

Champions 981

Chapter 981: My Legend Is Still Here (Part 2)

In fact, the game could not be said to be exciting, not one bit at all. McAllister was the new manager who had only recently joined the football team this summer, and he was not a manager of standards. The new tactics designed for the Forest team were still in the trial period and he was not to be blamed for that. Evan Doughty had not given him the lineup he had wanted to put together, so his tactical training had not been able to develop properly.

Speaking of Nottingham Forest's new manager, Gary McAllister, Twain and he had quite a connection. When Twain first became a manager and coached Nottingham Forest, it was in January 2003. At the time, the Forest team was just knocked out of the FA Cup by West Ham United and Twain was suspended after he talked a lot of nonsense in the post-match press conference, criticizing the referee and the Football Association. During the next League One game (the now English Football League Championship), the Forest team's away game was against Coventry City. At the time, the Coventry City manager was this very man.

At that time, Twain was still a true-blue rookie, and was also penalized to stay in the grandstand. McAllister, on the other hand, was no better. He had to play two roles – both as a manager and as a player on the pitch. The game eventually ended with a goal resulting from a free kick from McAllister, with Coventry City forcing a tie at home with Nottingham Forest. The first and only match between the two men was a draw.

Later, Twain did not care about this opponent with whom he had the single affinity. McAllister, who had drifted along years in the lower leagues and also briefly coached Premier League teams, had never accomplished much results. His best result was to lead the Wolverhampton Wanderers Football Club back to the Premier League last season and then he was poached by Evan Doughty to the Forest team.

After more than a decade of training, his coaching level was much better than when he first encountered Twain. But it was not enough to manage Nottingham Forest...

Nottingham Forest did not have a mature set of tactics and was more dependent on the individual players during the games rather than the entire team. The offensive starting point was launched wherever they thought and completely without rules. Even if they had a high ball possession rate, it did not make people feel at ease. Instead, it was Everton, the visiting team, which had a couple of attacks that threatened the Forest team's goal. Moyes, who had run Everton for two decades, was remarkable. If it had not been for Everton's poor financial resources, he could have achieved a lot more...

Twain shook his head and found himself distracted again. Why was he still thinking of tactics? It looked like he had not completely shook off the identity of a manager. Ah it was an occupational hazard, ah an occupational hazard.

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If anyone were to mock the American, Evan Doughty for his ignorance of football, he would definitely find it unacceptable. Even though he did not comprehend professionally to the level of a manager, he could also tell that the game currently in progress was boring.

His team did not gain the upper hand at all. Instead, it was worried about the other side's counterattack. It was the result of what McAllister had trained for over a month...

"Like a sheet of loose sand..." Evan Doughty snorted as he sat on the podium.

Allan Adams sat next to him in silence.

In the front left side of both of them, it was the Robin Hood Grandstand, where most die-hard Forest fans congregated. Right above there were lots slogans criticizing and insulting Evan Doughty and Allan Adams as usual.

"Go back to America and eat sh*t!"

"This team does not belong to the two of you. It's our team!"

"F**K YOU! Evan Doughty & Allan Adams!"

"You two gay guys! Go home and f**k each other!"

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Of course, the most popular slogan went something like this: "Give me back Tony!" "We want Tony!" "No one can replace Tony Twain!"

Although four years had passed and Nottingham Forest had replaced countless managers, the fans here still count not forget Tony Twain. So much so that every time a manager was replaced, it would only make them miss the former boss and now the England national team manager.

The game had progressed to the 11th minute. The fixed program at the Crimson Stadium began. The home fans rose from their seats one by one and then faced the direction of the podium. Without any command and advance rehearsals, they began to sing the chorus with great tacit understanding:

"Tony Twain won the championship for us, but he left. Evan Doughty will only sell people for money, which he keeps. Evan's a stupid c**t! A stupid c**t! Oh, yes! If you agree, just stamp your feet with me!"

With a series of rumbling sounds, the stamping of the feet traveled throughout the stadium. The Crimson Stadium seemed to shake like it was a minor earthquake.

"Evan is a stupid c**t!"

When Twain heard such revealing lyrics filled with profanity, he really had a feeling of not knowing whether to cry and laugh. Actually, his dissatisfaction with Evan Doughty and Allan Adams, had long disappeared in these four years. They only had a difference of ideas. The so-called going on their separate ways could not be considered as a personal grievance. So, it was not necessary to hang onto the entanglement. But for the fans, it was absolutely unforgivable that Evan Doughty and Allan Adams had joined forces to drive Twain away.

Such a distinct tremor, how could the two people sitting on the podium not feel it? Moreover, the exact meaning was no secret after such lyrics had been sung over and over again. Every time he heard such a song, Evan Doughty's face looked rather ugly – to be called “a stupid c**t by tens of thousands of people in person and still remained nonchalant, the face of that person must be thicker than the earth's crust. But Evan Doughty could not cultivate to that state. But at present, Doughty did not behave as usual. He was not angry, or it could be said that on the face of it, one could not discern if he was angry. He sat in his seat, looking at the pitch below, as if he lost in his thoughts.

The song lasted for a minute before it stopped. The fans sat back in their seats and returned to watching the game mode.

It was a pity that the team's performance still did not improve.

Allen had little interest in the game, which had no sense of beauty and no hope of winning. He began to turn his head around and chat with the two guests sitting next to him. These two people were the Arabs from the Middle East, with their striking white robes and headscarves. Their presence here suggested that the club appeared to be in contact with a consortium from the Middle East.

In fact, most of the guests sitting on the podium were not interested in the game. They just took advantage of the football game as an opportunity to socialize. For example, they would talk to each other about their gains in the stock market and futures market, chat about how their franchises were opening new stores, spoke about the investment projects they were bullish on to attract people around them to invest and so on...

It was like a social dance being moved to the stands on the football stadium.

Evan Doughty turned his attention around and found the buzzing discussions behind him. The subjects they were talking about had nothing to do with football. These noises sounded like countless flies swarming around his ears which irritated, but he could not stand up and scold them, telling them to all “SHUT UP.” These people were sponsors who could not be offended lightly...

When he could not find anyone to talk to, Evan turned his gaze to the field again. The score was still 0:0. However, Everton had taken the initiative and Nottingham Forest could only come under attack. The Forest team was indeed in contact with a consortium from the United Arab Emirates. With the invitation to them this time to watch the Forest team's first game of the new season, the club hoped the team could use its outstanding results to boost their value in front of the wealthy Arabs.

It just so happened that the performance of the team was so bad...

McAllister was just a stopgap solution and a transition manager. If the Forest team was to make a comeback, they needed to find a manager with standards and a prestige enough to control the locker room. It was just that such a manager was far and in between in the current football world. Where were they going to find him?

Evan Doughty's eyes wandered around and his gaze settled on the banners in the Robin Hood grandstand.

“No one can replace Tony Twain!!”

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Twain wanted to yawn, but he held back. The game was too boring, but Theresa was very interested in everything and looking everywhere. She could not keep still in his arms and he did not have to worry about having nothing to do ...

Everton's players had the ball on the pitch and the fans around him were booing to put pressure on the Everton players. The middle fingers were commonplace. He regretted bringing his daughter, because Theresa had already asked him thrice what the "upright middle fingers" meant ...

In order to distract her, Twain could only do everything possible to let his daughter pay attention to the football game itself. And the way to coax her was to say, "Quickly look, your brother Wood is playing football!", "Look! Your brother Wood has fallen!" (Actually, he was shoveling the ball) "Quickly, look at your brother Wood..."

At long last, it made his young daughter slightly more interested in the game.

But her brother Wood did not touch the ball. The man who had the ball on the pitch was now an Everton player.

The Belgian midfielder, Marouane Fellaini currently had control of the ball. He was a tall defensive midfielder and Everton's mainstay as well as the main midfielder for the Belgian national team. As his position was further back, the Forest team did not have anyone rushing up to tackle. Fellaini controlled the ball with ease and eventually passed the ball to James Vaughn who withdrew to provide support.

Vaughan and his partner on the forward line, the Polish player, Robert Lewandowski, did a two-versus-one pass to shake off George Wood who came up to defend. After he received the ball again, he did not give the Forest center back a chance to pounce over. He suddenly fired a long shot around the top of the penalty arc!

The football stuck to the turf and rolled past the hands of the goalkeeper, Wayne Hennessey to cross the goal line...

"A gorgeous long shot! James Vaughn! Everton leads Nottingham Forest 1:0 in the away game!"

The blue-clad fans in the opposite stands jumped and cheered loudly while the Nottingham Forest side fell into silence. Many of the fans around Twain held their heads in their hands and watched helplessly as the Everton players dashed around in celebration on the pitch.

In fact, they were more or less used to facing such scenes for the past four years, so they did not boo the team for the goal concede. They just chose to be silent.

This type of silence was more numbness in Twain's eyes. In the past, the Forest fans would overwhelm the goal-scoring side with thunderous hissing as soon as the team conceded the goal. How can you not be booed when you score a goal in our home game? Dream on!

After a while, there were boos coming in the other direction at last. It was coming from the most aggressive group of fans. It was just that it was not known if they were not booing Everton, or Nottingham Forest.

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The goal scored on the pitch distracted from the lively discussions of the guests on the podium, with a group of people turning their attention back to the pitch. When they discovered that it was Everton that scored the goal, they soon returned to their respective topics.

“I know a project that is guaranteed to make a lot of money...”

“Even Cambodia is almost hollowed out. Where else in the world has it not been developed? Antarctica? Ha...”

“I’m going to fly back to New York next weekend, where I have some business to take care of...”

“Ms. Nancy, you are so beautiful...”

“No, we don’t have any problems at the moment. There are no operational difficulties. I guarantee this is a deal that benefits both parties...”

Only Evan Doughty stared blankly at the Everton players celebrating on the pitch and felt distraught. Even he, who did not know much about football, could feel the team’s morale drop.

