care whether Twain answered the question or not. As long as Twain had a reaction, there would be good material for this evening's <Football Matters>.

Twain glared at Spicer. He currently very much wanted to throw the microphone in front of him at the other man, then get up, grab the chair, pounce over, push the other man to the ground and use all his energy to smash—he did have the urge to kill the other man.

He managed to restrain himself and did not really do so. He just stood up slowly and pointed to Spicer. He spoke slowly so as to try to make it as clear as possible for the man who asked the question and other people, "There's one thing I agree with, Mr. Carl Spicer."

"What is it?" Spicer smiled and asked, waiting for Twain to answer.

"You're a stinky bastard who deserves to go to hell!"

Twain finished scolding and turned around to leave the press conference.

His answer made the reporters present unusually excited, while Wenger, sitting next to him, smiled wryly. He served as the background in the battle between the reporters and Twain...

When he heard Twain swore that dirty remark with gritted teeth, Carl Spicer was delighted instead of being angry. He raised his fist and said happily, "Fantastic!" Then he turned and looked at the cameraman on his show to ask, "Did you record it?"

The cameraman nodded.

Spicer gave his partner a thumbs up. He got the result he wanted. He did not attend the press conference in vain.

"Eastwood's retirement was painful for the Forest fans. But even the most hardcore fans can't deny the fact—who was the one that had led to the early retirement of the promising Romani striker? It was none other than their most beloved team captain, George Wood." On the evening show, Carl Spicer spoke frankly with assurance in front of the camera. Perhaps the thing he regretted the most now was that Twain did not punch him in the nose on the spot, so that he could rely on an attention-grabbing shiner to wordlessly denounce to the viewers that Tony Twain was a dangerous violent man.

"Am I talking nonsense? Let's take a look at the evidence."

The frame cut into the afternoon's press conference at the City Ground stadium. Carl Spicer looked urbane on camera. When he threw out the question, what answered him with Twain's vicious face and uncouth language. The images of the two men were really different.

"Okay. First we need to answer the question of why Mr. Tony Twain was flustered and exasperated after hearing my question. Will anyone believe that he did not have a guilty conscience? Obviously, like me, deep down inside him, he thinks I'm right, and absolutely agrees with my comment. That's why his reaction was so intense—we all know Mr. Tony Twain is all about keeping up appearances and has a strong ego. He may agree on some things, but he won't express it. Like this matter."

Spicer smiled with delight. He felt the dagger thrown had hit the bull's eye. The footage timely replayed with the scene of Twain's swearing at the press conference.

“Of course, we have to look at things separately. George Wood’s foul that happened while he was still in the youth team, did lead to Eastwood’s early retirement. But without his kick, Eastwood might not have had such a successful career—he might be in another team and not have met Tony Twain as well not come to Nottingham Forest...”

It seemed that Spicer exonerated George Wood but in fact it was just a ploy he used habitually to package himself as a “fair and objective commentator.” He often did that when he needed to disparage a person.

For example:

“So, and so’s performance on the field was so bad, I wonder if he went to a nightclub last night to have fun. Of course, it’s normal that young people need to vent. After all, playing in a powerhouse team is very hard. Whether physically or psychologically, he needs to find a way to let out the built-up pressure ..”

From the looks of it, there was not a single word that was sensitive, and it sounded like he was considering the player. But the “rumor” about so and so’s outing with a prostitute the night before a game became true.

So now when he framed it in such a way, it was about making the matter of “Wood was the culprit who caused his teammate to retire” fait accompli.

He never hid his loathing of Tony Twain. As a team with Tony Twain’s deep imprint, the Forest team naturally did not please Mr. Carl Spicer. If his remarks and the episode could throw the Forest team into disarray, he would be happy to do so.

“You fell for his trick again, Uncle Tony.” Shania, who was watching the television at home on the couch, complained to Twain.

“I did it on purpose.” Twain shrugged.

“How could you purposely fall for his ploy?”

“It would really piss me off if I didn’t dare to scold him on the spot for fear of being used by him. Of course, I had to admonish him. I didn’t stand to lose that way. As for his tricks, I have my own ways.” Twain said it like it should be expected as a matter of course.

Shania pouted. She knew Uncle Tony was reluctant to admit his mistake and did not have his own way to deal with it. He just gave into his impulse at the time. From the time before they were married, she had lived with Uncle Tony for ten years. She was extremely familiar with the man beside her.

Twain did not want to hear Spicer talk drivel on the public broadcast, so he took out the remote control and changed the channel.