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The game went on and the Forest fans in the stands were a little frustrated. This period of time belonged to the Everton fans, who sang and cheered on Everton in the stands, while the Forest fans could not summon up the energy to go head to head against them.

The broadcast of each game could not always be aimed at the field. The footage would often insert some other scenes such as give the technical area some close-ups, or when some interesting slogan was found in the grandstand, the camera footage would also give it some extra attention. When there were some famous people in the stands, they would also be given close-ups.

The live footage of the game spanned across the stands. It first aimed at the few banners. Then it suddenly changed and cut into a scene in the grandstand.

The close-ups footage of live television was usually visible on the big screens of the stadium, so when the live matches were televised, one could often see some of the fans appearing on the televisions and waving excitedly to the cameras while looking at the big screen on the other side.

This was nothing new. But the Forest fans were not in the mood to give a show. Their team was falling behind. Whomever could still laugh for the camera, must not be a hardcore Forest fan.

This close-up was not to let the fans in that area act for the camera. They obviously had another reason. The camera angle zoomed closer and closer till it was fixed on a certain someone.

“Ah ha! Let’s see who this is!” The game’s commentator laughed when he saw the man. “Wearing a pair of sunglasses and a baseball cap, he looks like a spy...”

There was no doubt that the person who was betrayed by the live television cameras was Tony Twain, who did not care at first, because his mind was on the field. It was not until the looks in people’s eyes around him were different, that he realized something was not right because everyone was not watching the game. Instead, they turned their gazes to him.

Without waiting for him to react to what was going on, a voice suddenly sounded on the live broadcast, "Let us welcome—"

An earth-shattering chorus of voices rang out in the stands, "Tony Twain!!!"

The sound startled Twain, who stood up reflexively. As a result, the cheers became even louder.

"Tony! Tony! Tony!!"

Only then Twain reacted. He knew that he had been exposed, so he simply lent Theresa's hand to say hello to everyone.

Truthfully speaking, he was feeling a little smug to have received such an applause after having left here for four years.

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The sudden cheers also jolted the players on the pitch. Mitchell, who should have caught the pass, let the ball go out of bounds when he heard the cheers, but he was not booed by the fans. Instead, the fans were shouting "Tony! Tony!"

He looked up and easily found the focal point of the cheering. A man was standing there in the upper level of the grandstand. It was as if a king was there to receive the deference from the people.

Not only he, many players were also looking up.. But the people who would be dumbstruck when they saw the man were not many. After all, the Forest team's old players were almost gone.

Mitchell was still distracted when Wood came up and yelled at him, "What are you doing?! Why are you not defending?"

"Look there, George! It's the boss! It's the boss!" Mitchell pointed to the stands and shouted excitedly instead.

Wood did not even turn his head. He just stared at Mitchell and yelled, "Are you going to let him see you sleepwalking on the field?"

His remark was like a wake-up call to the sleepwalker. Mitchell ran to participate in the defense. This time it was Wood's turn to look back at the stands.

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The cheers continued and Evan Doughty was initially startled by the cheers. Then he saw Tony Twain's figure on the television screen. It greatly surprised him – they had not been in touch for a long time. He did not expect Twain to come to the stadium to watch the game. He thought Twain must have hated him.

Behind him, the social symposium was interrupted by the cheers of the fans who welcomed Twain. One by one, they asked around in a startling inquiry, looking for the cause of the cheering.

"What happened?"

"What are they shouting?"

“Tony? Which Tony? Tony Twain? He’s back?”

Allan also stopped his conversation with the Arabs and turned his gaze toward the big screen. He did see Twain and his daughter.

Four years have passed, and he even has a child...

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More than 40,000 Forest fans in the stands had their hands outstretched as they bent over to worship and paid tribute to His Majesty, even though the Majesty had been away for four years. As the banner had indicated, no one here could replace Tony Twain.

Twain waved to his subjects and sat down again. After such a display, he could no longer watch the game.

The cheering lasted a while before it faded away.

But the homage to the king was not over yet. At this moment, someone came up next to him and said, “Hey, I did not think the guy sitting next to me is Tony Twain. Give me an autograph, Tony!”

“I want a picture!”

“Your daughter is so beautiful!”

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For a time, he was surrounded by enthusiastic fans, and Twain had to deal with them, one by one. After satisfying everyone’s requests for autographs, photographs, handshakes, hugs, etc., he was able to sit down and watch the game again...

When the surrounding voices finally returned to normal decibel range, Theresa came next to Twain’s ear and spoke into his ear, “Daddy, which ‘Tony’ are they shouting for?”

Twain laughed this time and said, “They’re shouting for your daddy!”

“Is Daddy a big star?”

“Yes, a big star!” Twain answered with great pride and confidently. “Daddy is the king here.” He looked down at the pitch below and muttered the last remark, “I once was...”

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Perhaps because Twain came personally to watch the game. Nottingham Forest’s morale was boosted dramatically. In the ensuing game, they gradually took the initiative and the score was finally equalized by Mitchell before the end of the first half.

The goalscorer, Mitchell, ran to the area below the stands where Twain was and gave a salute to the top. Everyone knew what he meant with this celebration.

In the second half, Nottingham Forest continued with the efforts and went on to score another goal. In the end, they overtook and beat the visiting team, Everton by 2:1 to secure their arduous first victory of the season.

But after the game, people did not concern themselves with the Forest team's victory, but Tony Twain's "return" to the Crimson Stadium. In the post-match press conference, the media repeatedly asked McAllister questions about what he thought of Twain coming to watch the game. McAllister replied with an unfriendly expression, "I'm sorry, I'm not interested in an ordinary spectator."

But the media did not "let him go." After the game, in order to attract more eyeballs, some of the media outlets even used the headline—"A return to Nottingham Forest after four years, His Majesty helped the team reverse the game!"

It was made to look like Twain had led the team to victory. Poor McAllister...

Chapter 982: Visiting Michael

In the blink of the eye, the new season had already begun for more than a fortnight. Nottingham Forest's results were one win, one draw and one loss. This was a mediocre result and nobody knew what to evaluate it as.

Twain could hardly get any information about Nottingham Forest unless he went online as he was in America now.

During this fortnight, he completed another massive task—His second autobiography was finally done, and it was being published at the same time all over the world. Twain had announced that this would be his last autobiography. Since he had already retired, what else would there be for him to write about?

This autobiography talked about Twain's whole managerial career. The difference between this and the previous autobiography was that his time with the national team took up a large portion of it this time. At the same time, this was his first time talking about the details about him leaving Nottingham Forest even though the media had already dug out most of the information about that.

Next, he flew to Los Angeles with Theresa to participate in a book-signing event for his latest autobiography there. After that, he met up with a few Hollywood stars and directors after introduction by Shania and his good friends, Beckham and Tom Cruise, to discuss about another major event—An autobiographical movie. This movie would be produced by Tom Cruise's United Artists Studios. Twain and Shania also donated a huge sum of money. It was an autobiographical movie after all, so it was not completely commercialized and there was no need to expect too much in terms of ticket sales. It was mainly for audiences who like Twain. If one wants to watch the story of the most arrogant and most successful manager in the footballing world on the big screen, then this was a movie that must not be missed. As for whether he was popular amongst the viewers...that was not important.

In truth, it was Twain using his own money and the help of his friends to complete a small wish of his—Making a movie out of the story of his life.

As the producer, Cruise thought that this was good material for a sports movie—This was because it accurately reflected the football culture in England.

However, the media provided a different view after catching wind of this news.

“...Arguing with his opponents, full of vulgarities, going against the Football Association, criticizing the referee, arrogant, causing trouble everywhere... I really worry about the effects of this movie on kids when it's made. Anyway, I'll not be allowing my son to watch this movie in the theatres!”

“This piece of news shattered the last trace of good feeling I had for him because of the World Cup... The thought of seeing his face on the big screens sounds like a tragedy to me...”

Cruise did not mind the criticism of the media. In fact, that was the exact effect that he wanted. As a controversial character in the sports world, Twain's presence brought along voices of differing opinions everywhere he went. This was his advantage as he was able to attract enough attention. The producing studios had already witnessed the power of this advantage—The movie had not even started to be made yet and there were many calls from different media sources calling for an interview with the studios. Many other media sources became free advertisement for it too.

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“As a movie that's planned to be about 100 minutes long, we'll definitely not be able to show the full 15 years of your managerial career. Therefore, we'll have to take certain parts...” The United Artists Studios' producer was telling Twain about his ideas for this movie. Tom Cruise, the boss of United Artists, was accompanying Twain and Shania by their side as their good friend. “This won't just be purely a sports movie. We wish to express some thinking towards soccer as a sport.”

“We've read your two autobiographies thoroughly,” Next to the producer's hand were the two autobiographies by Twain. The one below was the first autobiography that Twain published after 10 years of managing, “Ten years”. The book below was the latest new autobiography that was being published at the same time all over the world, “Champion”. “We think that the story that is most suited to be made into a movie is your first season in Forest, or should we say, half a season. It was very dramatic and at the same time, it provokes thought... I love Shankly's quote, ‘Some people think football is a matter of life and death. I don't like that attitude. I can assure them it is more serious than that'. I think what you experienced during that half season was proof and an introspection of that quote...”

It was a good thing that this producer was Scottish and not an American who knew nothing about football. Otherwise, the movie would bear no resemblance to the real thing—Even though there were no good players from Scotland, there were many good managers from that country. He had some pretty good insights regarding a movie which featured a manager as the main lead.

Twain, who had been listening quietly all this while, suddenly interrupted him, “Sorry, can I ask you a question? Did you just say you want to use the second half of the 2002-2003 season as the base for the movie?”

“That's right!” The producer replied, “Even though your team failed in their bid to win the title, but that's okay. We can list out all your achievements during the end credits of the movie...” He thought that Twain was worried that the eventual failure at the end of that season would not be able to satisfy the audience.

Little did he know that Twain was worried about something else.

He stroked his chin in consideration for a while before shaking his head and saying, “I'm afraid I have to discuss this with someone...”

Tom Cruise looked at Shania next to Twain and she could only smile at him helplessly. She did not know what had gotten into Twain as well.

“Okay then, we’ll do this again next time...” Cruise looked at the producer who was going off to get his car, then turned back and asked Twain, “How long are you going to stay here, Tony?”

“Don’t worry, we’ll be here for quite some time.”

When the producer drove the car over, Cruise gave Twain and Shania a hug before saying goodbye to them. After he left, Shania asked Twain, “Who are you going to discuss the movie with?”

“An old friend,” Twain smiled at Shania, “an old friend whom I’ve not met for many years... I wonder if he still remembers me.”

“Do you want me to go with you?” Shania asked as she lied within Twain’s embrace.

“No, it has been too long, I’m afraid that it might become awkward,” Twain patted Shania’s shoulder gently.

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Their young daughter was chasing butterflies on the lawn, exclaiming in joy here and there while Fiona Bernard was seated on the white lawn chair, reading her magazine and asking her daughter to lower her voice occasionally.

“Shannon, keep it down, you’ll disturb the neighbours!”

“Don’t dirty your skirt. I just washed that yesterday.”

Her daughter’s voice was actually reminding her mother what she was doing. If she did not make a sound, then something would be wrong.

Now, Fiona could feel that something was wrong as her daughter was no longer making a sound. She dropped her magazine and looked up to search for her daughter. She found her on the lawn, shyly looking at a strange man standing outside their door.

That man was in a dark suit, wearing sunglasses, and he was standing right outside the door which reached his waist.

“We don’t need a vacuum cleaner or whatever you’re selling...” She stood up and walked to where her daughter was, grabbing hold of her.

“Madam, I’m not here to sell you anything. May I know if this is Michael Bernard’s place?” That man asked politely.

Fiona nodded.

A smile broke out on the face of the man in front of her and he removed his sunglasses, placing them in his shirt pocket. “Hello Madam. I’m a friend of your husband’s. We’ve met once, but you might not remember me anymore. My name is Tony Twain and I’m a long-time friend of your husband’s.

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When Michael returned home from work, he realized that there was a pair of man's shoes at the door.

"We have a guest?" He asked his wife who came to receive him.

"A friend of yours," Fiona said as she took her husband's coat and suitcase.

"My friend?" Michael changed his shoes as he thought about who it might be. Could it be that bank executive he met at the golf club, or maybe the lawyer he met when he went fishing the other time... But he was stunned when he entered the living room and saw who it was.

"Hi Michael," Twain stood up and greeted Michael Bernard.

Michael looked at the man in front of him in shock for a long while before muttering, "Ton...Tony? Why are you...why are you here?"

"Good thing you didn't move, otherwise, I won't be able to find you," Twain laughed as he said, "Actually, I have a place in Los Angeles too. I'll come over here to keep my wife, Shania, company sometimes, you know about that, don't you? I'm very sorry that I haven't come see you all this while, because... Um, I'm worried that I won't know what to say when I meet you." He shrugged, then shook his head and sighed. However, he smiled again shortly and said, "I'm glad to see that you have such a cute and beautiful daughter now."

Shannon was holding on to her mother's skirt as she stayed close to her. She looked at her daddy and the stranger with much curiosity.

"Actually, I came to look for you because of Gavin..."

The Bernard couple shuddered when Twain said this name.

Later, Twain told the two of them his reason for coming and hoped to get an answer from them. Ever since he reached Michael's place and saw pictures of Gavin all over the place, Twain felt that he made the right decision to come. Little Gavin still held a very important place in Michael and his wife's hearts.

Since he was going to bring the incident involving Gavin to the big screens, he definitely had to seek his family's approval.

If he was being honest, Twain thought that Michael's wife would object violently. He even prepared to get a scolding from her, but he did not expect Fiona to take a look at Michael, then stood up and walk away saying, "I'll go make dinner."

Next, Michael examined Twain for a long time before saying, "I heard that you've retired?"

Twain nodded.

"Why retire?"

"Erm... I have nothing to fight for anymore, I guess I'm tired..."

Michael laughed, "Who would have thought that the arrogant Tony Twain would feel tired too? Too bad... The World Cup final was very exciting."

Twain was a little surprised to hear him say that, "I thought you stopped watching football? Didn't you cut all ties with football?"

"I can still watch the match on television."

Twain stole a glance at the kitchen, "Your wife..."

"I told her everything. Come to think of it, I have to thank you, Tony."

"Thank me?" Twain did not know what Michael meant.

"Thank you for sending me tickets for every final. It wasn't until the European Cup final before I realized that I can never leave football..." Michael sighed, "Even though I won't watch matches live at the stadium now, I don't have to think of football as a terrifying devil. I have finally found peace... Do you know, Tony? If you had asked about this two years ago, we would definitely have not agreed to it. Gavin is like a stone in our hearts that we cannot put down, and it was getting harder for us to handle it. Now..." He shrugged. "We'll allow you to bring the story of Gavin to the big screens. I believe this will be a kind of consolation to Gavin."

This was the answer that Twain wanted, and he was very happy about it. Out of reflex, he reached out, looking to shake Michael's hand, but he did not expect Michael to give him a high five instead.

"Don't treat me as a negotiation partner. Do you remember how we met, Tony?"

Twain laughed as he heard him say that, "Of course, that's a piece of beautiful memory..."

Twain gave Shania a call that night, telling her that he would be staying at Michael's place and would not be going home that night. He reminded her and Theresa to rest earlier, then he continued to chat with Michael, all the way till late night. Ever since Michael left England in 2003, they had not talked to each other so amicably. Even though they did not drink a single drop of alcohol, they were flushed with excitement, as if they were both drunk.

They would laugh for a while, then cry for a while. The two of them were in their fifties, yet they were behaving like youngsters then. Thinking of how fast the past decade passed for them, they could not help but reminisce about it. When the two of them first met, they were enemies who fought with each other. At that time, the two of them never thought that they could ever sit and chat like this one day.

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The next morning, Twain said goodbye to Michael, his wife and their daughter, Shannon, then took the car back home.

Next, Twain gave the producer a call to agree to his proposal and gave him the go-ahead. There was nothing else he needed to say as there was someone more professional than him taking charge of it, so he had no need to worry about it. All he needed to do was to be an extra for some scenes and enjoy himself, that was all.

What was left were some miscellaneous stuff such as signing the contract. When all these were done, Twain was enjoying the company of his wife and daughter at his home in Los Angeles when he saw the calendar and suddenly realized that it was almost 9th September.

His fiftieth birthday was coming soon.

Chapter 983: At 50, I Know the Decrees of Heaven

“Happy birthday, Uncle Tony!”

When Twain opened his eyes in the morning, the first thing he heard was his wife, Shania, speaking softly as she laid next to his ear.

But he could not muster up a smile. Instead, he sighed and looked unhappily at Shania, draping herself over his own body. He said, “50-year-old birthday, what’s so happy about that...”

Shania said with a grin, “I don’t care so much, it’s happy as long as it’s a birthday! Happy birthday, Uncle Tony!” She repeated it, giving Twain a good morning kiss, and Shania jumped out of bed.

The maid and nanny had already prepared breakfast downstairs. Since there was a child in the family and such a big villa, Twain no longer insisted on their family living on their own. Theresa would always be afraid when the night came – the house was too big, even if all the rooms and corridor lights were turned on, she was always afraid of monster suddenly jumping out of the corners. So, they simply hired a live-in maid and nanny so as to add some vitality to the house.

And even after Twain and Shania returned to England with Theresa, the house would still be left to the helpers to live in.

A house was meant for people to live in. Otherwise no matter how nice the house was as long as no one lived in it, the rate of dilapidation was amazing. As long as people lived in it, it would be cleaned regularly, and the house would be fresh every day.

Thinking about it on this level, Twain no longer cared about their privacy...

Twain also followed suit to get out of bed, get dressed and washed up. And Shania, who got out of bed first, also did not have the habit to waste time in front of the dresser. As long as she was not going out for any activities, she would emerge fresh-faced without any makeup. Even though she was alluringly gorgeous like she was in promotional posters, movies, advertisements and runway stages, she was still equally beautiful. Twain looked at her for a long time and felt the bare-faced Shania even more beautiful.

By this time Shania had gone to knock on her daughter’s door.

“Theresa, are you up?”

When her daughter jumped to open the door, she was suddenly pulled in the arms of Shania waiting at the door. Shania tickled her armpits. Her young daughter’s twinkling laughter instantly tinkled all over the room.

Twain ignored the mother and daughter playing over there and went alone into the bathroom to begin to wash up. He habitually looked up at his reflection in the mirror. His hair was still black, but that was only superficial. He used a comb to tidy his hair, and the white hair could not be covered under the black surface. All the white strands popped out. In fact, a 50-year-old person’s hair would not be so obvious

quickly. But a manager was a profession that used the brains and endured immense mental pressure. Therefore, it was not uncommon for the hair to become whiter more quickly than an ordinary person.

Twain touched his snow-white hair and there was nothing he could do. The aging of the body could not be shifted with his own will.

It was just that there were more and more creases on his face, and he looked a little depressed. With his transmigration, even though he had won a lot of championship titles and married a beautiful wife, he also lost a few years on his lifespan for no good reason and could not borne a child of his own. He could only adopt one. This was really “the equivalent of paying for what you get.” He did not know whether those championship titles and money were equivalent to the lost years of life and lack of offspring...

He splashed some cold water on his face and the water splattered everywhere. With that, those distracting thoughts in his head was also splashed away.