“I still feel that I have not scolded hard enough. I can come up with at least fifteen different ways of scolding him now.”

“You’re like a little boy, Uncle Tony.” Shania laughed when she heard him say so, “Why are you squabbling with him?”

When it came the handling of the media, the younger Shania's was more mature than Twain's. Perhaps it was because she had been trained as well as influenced by her own mother, also a model, from a young age. No one could be liked by everyone in the world. A charismatic star like Shania also had people who did not like her. When these people in the media talked a lot of nonsense about her, she always ignored them and continued to do her own thing.

Twain did not answer. After a series of questions and answers with Shania, he started thinking about ways to reduce the impact of Spicer's recent episode on the team.

He knew that Spicer was definitely not talking nonsense because Wood's performance had fluctuated recently. He had always been constant like a pool of stagnant water with no outflow nor new inflow of water. Now a lot of ripples frequently emerged.

I hope this is not a sign of an earthquake...

"Uncle Tony?"

"Yes?"

"What exactly is the relationship between Freddy and George?" Shania's sudden concern about the team slightly surprised Twain.

Shania had always been jealous of football. Although she was a Brazilian, she was not very fond of football due to the reason that football robbed her of Uncle Tony's love. Naturally, her level of concern for her husband's team was also superficial and limited to knowing the good or bad results.

Twain thought about it, because he was also thinking about what the relationship between the two men. In the team, apart from having to perform his duties as the team captain, George Wood rarely spoke and was a man of action. Eastwood, on the other hand, was talkative and the joker in the locker room. But the two of them rarely talked alone, and if they had to say something, it would be related to the team.

Twain knew Eastwood had a sore point and was unwilling to greet Wood with a smile on his face. He also knew Wood's character. Because of his life history, his reticence seemed to be the outer shell of his fragile self-esteem, which made him seem a little haughty. "Proud" was a nice way to put it. Therefore, Wood could not be expected to take the initiative to look for Eastwood and reach his hand out to him to say, "Hey, Freddy. The incident was my fault, I'm very sorry and regret it... But now that we're teammates, I hope we can still get along well..."

The both inferior and proud, sensitive and taciturn George Wood was absolutely incapable of doing such a thing. Now that Eastwood had made it clear that he did not like him, he would not put down his pride and try to get closer.

As a result, the relationship between the two men appeared to be atypical in the Forest team, famous for its harmonious atmosphere within. Fortunately, they were men who attached importance to the bigger picture and would not deliberately pick a quarrel with each other in the team.

"Well... They are not friends in any case." Twain thought for a while and did not know how to explain it specifically, "They're almost never together alone and say more than three sentences to each other."

Shania tilted her head and looked at Twain, "Then why don't you create an opportunity for them to talk alone?"

Twain stared blankly for a moment.

That's right. All along, he had thought that he could not let the two people feel awkward and not to inflame the conflict. So, he turned a blind eye and thought that it did not endanger the team's internal atmosphere anyway. He should just let them be as they were sensible people.

Now obviously it could not go on like this...

George Wood's ups and downs in his condition had affected the team's performance. This was what Twain wanted to see. Also, if the issue were to go on, someone the team might really think so— it was the team captain who harmed Eastwood. Because Eastwood's popularity was good, it could be scary if this thinking were to spread. It could shake the foundation of the team's unity. When a captain no longer had prestige in the hearts of his teammates, it could cause a chain of adverse effects.

The matter must be settled.

Shania had given him a good idea.

Twain came up next to Shania and moved his body over.

Shania was alert, "What are you going to do, Uncle Tony?"

Twain smiled, "To thank you, Shania!"

Shania rolled her eyes and said, "Your naughty smile gave you away, Uncle Tony. Are you thinking about that again?"

Twain put away his smile and looked serious, "I suddenly got a little jealous of Freddy when I saw his two kids. I want a baby, Shania."

They had been married for five years. No matter how hard they tried, Shania's body had no respond at all. Although Twain never showed it, Shania knew he was anxious and even had some worries. What could she do as a wife? She could only use her own gentle and young sexy body to comfort her husband. She had secretly went for a checkup when she was in America. She had no problem physically at all...

Uncle Tony had suddenly mentioned a baby again. He was apparently motivated by Freddy's two children. Eastwood's son and daughter were really adorable. Everyone would want a child like that.

When she heard Twain say so, Shania raised her head and kissed him first. The two of them made passionate love on the couch...

The next morning, when Twain drove to Wilford, Eastwood was already waiting for him.

"You don't have to be so early, Freddy." Twain look at his watch. It was only eight-thirty. He usually came early. He did not expect Eastwood to come earlier.