Today’s breakfast was more abundant than usual. Obviously, the help had already been given special instructions by Shania and knew that today was the 50th birthday of the man of the house.

“Do you have any plans for today?” Shania asked during breakfast.

“No.” Twain shook his head. He had been busy a few days ago and was finally able to relax today. Moreover, he was completely free today and perhaps there was nothing to be busy with in the future for a period of time. Twain felt that the older he got, the less meaning the birthday held, so there was no big fanfare to invite people to a birthday party. Otherwise his house would have become a Hollywood’s over the top party.

Perhaps some people liked to use their birthdays to make friends with celebrities and use the opportunity to promote their fame and status. That was their prerogative. But Twain did not like to do it. At such times, he wanted to be with his loved ones, even if it was to watch television on the couch at home. It was better than to deal with those movie stars. Anyway, he was a football manager, and not of the same circles as the Hollywood stars. He only guest starred in movies for the thrill of it. He did not have to make any connections or kowtow to anyone.

Twain’s lack of desires made things difficult for Shania instead. He should not spend his birthday without any fanfare at all, shouldn’t he? It was his 50-year-old birthday. How many 50-year-old birthdays could a person have in his life... Well, just one. She was really reluctant to spend such a special day at home...

Seeing Shania having a headache alone, Twain advised, “Don’t think about it. I don’t want to go anywhere.”

“How can we do that? How can you spend your birthday by staying at home?”

“I can go shopping with you.” Twain spread his hands.

“It’s your birthday, not mine. How can you be doing what I want?” Shania widened her eyes and stared at Twain as she asked.

She did not expect Twain to retract his smile and did not evade Shania’s stare. Instead, he stared very seriously into her eyes, as if to see her heart through her eyes. He directly looked at Shania till she was little embarrassed before he said, “For me, the important thing is not how I celebrate this birthday. The

important thing is whom I spend it with. My birthday wish is to be with you, and..." He glanced at his daughter, who was having breakfast next to him and continued, "Theresa. It doesn't matter as to where we'll spend it at. It's nice to watch TV at home, it's also nice to go to the supermarket and buy things. It's all the same."

In fact, he still had some words he did not say. It would be too inauspicious to say those words. He would not mention them on such a festive day. All that mattered was it was clear in his own heart.

Twain's words, which were spoken from the heart, touched Shania's heart, but she did not show it on the surface. There was tacit understanding between them, so there was no need for any superfluous displays, such as eyes moved to tears, holding of hands and looking at each other wordlessly ... She only pursed her lips helplessly. She said, "Anyway, it's your birthday today, so it's up to you."

Twain immediately brought the smile back to his face and went to play with his daughter, Theresa.

Shania looked at the father and daughter getting along well and sighed gently in her heart. Uncle Tony was really fifty years old... It made her sad to think about it. Although she said "Happy Birthday" to Uncle Tony, she was actually in the same mood as Uncle Tony – she was afraid that it would only become sadder each birthday after the age of 50.

She first met him 15 years ago, when she was 13 years old and Uncle Tony was 34 years old. There was even a misunderstanding after the two people met... At the thought of Uncle Tony's wolfish look as he glanced at her bosom, Shania could not help laughing.

She did not expect to "mistakenly board a pirate ship" and never got off just like that....

I was only 13 years old at the time. How did I fall in love with this middle-aged uncle?

"What are you laughing about?" Twain heard Shania's laughter and looked back at her. He discovered that she had an obvious smile on her face, but her eyes were not focused. She was clearly lost in her thoughts.

"Ah... Thinking of the first time you and I met." Shania did not hide, and plainly told Twain.

Twain recalled it when she said so. He was once mistaken for a pervert by his wife in front of him ... At that time, he had just lost an important game and also lost six months of hard work put into the season. Michael had left him for the far away United States and little Gavin had died tragically in the fans' riot. His emotions were in a mess. But because of his encounter with the quirky Shania, his mood was able to lighten up soon after, as if the clouds had lifted.

Twain suddenly thought of a phrase, "If only the time stopped at the moment when we met for the first time."

The relationship between himself and Shania was quite in line with the meaning. It was as if only a day had gone by and not 15 years. It was as if they had met for the first time. He was never tired of Shania, and Shania did not tire of him too. Maybe it was because they spent more time apart than they had been together for 15 years?

“Theresa said she wants to go to Hollywood and watch people make movies. Anyway, it’s my birthday and it’s not nice to always coop up at home.” Twain told Shania their daughter’s wishes. In fact, Theresa did not want to see her father and mother quarrel, so she said that on purpose.

Shania naturally had no objection. She took Theresa upstairs to change and put on make-up.

Twain left the dining room and sat down in the living room to rest while he waited for the mother and daughter.

He did not wait long. Since she was just going out to play, Shania just put on a touch of makeup while Theresa just changed out of her pajamas she wore at home.

Watching Shania lead Theresa walk down the stairs, Twain discovered that although she was an adopted child, there was a resemblance in the features between the raven-haired Theresa and the dark brown-haired Shania. Shania had a little Chinese heritage, so they looked like a pair of mother and daughter. For the rest of their lives, Twain had no other desire as long as the two of them were by his side. Anyway, time would not go back, no matter how reluctant he was. He was already 50 years old. Since that was the case, rather than sitting here, feeling how time flew and bemoaning getting older, it was better to live well with his wife and child.

When Shania saw Twain’s hair at a glance as she walked down, she frowned, “Aren’t you going to dye it?”

Twain shook his head and said, “No more dyeing. I’m not going to dye it in the future.”

Shania was taken aback and said, “Did you suffer a blow, Uncle Tony?”

“I just suddenly figured out one thing.” Twain took Shania’s arm and added, “The snow-white hair looks good too.”

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In fact, Twain did not get a peace of mind when he went out to relax. His cell phone constantly rang with calls from friends, as if they had planned it in advance. Everyone wanted to wish him a happy birthday. Michael, Wood, Brosnan, Dunn, Kerslake, Walker... Shania was a little displeased. Shania was not at fault. What was supposed to be family time for the three of them, was interrupted by a series of phone calls.

“Well, no one else should call me.” Twain knew his wife was a little unhappy. Their conversation only lasted a few words before it was interrupted by the phone ringing, which was annoying. “I’m going to turn off the phone.”

He lifted his cell phone and planned to turn it off. But coincidentally the phone in his hand started vibrating again.

Shania rolled her eyes.

“All right. This time, whoever it is, I’ll turn the phone off.” Twain glanced at the phone screen, and a somewhat unfamiliar name flashed on it – Evan.

When the name first appeared in Twain's eyes, he actually did not think of who it was. He was just about to hang up and then turn it off when his finger hovered over the hang-up key, because he suddenly remembered who the person behind the name was.

The question was, why would he call him? He and the club chairman had not been in touch since he ended his contract with the club in 2014. Other than he once called him again later in hopes that he would return to the Forest team, the two men had not been in touch since. What was the matter with him calling at this time? Could it be that he had called to wish him a "happy birthday" too?

Twain frowned and could not figure out why. Then he reacted – wouldn't he find out once he answered the call?

"Oh hell..." He muttered as he pressed the answer button.

"Hey!"

When Shania saw Twain raise the phone to his ear, she took Theresa to quickly step straight into a store.

"Happy birthday, Tony!" Evan Doughty's voice came on the phone. But Twain did not know how to react to it.

Hearing such a warm voice, Twain became even more confused about why Evan was calling him.

"Thank you... Evan." He thought about it and did not address him as "Mr. Doughty." Instead, he changed it to a more cordial "Evan." Although he and Evan had a falling out when he first left, the incident was four years ago, and it was not a murderous feud. What else could he not let go? Moreover, for him to have so many championships titles, part of it was to Evan's credit.

"I heard you went to Los Angeles?" Evan Doughty seemed to be in high spirits over the phone.

"Yes, to be with my wife. She also misses her daughter." Twain did not want to talk too much to him, not because he was upset with Evan, but because he did not want to keep his wife waiting for too long. If she found out that he was still on the phone when she came out of the store with Theresa in a while, she was going to explode...

Evan Doughty also seemed to sense the coolness of Twain's tone. He could only take it that he still held a grudge toward him for when he drove him away at the time.

He laughed bitterly, "Tony, do you still care about what happened at that time?"

Huh?" Twain stared blankly for a moment, and immediately understood. Evan was clearly mistaken.

"Oh, not at all. Let bygones be bygones. I actually bought season tickets every season, and occasionally I would go to the home stadium to watch games."

Evan certainly knew because he saw Twain's figure in the Forest team's first home game of the new season appeared in the stands at the Crimson Stadium.

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"Mommy, what are you looking at?"

Theresa felt strange. After her mother took her into the clothing store, she did not take her to pick out clothes as usual. Instead she used the excuse of “take a look on your own” to move to this corner to peek through the window.

“Of course, I’m looking at Daddy.” Shania touched her daughter’s head and looked over again.

“Who’s on the phone with Daddy?”

“Mommy doesn’t know.”

Despite the separation of the window, Shania could see from Twain’s expression that he was not as happy as he had been on previous phone calls.

Who on earth was calling him?

Although he had said to let bygones be bygones, there was no way to skirt around the matter since it was mentioned. The topic suddenly made Doughty feel that Twain was a little further away from himself, because the tone on the other end of the line was getting colder...

But in fact, Twain was anxious that Shania would come out in a moment. If he was still not done with the phone call, he was going to have a hard time.

Realizing that it was not a good idea to take such a risk to make the call, it was inappropriate to talk any further. So, Evan Doughty politely wished him a good time and hung up.

Once the other side hung up the phone, Twain was relieved on this side. He immediately turned off the phone, and then put it back in the pocket as he waited for Shania and Theresa to come back from the shopping.

But instead, the mother and daughter returned emptyhanded.

“Did not you buy anything?” Twain asked somewhat diffidently.

Shania shook her head and went straight to the point to ask, “Who’s that on the phone?”

“... Evan, Evan Doughty.” Twain hesitated a little and chose to tell his wife honestly.

Shania was no stranger to the name. She frowned and said, “What does he want with you by calling?”

“Just to say, ‘Happy Birthday.’” Twain shrugged.

Shania looked suspiciously at her husband. She knew her husband too well. His love of football had always surpassed everything. Sometimes she often wondered whether the man loved her or football...

“That’s all. We did not chat too much. I was afraid that you would come out and saw that I was still on the phone, so I just exchanged a few words with him.” Twain hurriedly explained for fear of Shania’s suspicion.

Shania looked at Twain, and then the corners of her lips slowly curled up, forming into an arc. Then she leaned her body over and nestled in Twain’s arms, putting her arm around him, while her other hand held Theresa.

“I’m hungry. I know a store with delicious ice cream. Let’s go!”

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Twain, who quietly spent his 50th birthday with his family, did not return to the United Kingdom, but remained in Los Angeles. When his wife was at work, he spent time with his daughter. When his wife had a break, the whole family would go out to play. The days went by with ease.

People often said that at thirty, one stood firm. At forty, one had no doubts. At fifty, one knew the decrees of Heaven.

The 50-year-old Twain felt that his destiny was this.

Chapter 984: I Have Decided to Retire

“... Let’s do five sets of passing exercises next. George, you’re in charge of passing the ball from here to the two sidelines, five passes each on the left and right sides. For one group...” Manager McAllister was explaining the specifics of the training on the training ground to the players, “When Freddy kicks the ball to you, you have to pass it directly. You can’t adjust. Got it?”

Wood nodded.

“As for the players on the two sidelines, cut inside to shoot after you receive the ball.”

The players on the two sidelines indicated that they understood.

“Very well, start practicing.” After he had given all the instructions, McAllister retreated from the training ground and handed it over to Coach Freddy Eastwood to handle it while he himself stood at a side and watched carefully.

The team’s recent record had been up-and-down. He was under a lot of pressure too. The league tournament was already in the month of October and the Forest team was still in tenth place. Such a placement was absolutely unsatisfactory to everyone. There were rumors outside that Evan Doughty wanted to fire him but could not find a better excuse because he had led the team to an immediate win when it looked like he was about to be fired and that eased the pressure a little.

But it was not a long-term solution. He had to find a way to stabilize the condition of the team. Unfortunately, he was not a master of psychological adjustment. He could only find a way from the skills and tactics. He strengthened Wood’s core position and developed all the tactics around him. It was the only way McAllister could think of. After all, Wood’s form was stable. Over the years, there was almost no issue with his form. With him as the core, and as long as his condition was stable, then the team’s condition would not be too much of a problem.

By contrast, the other Italian player was simply too unreliable... Balotelli always wanted to leave the club, which always caused a din for a spell before every season. It had made the fans tired of him. Miraculously, though, he always ended up not leaving. Now that McAllister considered fixing him in the right midfielder position, the Forest team at least did not have to rely too much on him to score goals.

In order to improve the team’s performance, McAllister decided to sacrifice Wood’s defensive ability and let him focus on the offense. Therefore, Wood had to carry out more offensive drills during training

such as the previously mentioned straight passes, diagonal long passes or even plugging in with his own long shots ... The intensity of these training programs had increased.

Since becoming the Forest manager, he had to admit that even though Twain was an annoying person, he had cultivated George Wood for England, much to his credit. And now he was benefiting from it too.

As McAllister stared at the training ground and mulled over how to maximize Wood's role, someone had hurriedly walked behind him.

"Mr. McAllister."

"Ah? What's the matter?" McAllister's thoughts were interrupted, and he was a little annoyed. He did not turn his head around and kept staring at the training ground. He was using this method to let the unexpected person know that he was hard at work. If there's nothing urgent, you'd better not come and disturb me!

"It has to do with George Wood..."

That person whispered behind McAllister. As he listened, the expression on McAllister's face immediately changed from puzzlement to shock as well as at a complete loss ...

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Wood was on the field for practicing the passing drill. This training subject was on long passes, mainly to practice the accuracy of his direct long passes without adjusting in the face of the opponent's scramble. McAllister did not arrange for someone to make a scramble. He just instructed him not to adjust after receiving the ball. The actual effect was still somewhat different.

From the first three sets of training, Wood's long passes were becoming more and more skilled, whether in terms of the speed of the ball and the accuracy of the final target of the passes. Both could be considered top notch.

Just as he was about to continue his fourth set of passes, he saw Manager McAllister, who had been standing on the sidelines, make a time-out signal to Eastwood. Then he walked over directly toward him.

Was there something wrong with training? Wood did not think so. The quality of the practice was high and he himself was satisfied with it. Wood always demanded high standards of himself. Even a tough manager like Twain thought he was sometimes too tough on himself. Experience had also shown that as long as he thought it was fine, the coach would basically not be able to find any fault.

He stood there, waiting for the manager. He did not know what the manager wanted from him by pausing the training at this time.

When McAllister walked up to Wood, he opened his mouth and could not make a sound because he did not really know how he should relay the news to the other party.

After a moment's silence, the rest of the players on the training ground noticed the unusual situation happening here and turned their attention over one by one.

McAllister also clearly realized that standing here while saying nothing made it even worse. “Well, there’s something I need to tell you, George...” His voice was hoarse and low once he spoke, which startled McAllister – his usual voice did not sound like this.

Wood looked at the other man in bafflement. When had the manager spoke so carefully?

“Well...” McAllister hesitated for a while and decided not to just blurt out the matter directly, but to start with the process to mentally prepare Wood. “The club has received a call just now from the Royal Hospital of Nottingham University ... Your mother is in a critical condition and has just been taken to the hospital...”

Wood stared blankly at the manager. His mind was completely blank.

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In fact, in the last two years, Sophia’s health had increasingly worsened, so Wood had spent money to hire professional nursing staff to take care of his mother at home. He had to train and also traveled around to participate in tournaments. There was no way for him to stay next to his mother.

Professional nurses could handle any usual situations. But if she had to go to the hospital, it meant her problem was serious...

When Wood rushed to the hospital’s intensive care unit, his mother was still in a coma. Ms. Nancy, the private nurse in charge of caring for his mother, was sitting outside the ward, somewhat at a loss. Her job had been taken over by the hospital. If Sophia did not leave the hospital from now on, there was basically nothing left for her to do.

Wood tried to rush straight into the ward but was stopped by a young nurse wearing a face mask.

“What are you going to do, sir? You can’t enter the intensive care unit at will!”

“I want to see my mother!” Wood yelled at the other person.

“Please keep your voice down!” The female nurse, who stopped him at the door, frowned and said, “You are not allowed to enter the intensive care unit without permission.” She spoke in a low muffled voice because of the face mask she wore.

“I’m her son. Why can’t I go in?” Wood did not care too much about it. He just wanted to get in there. The nurse was also unwilling to back down. She came up and blocked in front of Wood with her chest out.

“The patient is still not out of danger yet. The doctor is keeping her under close observation. Please do not disturb our work!” She stared sternly at Wood.

“You...” Wood raised his fists, wanting to push aside the tactless nurse, but was stopped by Ms. Nancy, who saw what happened at the side.

“Calm down, Mr. Wood! This is the hospital...”

Even though Nancy was a lady, she was not a petite woman. She was sturdy, had broad shoulders and strong thighs – although it was not suitable to use these words to describe a lady, it was a true portrayal – Not weaker than men in terms of strength, she was able to hold Wood back with some difficulty.

“Are you the patient’s family?” The female nurse on the other side saw that Wood was being held back, so she pulled out a sheet and glanced through it.

“I’m her son. She’s my mother.” Wood had calmed down after being persuaded by Nancy. He replied in a low voice.

She did not expect the other party’s attitude to suddenly become so good. The female nurse lifted her head and gave him a strange look. How could it be that she did not recognize the man in front of her? As long as she was from Nottingham, even if she was not a fan, she should recognize the man in front of her at a glance. Because he was the legendary team captain of the Forest team, George Wood. No matter how bad the team’s performance was and how difficult his situation was, he never had the heart to leave the Forest team. He was respected by countless people because of it.

She just did not expect that the team captain who kept a low profile of his life off the field, would have such a fiery side to him. It was not the stadium here...

But even if she recognized him, it did not mean everything would be according to his wishes. It was the rule that the intensive care unit could not be entered at will. Even if the Queen were to be here, she would not let her in without permission.

Thinking of it, the nurse’s attitude eased a lot. She told Wood, “Your mother is not out of danger yet. We have just completed the resuscitation. She’s still in the observation stage. You can look at her through this glass panel.”

Needless to say, Wood had already leaned against the front of a thick glass panel, gazing fondly at his mother lying on the bed inside. Various types of tubes were stuck in her body and connected to many of the medical equipment which he could not name. A doctor in a sterilized suit was observing the equipment and taking notes inside the ward.

Looking at the other person’s appearance, he also realized that if he had barged in just now, he would have screwed things up.

With this in mind, Wood turned to the nurse still standing next to him and said, “What happened just now... I’m really sorry... I was too impulsive, I hope... you can forgive me...”

When the nurse looked at the man’s awkward appearance as he apologized, she could not help laughing. She guessed he was not in the habit of apologizing to anyone.

Thinking that he had clashed with her due to his anxiety about his mother’s wellbeing, the last trace of dissatisfaction in the female nurse’s heart also dissipated. She smiled and shook her head, “I’m fine.” Those eyes which looked straight at Wood just now, had transformed into two beautiful crescents of eye smile.

Generally, after the opening of this sentence, they should chat further and get acquainted with each other. But Wood was not in the mood to chat to the nurse. After he apologized to the other person, he

turned his eyes back at his mother separated by the glass. Apart from his mother, he had no room for anyone else in his heart and eyes at this time.