"Ha, chief! It's the first day of work, I have to be proactive, don't I?"



Twain glared at him and said, "Don't call me chief. You're now one of the coaches in the team now, like me."

Eastwood shook his head in disbelief and said, "Actually, while I was waiting for you here, I had been thinking about how to address you. Then I realized that I still like to call you 'chief' the best. I'm used to it. Aren't you used to hearing it, Chief?"

Twain helplessly acknowledged this address and no longer continued to get hung up on the detail.

"Well, chief... This is my first time as a coach. What kind of work would you like to assign to me? Or... what do you think I can do?" Eastwood put his hands together. His new identity still made him a little awkward. "Even though I train with the coaches every day, I don't know much about it."

Without his wife's advice from yesterday, Twain had originally intended for Eastwood to work with and learn from the other coaches and not to take care of specific matters yet. Then he could simply take coaching classes at the League Managers Association to get ready for his coaching license test.

But now there was clearly a more urgent job for him to do.

"Well... it's like this, Freddy. What are your thoughts on...George?" Twain thought over and asked.

Eastwood paused for a moment. He did not know why the chief asked the question, but he knew that the chief was definitely not having a casual chat with him. He thought it over before he replied, "Not a friend."

Twain laughed. He recalled his answer to Shania last night.

"Well, I can understand why you would think that, Freddy. But now I hope you can help...actually it's not considered a help. Since you're now a coach, you have to treat everyone equally. I want you to do one thing for the team as a coach..."

"Does it have anything to do with his recent poor form and distracted performance?" Ever since Carl Spicer pitched the question at the press conference, the media began to follow suit. In their view, such a piece of gossip was clearly more entertaining and attention-grabbing than to reminisce about Eastwood's career.

"It's so easy to talk to smart people." Twain exclaimed, "Yes, that's it. No matter what you think of him, I hope you can let go of this part of the relationship. It's okay even if you temporarily let it go...Get the steadfast and hopelessly wooden block back for the team."

This was an unexpected "mission." Eastwood had never done the job of "psychological coach." Not to mention, he had to face his "enemy" who caused his current predicament... But he also knew that his current identity did not allow the interferences from his personal feelings. The chief strongly stressed teamwork. This request was not limited to the team. It also applied to the coaching staff.

It was a really troublesome job.

"Okay, chief. I promise. But ... You have to make me think about how best to go about it."

Twain let out a long breath when he saw him agree and smiled, "Of course, but don't think about it for too long. Our team's current ranking is not very optimistic."

“I know, chief. Don’t worry, I won’t let you down.”

Eastwood said goodbye to Twain and then turned to walk away.

Twain stood in the office, looking pensive.

### **Chapter 829: Whoever Started the Trouble Should End It**

Twain threw an extremely thorny problem of acting as a psychological counselor to George Wood to Eastwood.

Eastwood seriously thought back on it, and he found that Wood almost never had such an experience. Sometimes it really made people wonder if his heart was really oaken, as hard and stubborn as iron.

All along Nottingham Forest relied on such an oaken heart, operating at a steady and high speed. Now that the heart had issues, the team’s performance was naturally affected.

Eastwood was troubled by his own inexperience. Never mind that he was a little upset with Wood. Even without this matter, he did not know what to do when faced with Wood.

He contemplated on the matter all day long. From his frown during the day, it seemed he did not come with a good idea.

Eastwood had intended to look for Wood directly and get straight to point to say, “Let’s talk about your recent decline...”

But he had second thoughts about doing it in this way, which seemed to be ineffective. He could not determine if Wood would even listen to him at all.

Feeling vexed, he ended his first day as a coach.

Back home, he still had a worried frown on his face, which alarmed Sabina. She asked, “Did something make you unhappy in your first day as a coach?”

“Nothing made me unhappy but there was an annoying matter...” Eastwood recounted the task given by Twain.

Sabina looked at her husband with a seemingly smiling face, “You men are such strange creatures. Freddy, do you really hate Wood?”

Eastwood thought for a moment. He did not hate him to the core. Otherwise he would not play in this team until retirement. But it would be a lie to say that there was no feeling. Anyone who had encountered such a thing, could not treat it as if nothing had happened.

“Hate? I don’t know... But I certainly don’t like him.” Eastwood shook his head.

“Did you ever have a quarrel with Wood in the team? Had you ever come to blows with him or been in conflict?”

Eastwood wondered why his wife asked such questions. He said, “Don’t you know me, Sabina? I’m not that kind of person... I just don’t talk much to him.”