Wood gazed at his mother in the ward, while the nurse outside the ward gazed at Wood.

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Reporters soon discovered that something odd was afoot. During a routine filming the next morning, they did not see George Wood's figure.

Ever since George Wood became a member of the Forest team, he had only been late once. That was because when AC Milan wanted to purchase him, he had a conflict with Twain and came in late as a protest. Of course, the media did not know the real reason behind it. Only that Wood wanted to leave but was eventually persuaded by Twain to stay.

Other than that, Wood had never been late for training.

This time, it was different. Wood was not only late, the reporters waiting outside did not see Wood's figure even until the end of the training session in the morning. He was not late. He was absent from training...

It was a serious matter – indeed, if it had happened to the undisciplined players, it would not have been a big deal. But it had happened to George Wood, so it was a very serious matter – naturally it attracted a lot of media attention. They surrounded Manager McAllister after training. They wanted to ask him the reason behind Wood's absence.

Before asking McAllister, the media were also speculating among themselves on whether that meant something was wrong within the Forest team. Was it a conflict between the manager and captain? That could be big news!

McAllister was surrounded by dozens of reporters. If he did not give a reason why, he might not be able to leave Wilford today.

"Everybody..."

He had just opened his mouth and was overwhelmed by a louder clamor of voices.

"Mr. McAllister, has Wood applied for a leave of absence from training through you?"

"Mr. McAllister, do you know why Wood is absent from training?"

"Mr. McAllister, the team's not doing well recently, and now Wood is absent from training, are you going to penalize him?"

"Mr. McAllister..."

"..."

"All right!" McAllister shouted in frustration, "Just keep quiet!"

He waited till the reporters shut up one by one before he continued to say, "I regret to tell you that George's mother is hospitalized and in a critical condition, so he took time off to take care of his mother in the hospital."

As soon as the answer came out, the reporters present just looked at each other in dismay. They did not cotton on to what had happened for a while.

McAllister slipped away from the side while the reporters were still in a daze.

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Vivian Miller was the nurse on duty in the ward. She had just finished her job here and was getting ready to leave. She wanted to give some space for Wood and his mother. But as soon as she closed the door, she heard a sudden rush of footsteps coming from the end of the corridor. Following the rush of footsteps, a large group of reporters holding cameras appeared in front of her eyes.

What are they doing here? It was her first thought. Her second thought was – George Wood! They must have rushed here for Mr. Wood and his mother!

Vivian then made the same move as when she stopped Wood a day earlier. She stood at the door to stop the uninvited mob from approaching.

"This is the hospital. May I know who you are looking for?" Vivian asked despite knowing the answer so as to buy some time.

"Miss Nurse, can you please tell us if George Wood's mother is staying in this ward?" Someone came forward among the reporters and asked.

Miss Vivian Miller stared at the ill-intentioned group of reporters and did not answer.

The reporters took her silence as admittance and wanted to charge inside.

"This is the intensive care unit. You are not allowed to enter without permission!" For fear of disturbing the patient inside, the female nurse could not raise her voice, so she appeared a little powerless in front of such a large group of men. If that group of men really want to break in, she might have no way of stopping them as a girl...

"We're all friends of George. We're here out of concern for him. We know that he did not attend the training this morning..."

Some of the reporters were okay and knew to make excuses for themselves, even if they were lies. The others reached out directly to push aside Vivian Miller, the meddlesome nurse.

"I don't know you, this so-called group of 'friends.'"

Vivian felt that she could not hold on any longer. She scrambled at her feet and took a step back but did not hit the door. Instead, she knocked into a person's chest.

George Wood had showed up at the door to help Vivian fend off the impact from the reporters.

Seeing the man in question show up, the thick-skinned reporters suddenly became spirited and took out the cameras to start taking pictures of him. Some people even reached out with the microphones and recording equipment, wanting to ask questions.

Wood did something that the reporters did not expect. He pulled the nurse behind him to protect her with one hand while his other hand grabbed the nearest camera lens.

“If you dare to shoot, I’ll crush it.”

The remark surprised the media. They did not expect to get such a response. “Hey, George... We just care about you...”

“Thank you, but I don’t need it.” Wood answered with a grim face. His voice was low, as if he were a beast growling from the depths of its throat. It was a precursor to an attack.

The two sides seemed to be in a stalemate. The atmosphere at the scene was tense. Miss Vivian Miller, hiding behind Wood, only felt her heartbeat accelerating, for fear that the two sides would break out in a fight over a clash of words...

“A patient needs rest and a quiet environment. If you continue to cause a scene here, I will make sure that all of you will receive a letter from my lawyer.” The man who said this was not George Wood. The voice came from behind the crowd of reporters.

Everyone turned around and it turned out to be Wood’s agent, Billy Woox, as well as a large group of hospital security guards behind him...

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Relying on the security guards and threat of lawyer’s letters, they finally drove away the huddle of reporters at the door. Woox was talking to Wood in a room outside the ward.

“I rushed back the moment I got your call. How’s Sophia doing?”

“She just came out of the critical stage, but the doctors say we can’t be too optimistic...” Wood said in a soft voice, as if he was afraid of disturbing his mother who was in the room.

Woox looked at her listless face and did not know what to say for a moment. After all these years of working with Wood, he deeply understood Sophia’s place in Wood’s heart. It was not enough to say that she was Wood’s everything. Now it looked like Sophia was not going to hold on for much longer. What would happen to George when the time came?

Wood sat in front of Woox and pursed his lips tightly. There was a silence in the room, which was extremely uncomfortable. Just when Woox planned to say something to ease the tense atmosphere in the room, Wood was the first to break the silence.

“I’ve thought about it for a night. I have decided to retire.”

Chapter 985: It is Decided

“The American sports news are so boring...” Twain muttered as he switched off the television. He had wanted to watch some sports news on it, but there was a shocking lack of football news as the sports news comprised of only basketball, baseball, ice-hockey and American football. It was not really boring, just lacking in news regarding football.

He decided to search the internet for news about European football. Even though he was retired, he could not possibly rest at home his whole life and depend on his wife for a living. His job in the future would definitely involve football, that was why he wanted to ensure that he paid attention to football as a whole, so when the time came where he needed this information, he would not know nothing.

Twain had already planned his future. After resting for a few months, he would go look for a job. If there were no surprises, he would accept the invitation from BBC5 and be a commentator. As for his future after that... He had not thought about it. Maybe he might host a football program like Lineker.

Twain could not rest even though Theresa was napping in his room. That was because he could only make use of the time when Theresa was napping to do his own things. Otherwise, if Theresa was awake, he would have to go keep her company.

Just when he booted up his computer, his phone rang beside him.

Twain took a look at the caller ID on the screen of his phone and saw that it was the old Billy Woot.

That took him by surprise. As far as he knew, ever since he stopped being Nottingham Forest’s manager, Billy Woot, Wood’s agent, had not looked for him much. There was no personal friendship between them and since there was no longer any work relation between them, they naturally did not contact each other much.

Why was he calling Twain at this time?

Twain thought for a while before answering. He did not really like to have anything to do with this old man with questionable sexual orientation. Twain would get goosebumps when he heard the feminine voice of his. However, he had to show him some respect. After all, this agent did not urge George Wood to leave when he was still Nottingham Forest’s manager.

“Hi Mr Woot. What made you call me?” Twain teased, “I’m not longer the Nottingham Forest manager.”

“Are you still at Los Angeles, Mr Twain?” What Twain did not expect was that Woot did not give him a sarcastic rebuttal.

“Huh?” Twain was surprised by this question and he took a while to recover. “Yes, I’m at Los Angeles. Are you here too? Are you on holiday?”

“I was there two days ago, but I’m in Nottingham now. It seems like you’re doing well in Los Angeles. I’m sorry but...can you return to Nottingham now?”

Twain thought that it was weird, “Return to Nottingham? I have to wait for another month...” A thought suddenly appeared in his mind, “Is something the matter, Mr Woot?”

“George is planning to retire. I tried to convince him for a whole night, but he wouldn’t listen. I think that there are only two people in this world who could possibly convince him, and that’s his mother and you. However, his mother is in a coma in the hospital now, you’re the only one who can...”

Twain did not even listen to a word after that.

It felt as if there were many flashes of lightning inside his mind. This piece of news was such a shock to him that he could not react, as though his brain had stopped responding.

George Wood retire? Sophia in a coma?

What happened?

“...Mr Twain, I hope that you can come back immediately,” Woox’s words found their way into Twain’s ears again and he finally snapped out of it. “George is going to call a press conference to make this announcement... But you should know that if he really made the announcement, things would only get worse. He would not listen to me so I could only tell him that he has a contract with the club. If he wanted to end the contract and retire, then the very least he could do is to discuss with the club... I’m stalling for you, Mr Twain.”

After Woox was done speaking, Twain opened his mouth, but he did not know what to say. This was the first time that Woox did not have his usual demeanor, saying so many things at once.

After many flashes of lightning in his mind, there was now a thunderstorm inside, and his brain was mush. He shook his head forcefully, then pinched his thigh so hard that he exclaimed in pain.

“Mr Twain?” Woox heard Twain exclaimed over the phone, but he did not understand what had happened.

“Um... It’s nothing, I’m fine. I’ll go back immediately. I’ll book the tickets now,” He pinched himself so hard that he was in tears, but this also cleared his mind a lot, “You must stall him before I return! Keep in touch!”

He hung up after saying that.

Next, Twain stood up and paced a few rounds in his room to calm himself down. Then, he made two calls. One to Shania, telling her that there was an emergency and he had to return to Nottingham. Theresa would stay with her in Los Angeles and he would return after the matter was resolved. Shania was surprised that Twain would decide to return to Nottingham so suddenly and she asked him about it. Twain told her that George wanted to retire, and she immediately understood the gravity of the situation. She promised Twain that she would rush home to take care of Theresa after her work was over.

The second call was made to the local ticketing office, and he requested for the earliest plane ticket to London.

After making these two calls, Twain took out his luggage and started to pack. There was nothing much to pack actually, just a few under garments and a few outfits, which was thrown into the luggage by Twain very quickly. After all these, Twain finally sat down and thought about what he just heard.

Sophia in a coma... Obviously her illness had taken a turn for the worse. She had been in a bad shape for the past few years. If he was being a heartless, he would say that Sophia did not have long to live. Twain was prepared for that, but not Wood... No, it was not that Wood was not prepared, he was, but he did not want to admit it.

Wood's retirement had a lot to do with Sophia's coma. Twain thought about it carefully. Based on his understanding of Wood, he must have had no mood to train or compete now that his mum was in a critical stage. For the past decade, his mother was his motivation for everything he did. Now that his mother was in a critical stage, he obviously had no interest to continue playing football anymore. Choosing to retire and keep his mother company was the only future plan that he could think of.

But this plan...

"You idiot!" Twain cursed.

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News of Sophia being in coma spread across England very quickly. Everyone knew that the person Wood loved the most was his mother. So, nobody thought it was strange that Wood missed training because of Sophia's illness. However, the number of people from the media waiting outside the hospital became more and more as days went by. Both the hospital and the police had to arrange for people to ensure things were in order and prevent the paparazzi from entering.

Vivian Miller was still in-charge of taking care of Sophia's daily requirements, even though there was nothing much to take care of now. Wood's mother was still in a coma after two days and the doctors in-charge were worried that Sophia might not wake up and become a vegetable. Of course, they did not tell George Wood about their concerns, they merely discussed amongst themselves privately.

Wood talked to his agent outside for a very long time the night before, their tones were rather intense. Vivian did not hear what they were arguing about, but she could see that they had a very grave look on both their faces when they reappeared in front of her. She did not know what happened between them and she did not need to concern herself with it. Her job was only to take care of the patient, and it did not entail taking care of the patient's son. However, when she was free, she could not help but wonder about what made them argue so fiercely.

At that moment, Wood was sitting on the couch outside the ward with his head in his hands. It had only been a night, but he was a mess mentally.

Woox entered.

"I called the club and they heard about your intention to retire. Do you want to hear their response?"

Wood shook his head, "I'm going to retire anyway."

"You still have a contract with the club. If you want to cut the contract short and retire, you'll have to discuss it with the club first. The club obviously does not approve of your retirement request. They're willing to let you go on an extended period of leave, but they do not wish for you to retire now," Woox had already said whatever he could to persuade Wood yesterday. He did not intend to say much more now, just repeating what the club said.

After that, Woox sat across from Wood and asked him, "Is your mother awake?"

Wood shook his head slowly. This was the source of his worries. His mother had not woken up yet and he did not know if she would ever wake up again.

"If you really want to retire, it's better for you to talk to the club first..." Woox started again.

This time, Wood did not object to it. He merely nodded and the ward fell into silence again.

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Even though Wood needed to talk to a representative from the club, the club did not send someone immediately. They were in a mess internally because of the news of Wood's impending retirement.

"Retire?!" McAllister was shocked by this news. If it did not come from the club chairman, Evan Doughty, he would most likely think that it was a prank. Even though Wood was already 32 years old, he was still in good shape and everyone thought he could at least play till he was forty. Just like the previous legendary captain from Nottingham Forest, Stuart Pearce.

"George's agent called us. He said that Wood decided to retire last night."

Evan looked at the two people in front of him. One of it was the manager, McAllister and the other one was Allan Adams. He hoped that the two of them could offer some ideas.

"I think that this is ridiculous..." Allan Adams frowned, "How could he decide to retire so easily?"

McAllister said, "It's true that retirement can be an impulsive decision. Just like the previous Emperor of Manchester United, Cantona..."

Evan waved his hand. If he allowed them to continue this path of thinking, they would be off topic by miles, "I don't care why he decided to retire, but we cannot let him do it. We're all very clear that Nottingham Forest cannot do without him. You guys have to think of something."

McAllister hesitated for a while and stole a glance at Allan Adams next to him. There was nothing coming from him and it seemed like he was intending to just watch. However, it was true that Wood was McAllister's player. The manager would have a greater say in such matters as compared to a marketing director.

"Let me go talk to him..." It seemed like he had to do this himself. It was not an easy task to communicate with Wood... McAllister had not really talked to Wood even though he had been at the club for a few months. That was because when he talked to Wood, he could speak for a good half hour, until his throat was dry, but he might only get a couple of words in response. To be honest, he would rather lead a team out against Manchester United at Old Trafford than to talk to George Wood in private.

Evan Doughty nodded in satisfaction when he heard that the manager was taking the initiative to handle the situation.

He thought that Wood was only doing it on impulse. Now that the manager was going to talk to him personally, and he would have a day to calm down, he should definitely take back his decision to retire.

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With arrangements from Evan, McAllister went to the hospital to see Wood on the day after. Wood had treated the ward as his home for the past couple of days, doing everything he needed there. He would not sleep until his mother was awake. When McAllister saw him, he could hardly believe his eyes. The

legendary Nottingham Forest captain was so haggard that his eyes were sullen and unshaven. He looked like a totally different person from the impressive George Wood on the pitch.

After greeting Wood's mother, McAllister told Wood about his reason for coming—To talk Wood out of his decision to retire.

McAllister analyzed the pros and cons of Wood's retirement from all angles in an attempt to calm him down, but he failed.

No matter how McAllister put it, Wood would not say anything. After he was finished talking, Wood said, "I've already decided. I'll retire."

Hearing him say that made McAllister think about retreating. He had been doubtful that he would be able to convince Wood, and this was an opportunity for him to retreat.

Evan Doughty had no choice but to do it himself after hearing McAllister tell him about Wood's determination. He brought Allan Adams to the hospital with him, under the pretense of visiting Wood's mother. He told Wood to keep his mother company without worries, the club had already given him an extended period of leave and he could return to the team after his mother's condition improved.

He said nothing about retirement.

Too bad Wood was having none of it. He did not thank Evan Doughty for his arrangement, and the first words out of his mouth was, "When can I talk to the club about my retirement?"

Evan was stumped by the question and it took him a long while before he thought of stalling him.

"George, we can talk about it after your mum wakes up..."

Other than stalling, he could not think of any other way. Maybe Wood would change his mind when he was feeling better after Sophia was awake?

However, if Wood insisted on retiring after Sophia was awake, what should the club do then?

Evan Doughty, the club chairman, had no idea at all...

Chapter 986: Twain and Sophia

Evan Doughty currently did not know how he should feel. Did he hope that Wood's mother would remain in a coma or smoothly regain consciousness? He told Wood to wait for his mother to wake up first and then talk about retirement. If Sophia woke up, the matter would be on the agenda. What should he do at that time? Would he agree to Wood's request for retirement? Stop kidding! He's only 32 years old and without reservations, he's the core of Nottingham Forest. If he were to retire, what will we do?!

There was another thing that angered him – the Arabs suddenly slowed down the progress of the negotiations.

What made him even angrier was that this matter had to do about Wood!

George Wood's sudden absence from the team overshadowed the team's prospect. Not knowing where these Arab infidels obtained the information that said Wood might retire, so they would need to reconsider their bid for Nottingham Forest if that were the case.

Allan Adams was also very frustrated with this. He thought it was simply a ploy by the Arabs. They were looking for any excuse to keep the offer low and try to buy Nottingham Forest at the lowest price. Otherwise, how could a player be compared to a football club?

If the Arabs were to use this excuse to push down the price, Evan Doughty would not accept it. When they first went to this Arab consortium, it was because they were keen that they had the money and could afford to fork out big money. They did not expect that the more they talked, the less money there was...

Now Evan Doughty wanted very much for God to be able to save him from this.

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There were far fewer reporters outside Wilford than usual. Everyone knew the reason why – it was clearly worth paying more attention to the Royal Hospital of Nottingham University than here. Even the players training here were absent-minded. Physically, they were here on the training ground, but their minds were in the hospital. George had not appeared in front of everyone for two days. No one knew what was going on with him. People like Gareth Bale and Aaron Mitchell, who were usually close to him, were a little distracted during training due to this matter.

McAllister took it all in and was anxious in his heart. He had already warned his players not to put their focus on areas other than football and what they should do was to set their minds at ease to prepare for the next game. But his words were useless, and the players' minds wandered as before. Knowing that their next game was to challenge the strong team, Liverpool at Anfield, it was not an easy-going opponent, and Anfield was not a stadium that could be conquered if their minds were elsewhere. If the team's mind was not in the game, what would be facing him as a manager?

McAllister was afraid to think further.

"After the training, I'm going to the hospital to visit George and his mother." Bale told Mitchell during a break in the training as he looked at him.

Mitchell certainly knew what that meant, and he replied, "I'll go with you."

Bale heard his answer and smiled. But the smile only flashed across his face, and it was replaced with another look. Bale looked around and motioned to Mitchell to bend down. He got close to his ear and said, "I heard a piece of news that George might retire..."

"What?!" Mitchell screamed in surprise. He could hardly believe his ears. He saw Bale gesture to him, asking him to lower his voice. He quickly suppressed the shock he felt and whispered, "Where did you hear it?"

"There was a rumor coming out of the hospital that someone had overheard George talking to his agent... It's just a rumor. I don't know if it's true or false." Bale saw that Mitchell seemed completely disinterested to continue training and wanted to leave the training ground immediately. So, he hurriedly said a few words to set his mind at rest.

Hearing that it was a rumor, Mitchell calmed down again, "I don't believe it... The captain is not that kind of person. Besides, he's only thirty-two years old. How can he retire?"