Unknowingly, a deck of cards appeared in Sabina's hands as she asked, "Would you like to consult the cards?"

Eastwood quipped, "Save that for the tourists, Sabina."

Sabina ignored her husband as she played the cards in her hands. A moment later, she looked up and said to Eastwood, "I think you should look for Wood and have a fight in person."

"Is that what you've figured out?" Eastwood felt he really should not have discussed work with his wife.

"That's why men are stupid creatures." Sabina slowly fiddled with the cards on the table, "If Llewellyn makes a very serious mistake, I'll just give him a beating and not treat him coldly. And he would be happy to accept the beating, rather than not talk to his mother for the rest of his life."

Eastwood dismissed his wife's remarks and said, "Llewellyn is your child. But George Wood is not my son."

"Sometimes men and boys have something in common. If you feel embarrassed to fight in person, you can make an appointment with him to find a time and place in private, like a knight throwing down his gauntlet." Sabina snapped her fingers and kept the cards. "I'll go see if Chartwainay is asleep."

Eastwood was left alone in the living room. He had ridiculed his wife's rotten idea at first. But after he mocked the idea in his mind, he found that there seemed to be some truth in this approach...

Since I don't know how to talk to Wood, it's better to take the tough approach right away.

Based on his understanding of Wood, the other party was not a man who beat about the bush. If I say a lot of highfalutin stuff, it will be ineffective and a waste of efforts.

All right... I'll look for an opportunity.

Eastwood kneaded both hands and his joints made cracking sounds.

Before going to Wilford, the next day, Eastwood rehearsed his "ferocious" expression in the bathroom mirror for a long time.

He was a mild person and popular. He always had a smile on his face in the team and joked with the people around him. Everyone also liked such an optimistic and cheerful teammate, so few people would ever give him an attitude. Thus, the impression was Eastwood was a nice man who would never be fierce to anyone.

It was really hard for him to play the role of villain now...

"Wood! What are you doing?!"

Eastwood shook his head. His tone did not seem to be aggressive enough.

"Didn't you eat last night? Don't you have any strength in you?!"

"Look at your movements. Are you really training?"

"All right, actually your performance is not good enough... No, no! It's terrible! Bad! It sucks!"

...

Eastwood finally shook his head and walked out of the bathroom. If he still did not come out, his daughter, Chartwainay, who had called him for breakfast, would knock till the door was broken.

Sabina kept smiling at her troubled husband during breakfast.

When she sent him off for work at the door, Sabina kissed him on the cheek and said, "Good luck."

"I don't feel confident that..." Eastwood spoke without certainty.

George Wood changed his clothes in the locker room with a black face. He had been in a bad mood lately. People around him did not dare to talk to him. Even an old friend like Bale tried not to provoke him at this time.

Everyone knew what kind of pressure the team captain was under. The outside media were going crazy in their speculation that George Wood was responsible for Eastwood's early retirement. It was as if they wanted Wood to step forward and take responsibility for Eastwood. If this were to happen in South Korea, it was reckoned that they would all directly ask George Wood to cut off his finger as an atonement...

Actually, everyone was aware that Carl Spicer was right in that the first time Eastwood was seriously injured, it was due to Wood's foul. However, all in all, it was an unintentional mistake. It was too mean to bring it to the surface again after ten years... To put it more seriously, it was done with malicious intent.

The media would not delve into the reasons behind the injury at the time. They only knew that this matter was very newsworthy, so they did a lot of follow-up stories...

As for the readers, they also lacked basic judgment. Or they simply did not want to judge who was right or wrong. They just wanted to watch the drama and feel that life was good.

To make matters worse, the next game was the tenth anniversary of when Tony Twain officially took charge of Nottingham Forest. The team was keen to pay tribute to the boss with a win in that game. But the team's current condition and a mighty opponent like Liverpool had made that game looked bleak.

Liverpool was also keeping a close eye on the Forest team's developments. Benítez must be pleased to see that cracks and unrest had emerged within the Forest team. Because he and Twain had fought each other for so many years, he had found that the easiest way to beat Twain was to hope that something would go wrong inside the walls of the indestructible castle.

George Wood's form was up and down. This was indeed a great and rare opportunity...

Liverpool's local media had already harshly spoken out that they wanted to upset Tony Twain's tenth anniversary at Anfield.

"How long he has coached the Forest team has nothing to do with us. We just want a victory."

Wood was the captain and of course he was aware that his form affected the team. But he just could not let the matter go like it was air. He did feel guilty about Eastwood, and he had felt guilty for the last ten years. It was just that he was not good at showing his emotions, especially after he became the

captain. He always wanted to leave his teammates with the image of a “dignified” team captain. Some words were not easy to say out loud again.

Wood spent the day in training with a heavy heart again.

Kerslake looked anxious at the side. He said to Twain more than once, “I think George listens to you the most. Why don’t you speak to him in person and it will all be okay? Why are you doing this?”

Twain put on a profound expression and said, “There is a saying in China—whoever started the trouble should end it.”

“What do you mean?” Kerslake did not understand Mandarin.

“As a man sows, so he shall reap. The two of them are a doomed pair.” Twain sighed, “They are entangled with each other.”

“What are you doing, Tony? You’ve got another knock on the head?”

“Oh, you just wait and see. No one can get involved in the matter between them.” Twain finally said something that Kerslake could understand. “It’s so tiring to talk to you!”

“All you have to do is to just talk sense.”

After the training, Wood routinely gave himself another half hour of practice. The rest of the players went back to the locker room. The members of the coaching unit had long been used to the scene, so no one stayed on the field to watch Wood.

When Wood was alone on the field, he decided to forget the troubles for the moment and train carefully. The quiet environment helped him to do so.

Just as he was about to start, a football hit him in the back of the head.

The knock to the head was not light. It could be a volley shot in a game. Wood was a little dazed from the impact. He put his hand on his head and turned around to glare at the “culprit.”

“It looks like I still have my footwork. Should I consider withdrawing my decision to retire and return to the field?”

Eastwood completely ignored Wood’s angry glare and stood in place as he stroked his chin, talking to himself.

After he saw that it was Eastwood, Wood’s anger suddenly began to dissipate. It had always been the case in the team. Eastwood always gave Wood a little bit of attitude, but Wood was fierce toward Eastwood.

“Don’t look at me. It was no accident. I did it on purpose.” Eastwood stormed over to Wood, picked up the bouncing football on the ground, and shook it in front of Wood with one hand.

“I never hide my dislike of you, have I?” Eastwood asked. He did not expect Wood to answer, but Wood nodded. It surprised him a little.

“Well... All right. I don’t have any interest in knowing what you think of me. It was really a miracle that we could play together for ten years. You know, every time I see your face looking like nothing has happened, I just want to pounce on you and give you a punch. That thought became especially strong when I was last injured... Unfortunately, I’m no match for you.”

Wood did not defend himself, nor did he retort. He just listened quietly.

Eastwood was actually quite nervous, too. He was reciting the lines he had spent a day preparing... At the same time, he had to make his tone sound like it was a complicated mixture of anger and disdain. It was the best method that he could think of and do—to have a good talk with Wood without having to fight like a man. But he could still express his anger like a man and make Wood feel it.

“You’re so physically strong...” Eastwood appraised Wood up and down, “You’re never tired and never know what an injury feels like, and how it feels after the injury. No one can hurt you and can make you miserable. You’re basically not a human being... If someone else wants to assault you, he’s the unlucky one in the end. While you nonchalantly wonder why the other person is hurt...” Eastwood became more agitated as he spoke. At first, he just tried to make himself look angry, but he became really angry in the end.

That’s right! Why is everyone human while you, George Wood can have such an enviable physique? And I, Eastwood have such fragile knees? Why!!

“You... You think I willingly choose to retire?” The football in Eastwood’s hand was long gone. He stepped forward, closed in on Wood and glared at the other man. “I’m only thirty years old! The golden age of a professional footballer is not over yet. Why should I retire? Do you think I’m satisfied to stand in the middle of the City Ground stadium, enjoy the final cheers and say some moving bullshit? I don’t want this shitty farewell! I’d rather play football all my life!”

He had completely deviated from the lines he prepared...

“Then when I look at you again! Look at you again!” Eastwood suddenly grabbed Wood’s collar and growled with his mouth open, “You have such a healthy body, so enviable ...but you’re playing like shit! If I had such a healthy body as you, do you know how hard I’ll train and play? How grateful I will be? You bastard! You suck! Are you mocking me? ‘Look, I have a strong and healthy body but I’m deliberately playing like shit, just so that I can sicken a fool like you who have to retire at the age of thirty!”

“I...”

Wood finally opened his mouth and wanted to say something.

But his voice was drowned out amid Eastwood’s raging storm.

“Now I really want to beat you up! Even if I can’t defeat you, I want to fight you!” Eastwood gave a hard push with both hands and really shoved George Wood to the ground. He glared furiously and trembling all over. He raised his fists, but he did not smash down in the end.

“I’m really a f\*\*king coward.... I’m a coward who gave up his professional career for fear of getting hurt again. I’m afraid to keep playing football.” Eastwood seemed to be drained of all his energy at once. He bowed his hand and muttered, “I’m only thirty...”

He suddenly looked up again and stared at Wood, lying on the ground. He said, "Do you know what it's like to be hurt there? The part below the knee doesn't seem to belong to your body anymore, you can't feel anything. Lying in bed in the middle of the night, when I remember that I can't play football anymore... Do you know how that feels?" At this point, he suddenly paused, and a look of realization dawned on his face. "Yeah, why am I telling you these? Why am I saying all these to a robot that has never been hurt? Am I confused from the anger?"

He shook his head. He was going to turn around and walk away.

"Not only am I a coward, I'm also a fool..."

"You..."

Wood got up from the ground and said somewhat helplessly, "Why don't... you hit me? If it can... allow you to... feel good..."

Eastwood suddenly turned around and rushed toward him. He almost stuck his nose in his face and roared, "What is this? A winner's sympathy for a loser? I don't f\*\*king need your sympathy!"

He took a step back again and continued to stare at Wood as he said, "I chose to retire. It f\*\*king has nothing to do with you! Why are you pitying me? You're a scumbag! What's with the look on your face? Is this how you look when you see a pitiful idiot? You think I'm pathetic, don't you? Ah, I know, I know what you're thinking—it's so sad that he can't play football..."

"No, I don't..."

"Shut up! So, what if I retire? So, what if I can't play football? I'm the coach now. You'd better watch out, you bastard! If you dare continue this kind of shitty performance, next time I will cuss you out like the bastard you are in front of the whole team! You think I won't do it?" Eastwood gave a cold laugh, "I never like you. You'd better not let me get the chance, boy."

After his harsh words, Eastwood quickly left the training ground. If he did not leave, he was afraid he would burst into tears.

He really hated Wood, not because Wood had injured him in a tackle. He hated that Wood had such a healthy and strong body and yet his own knees were so fragile... He hated the injustice of his fate and his powerlessness.

When he grabbed Wood's clothes and roared, there was also a voice in his heart that roared, unwilling to resign to his fate:

I want to keep playing football! I want to keep playing football ...

Why? Why am I retiring at the age of thirty? Why can't I have a healthy body like that bastard? Why... Why should I say those nonsense to him here?

Eastwood, who was back in his car, did not drive away. He sat in the driver's seat and hung his head, feeling deeply tired.

Meanwhile, George Wood stood on the training ground and looked at the football that Eastwood threw at his feet in a daze.

## Chapter 830: Tony's Decade

On December 12th, 2003, Tony Twain, one of the greatest managers in Nottingham Forest's history, returned to the post he was best at after six months of silence and appeared in the home team's technical area at City Ground stadium. When he returned, there was no talk of his luckless predecessor, Collymore. It was as if the City Ground Stadium's position was for tailormade in advance for Tony Twain.

It was an ordinary Football League First Division game (there was no English Football League Championship at the time, so the Football League First Division was the second-tier tournament). After losing six games in a row, Nottingham Forest met Crystal Palace, a team that was ranked a spot lower than them but aggressively determined to beat them, at home. Nottingham Forest first fell behind and then reversed the situation to end an embarrassing six-game losing streak.

He had not left his post since that game. Tony Twain had been the manager of Nottingham Forest and this team had been branded with his arrogant and untamed mark. Even during the six-month period when he was in recuperation from a heart attack, the team was not short of his influence. He led his Forest team to sweep across Europe and won two UEFA Champions League and two Premier League titles.

Up until now, Nottingham Forest, one of the world's first few established professional football clubs, had two of the most glorious periods in its history. The first glory days were when Brian Clough came to Nottingham Forest. Under the leadership of one of the most individualistic managers in English football, the previously unknown Nottingham Forest soared to the skies and won one of England's top league titles, two European Champion Clubs' Cup, one European Super Cup as well as created an unbeaten record of forty-two games in the English topflight tournament. That record was only surpassed by Arsène Wenger's Arsenal record of forty-nine games twenty-six years later.

The second glory days undeniably began on December 12th, 2003. Tony Twain, a former nobody, led the Forest team to stir up a red whirlwind at the City Ground stadium. They had won two Premier League titles, two UEFA Champions League trophies, two UEFA Super Cups, one FIFA Club World Cup, two Football Association Community Shield titles and one EFL Cup. But in terms of the number of championship titles, he had surpassed his predecessor, Brian Clough. Clough had already passed away while Tony Twain was only forty-five years old. His age was considered young as a manager and he still had a long way to go. People believed that under his leadership, the Forest team could continue to be brilliant and go on to create one of the most glorious Forest dynasties in history which was imminent.

Ten years had since flew by.

As the only manager who could be on par with Brian Clough in the history of the club, his ten-year anniversary as a manager was well worth a big celebration. The club had decided to present a commemorative award to Twain. But unfortunately, on December 12th, the Forest team's game was not at its home ground, so the trophy could not be presented in front of tens of thousands of spectators before the game.



December 12th, 2013, in the 17th round of the English Premier League tournament, Nottingham Forest challenged Liverpool in an away game.

It was a decade after Twain officially coached the First Team. Although he became the Forest team's acting manager as early as January 1st, 2003, he was only an "acting manager" and was dismissed by Evan Doughty midway through. It could not be counted in his formal coaching career. Even Twain was reluctant to count half of that season's failure into his own decade even though that half of the season occupied a very important place in his life which left him with countless precious memories.

The local media, such as the <Nottingham Evening Post>, had published special issues as a retrospective of Tony Twain's past decade. For the people of Nottingham, the past ten years had a lot of things worth remembering. It was like they had a wonderful and long dream. If someone were to say to them ten years ago, "Your team can get back to the top," they would think that the man had deliberately mocked them. But now those honors were quietly placed in the club's honors room, telling them this was not a dream. It was a reality.

Everything was thanks to this forty-five-year-old man. As a manager, he was only forty-five years old and very young, but his honors had made him the envy of many managers older than him. But as a man, forty-five years old was considered middle-aged. The biggest wish for all Forest fans was that he could hopefully continue to be the manager, the longer the better.

A book publisher came to Twain in the hope of publishing an autobiography of this worthy time period. Twain's writing was rather good. He often wrote in his column in the newspapers, but it was too time consuming for him to write a book. The manager of a Premier League club was already busy enough. How could he have the time to write a book? So, he handed the matter to Pierce Brosnan, the reporter who knew him best, stating that he would dictate and Brosnan would take notes. In fact, he did not have to do much. Brosnan had used all the material he had gathered and recorded over the past ten years to put together the entire book. The only thing that was likely to be Twain's creation was the title of the book.

<Ten Years>.

Well... Strictly speaking, even the title of the book was not of his creation. When the publisher asked him to think about the title, the title of a song by Eason Chan coincidentally popped up in his mind. He thought it was a kind of destiny, so he used it.

At first the publisher thought the name lacked grandeur and too low-key. It was completely incompatible with Tony Twain's "madman identity." He wanted Twain to change to another, such as "The Forest Emperor", "Lionheart", "The Godfather of Champions", "We Are the Champions" ... these kinds of straightforward and common titles which could be easily comprehended when written.

But Twain refused.

"Since I am a madman, what kind of madman I will be if I can't even insist on a book title?" His question left the publisher speechless. He was definitely egotistical...

"Tony, I've thought about it. Shall we present you with the award at a press conference in Nottingham the day before the game?" Three days before the game, the club's chairman, Evan Doughty came to Twain.

“Why?” Twain was surprised because the original plan was to present it after the game.

“Well, I’m worried that if you lose that game, you won’t be in the mood to receive the award in front of the media...”

Twain laughed.

“Don’t laugh, Tony. We have to prepare for both eventualities, don’t we?”

Twain continued to laugh, “Ha! If you present me that crystal award before the game., how’s that preparing for both eventualities? Before some important games, the media always have Plan A and Plan B, but they do not declare the loss for a team ahead of the game. Don’t worry.” Twain patted Evan on the shoulder and said, “The situation which you are worried about, won’t happen because we will not lose. I don’t want to lose the game and then receive the award too.”

“It’s going to be hard to play in Liverpool’s home ground...”

“It’s not that we had not beaten them at Anfield. Don’t tell me it’s because it’s my tenth anniversary that they suddenly become a fortress that is the most difficult to conquer in the world?”

“But with our team’s recent performance ... plus George Wood’s form...”

Twain shook his head and interrupted his doubt to say, “No problem. There are no issues with him and the team.”

Twain pushed back Evan’s doubts and said, “Believe me, Evan. This is my tenth anniversary. How could I allow someone to mess it up? I have drinks for friends who come and bullets for enemies who approach.”

“Anfield is the most devilish home ground on the planet!” Christopher Beesley, a senior correspondent for the <Liverpool Echo> predicted in his column the game about to be held two days later. “Our relationship with Nottingham Forest is not too good and there is no reason for us to let Tony Twain enjoy his anniversary celebration at Anfield.”

The man had once listed in his own column the top ten wishes for the 2009-2010 season, one of which was “Hope that Tony Twain has a heart attack to completely say goodbye to the position as the Forest manager.” In addition, he wanted Abramovich to go bankrupt and for Chelsea to have no choice but to sell Lampard to Barça and Terry to Liverpool. In that way, the “Premier League can start a fair and reasonable competition.”

It was obvious that he was a staunch Kopite and did not like Chelsea nor Tony Twain.

In fact, without him adding fuel to the fire in his column, few Liverpool fans had any favorable impression of Nottingham Forest and Tony Twain.

Liverpool, which was confined to the UEFA Europa League for several years in a row, had become the laughingstock among Europe’s powerful teams. It was all due to Tony Twain’s Nottingham Forest. Going back a little further, the question was: whose was it that Liverpool, once a giant that dominated Europe, was beaten by the same opponent in a year and eliminated from the three tournaments, League Cup, EFL cup and the European Cup?

The answer was: Brian Clough and his Nottingham Forest team.

With the added layer of relationship, both were the “red camp” in English football, but every fight seemed to be a derby. Liverpool wanted to prove they were no weaker than Nottingham Forest with a league win and why they could play in the Champions League whereas Liverpool could only compete in Europa League. Nottingham Forest, on the other hand, had always pursued the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Since you’re upset with me, I naturally do not need to be polite to you.

Furthermore, with regards to the debate as to whether Gerrard or George Wood was England’s best midfielder at the moment had never stopped between the two teams’ supporters. In the past, the Chelsea fans had also joined in to support Lampard. As Lampard grew older and lost his place in the national team, the Chelsea fans also discreetly left the fray.

The Liverpool supporters saw Gerrard as more comprehensive, immaculate and flawless. He was undeniably the core player of both England and Liverpool, which certainly made him the best in England. While George Wood was slightly better defensively than Gerrard, his offense was far too inferior. His goalscoring ability was night and day as compared to Gerrard. He could not be placed on par with Gerrard. In the England team, George Wood had emerged more as a player to assist Gerrard.

Nottingham Forest’s supporters thought Wood’s midfield defense as matchless in the world. His offense was quickly improving. He was younger and had plenty of room to rise. Instead, Gerrard was already stereotyped. Moreover, Liverpool was always kept under by Nottingham Forest in the league tournament. The team’s results were not ideal, and Gerrard’s achievements were largely set. On the contrary, Nottingham Forest, led by Tony Twain, had repeatedly won championship titles. George Wood continued to update his honors list. He was certain to achieve more honors and achievements in the future. He could definitely reach the heights of which Gerrard had never reached.

The fans, pundits and reporters who supported their respective teams, stuck to their own teams and regularly engaged in such debates. But the controversy did not affect the relationship between Gerrard and Wood. The national team saw no negative impact caused by these kinds of debates. Wood’s dynamic duo with Gerrard was clearly better than his partnership with Lampard. Wood was a midfielder who could partner with anyone. He could attack and defend, be a playmaker and to assist, which was what Capello liked most about Wood. So, while he and Gerrard played at the same time, it must be him to assist Gerrard. However, in the national team, anyone’s position could be rotated, only Wood could not be. Gerrard sometimes needed to give his position to another player to partner with Wood, but there had never been any media hype about “who is going to partner Gerrard.”

Wood was not a man who liked to compete for the false reputation of “who the big man is in English football” and Gerrard clearly did not need to fight for the top spot. His status had long been cemented.

Such an argument was nothing more than an excuse for fodder among the fans and for the media to speculate about the two teams’ match.

“Nottingham Forest has been in poor form lately. Their core and team captain, George Wood seems to be having problems. I’m not going to hide my feelings that I’m very happy to see this happen. I just want my opponents to have their own problems.” Beesley continued to state in his column, “The competition schedule is terrible for Tony Twain. His tenth anniversary will be played at the devil’s stadium. If he were

to be at City Ground stadium, he might still be able to accept the club's award before the game. That must be a glorious thing, but now Manager Twain can only fantasize about it in his mind."

"To be able to disturb the anniversary of this arrogant man, that's what I'm looking forward to the most in this game. I make no secret of my dislike of Nottingham Forest and my love for Liverpool. Every Kopite who knows Liverpool's history in the late 1970s and early 1980s should agree with me. We are going to settle the score with new enemies and old hatred on December 12th night at Anfield!"