In fact, Bale only managed to placate Mitchell, but did not succeed in calming himself. In his mind, he was constantly worried that George would retire just like that.

When they saw Freddy Eastwood calling the players back to the training ground to continue training, Bale patted Mitchel on the shoulder and soothed him as well as by saying, "Don't think too much. We'll go to the hospital after training and find out."

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It was quiet in the ward. Only the sound of the medical equipment could be heard working. George Wood waited by his mother's bedside. He gently held his mother's hand and refused to let go. Vivian was at the side, recording the various data that appeared on the equipment to collate it into a report for the doctors to have the important references when diagnosing the treatment. His agent, Billy Woor was outside, figuring out how to deal with the increasingly impatient media. He did not know how the news was leaked. Some of the media outlets actually guessed that Wood wanted to retire. A lot of "excitement" was generated all of a sudden and the reporters which came to interview were more than twice of yesterday. If these reporters were to swarm in, the hospital would not be able to carry out the day-to-day work.

Vivian stole glances at Wood sitting in front of the hospital bed while she recorded the data on the equipment. She had already learned of the latest rumors from the newspapers that Wood was retiring. She was not a hardcore fan, but as a Nottingham native, she still had an understanding of football. At the peak of the Forest team's most glorious period, a grand parade would be held in the city at the end of the season to celebrate another championship title that the Forest team had won. Besides, the hospital she worked for had a partnership with the English Football Association. How could she know nothing about football?

Was he really going to retire?

Vivian looked Wood and thought.

Wood noticed that someone was peeking at himself. He looked up, just as he met gaze with Vivian. The startled Vivian hurriedly averted her gaze and turned to look at the equipment screen. She took a pen and just scribbled something in the notebook, pretending to record data. How could she actually have the presence of mind to work?

Wood could feel someone peering at him, and she could also feel that Wood did not look away immediately.

It felt like an hour had passed, when in fact only a minute had passed on the clock on the wall. Vivian felt that Wood had taken his eyes off her and was secretly relieved. Once she relaxed, she felt strange. When she and Wood were looking at each other outside the ward the other time, she was not nervous or afraid at all. So, why would she feel a great pressure now when he was watching her closely? It was like he was a lion, and she herself was just a helpless prey in front of the lion...

After recording the data, Vivian should have gone straight out because her work was done. But she said to Wood, "Mr. Wood, you'd better take a break first..."

Wood looked up again and regarded Vivian, who did not evade this time. She also looked straight at the other man.

Wood did not agree her suggestion offer, but he said, "Thank you."

Vivian knew she could not persuade the stubborn man. From what she had seen and heard working here these past two days, there might only be one person in the world who could make Wood listen obediently, but she was in a coma in the hospital bed. Perhaps no one else could persuade Wood to change his mind once he had already decided, even if it was just a small matter of taking a break.

Vivian sighed softly and turned to walk toward the door of the ward. She and Wood did not know each other. Their first encounter was less than two days ago. She really was not in any position to be overly concerned about Wood.

As she opened the door of the room outside the ward, she saw two men walking towards her from the end of the corridor. One of them, whom she knew, was Mr. Billy Woox, while the other person he was with was somewhat familiar. She could not recall who he was at the moment.

"Mr. Woox." Vivian stepped aside from the door and greeted Wood's agent, who she was familiar with from these few days.

"Miss Miller. How's George's mother today?" Woox stopped and said to Vivian.

"She still hasn't woken up yet. But her vitals are stabilizing." Vivian answered Woox's question, and then glanced at the man next to him. Because she thought the man looked familiar, but she could not recall where she had seen him this instant.

How could Woox not be able to see what she was thinking? So, he simply pointed to the quiet man next to him and introduced him, "Mr. Tony Twain. I think you must have heard the name, so I will say no more." He smiled.

The name was famous. How could Vivian not have heard of it? Just four months ago, he had just led the England team to win the World Cup, and then announced his retirement, disappearing from the public eye. She did not expect...

Vivian rushed to greet the legendary figure of the English football, "Hello, Mr. Twain. I'm Vivian Miller, the nurse in charge of taking care of Ms. Sophia."

She reached her hand out to Twain with an easy manner. Twain shook her hand while he nervously stared at her eyes. Such a look was not polite, but Twain had always been like this. He was taking the opportunity to observe the other person. The eyes were the window to the soul. One could discern a lot of things from looking at the eyes.

When Twain let go of his hand, he also moved his gaze away.

Vivian was also secretly relieved. The feeling of being stared at by him was almost as the same as the feeling of being watched by Wood just now, and it all made her feel great pressure.

Woox naturally did not know what had just happened in the exchange of glances. He informed Twain, "Miss Miller is a very responsible nurse. Both Wood and I feel reassured with her taking care of Sophia."

Twain nodded and said, "Thank you for taking care of Wood's mother, Miss Miller."

Vivian smiled back in reply, "This is my job, Mr. Twain, no thanks needed."

The three people did not chat further. After thanking Vivian, Twain and Woox went into the ward, while Vivian closed the door and left.

But as she was leaving, she suddenly remembered that it was a well-established fact that Twain and Wood had a good relationship. Perhaps he could persuade Wood to change his mind? For Mr. Woox to appear here with him, it was obvious that he had asked Mr. Twain to come.

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As Twain entered the room, Wood clearly heard someone come in, but he did not look back. Apparently his focus was on his mother.

When Woox saw that Wood appeared to care about nothing but his mother, he planned to make some sound to remind him that he had a visitor. But he was interrupted by Twain reaching out. On the way, Woox had already briefed him on Wood's recent state, but seeing was believing. At the first sight of Wood's back, Twain realized that it was going to be tricky this time.

Twain stood behind Wood and said nothing. Woox also did the same until Wood felt something was wrong. He remembered that someone had just gone out and people had come in, so he turned around...

When he saw Twain standing in front of him, he could hardly believe his eyes and a look of surprise showed on his face.

Twain, who also saw Wood's face, was heartbroken when he saw Wood looking thin and pallid. Twain had not doubt that Sophia was Wood's everything. What he saw in front of him just confirmed this fact once again. But it made him feel bad. His feelings for Wood were complex. It was not simply a relationship between a coach and a player, and it was not just a master and disciple relationship because he had took him off the streets to develop and cultivate his talents. It was hard to put into words that complex emotion.

"How many hours have you slept in total these two days?" Twain asked the moment he opened his mouth.

"I... Five hours... not even." In the face of Twain, who suddenly appeared in front of him, Wood's mind was a little unresponsive and even stammered a little.

"Go to rest." Twain's tone left no room for argument.

Wood's mind was finally back to normal. He shook his head and refused, "No, I want to stay with my mother."

"Don't kid, George. When your mother, Sophia wakes up, are you going to let her see your haggard-looking face? Your unkempt beard, sunken eyes, messy hair, your entire body giving off an odor that the

air conditioning cannot make it go away? Did you come straight from the training ground? You haven't had a shower, have you? Are you trying to knock your mother out again?"

Watching the show on the side, Woox had to admit that Twain, who was better at talking glib than himself, as well as his special relationship with Wood allowed him to speak so brazenly without fear of facing a backlash from Wood. He himself could not do so...

Twain's words hit the nail on the head. He just had to refer to Wood's most vulnerable spot – his mother. He dare not refuse to listen whenever the name of his mother was invoked.

Wood was still hesitant, but his stance had loosened a lot, so Twain drove home another point.

"What are you still doing here? Go take a shower and have a good sleep. Then when your mother, Sophia wakes up, let her see a healthy you. Do you want your mother to worry about you in the hospital bed? George, do you know how many years your mother has been worried about you?"

The last sentence touched Wood's heart. He was not someone who could not tell the good from the bad. He certainly knew that his mother had always worried about him. When he was young, she would worry that he would be as weak and sickly as she was, so she would be reluctant to eat nutritious and good food herself and feed them all to him. Growing up, she worried that he would become bad like those scumbags in the slums, that he would take drugs, go whoring and get into fights, and eventually be sent to prison. Consequently, she would rather work as a prostitute to make money to send him to school and let him receive an education so that he could find a decent job in the future. Later when he finally became a professional player and could make a lot of money, Wood thought his mother finally need not worry about him, because he was an adult, but he did not expect that his mother began to worry about his marriage prospects. She was worried that he could not find a girlfriend ...

Wood got up from his chair and said, "I'm going to take a shower."

It was a VIP ward. The patient's room was inside with a visitor's room outside, as well as a sleeping area for a caregiver and complete with a rest room with a shower in it, satellite television, telephone, Internet and other facilities. Wood rushed into the bathroom outside, and soon the sound of running water came from inside.

"It looks like I was right to call you." Woox laughed.

Twain did not answer him. Wood had given up his seat by the hospital bed, so Twain walked over to sit down.

He looked at the face of the one lying in the hospital bed.

He still remembered the scene when he saw the face for the first time.

At that time in Sneinton, everything he saw was grey. Grey walls, grey roofs, grey skies, and everyone's faces were grey, like black-and-white televisions. The first color that shone into his eyes and heart was Sophia, the only light source in that small, dark room. She was the only color in the dark grey world.

At that time, he stared at her and was lost to the world.

Now he was just as preoccupied.

The colors of the past were gradually fading away, and that light that once lit up the whole room was slowly waning. With her eyes closed, she laid quietly in bed and her complexion ash colored. Her face was much more wan and sallow than the last time Twain had seen her. Countless tubes and wires connected to her body to the cold equipment. He was unable to feel any anger.

Twain gazed blankly at Sophia, lying in the hospital bed, and was lost in past memories. Those things had already passed many years. He thought he had long forgotten them completely. He did not expect that at this moment the memories would re-surface from the bottom of his heart.

He had given her a violet dress which made her gasped in pleasant surprise.

To protect her from Collymore's philandering, he even confronted Collymore, who was then the First Team manager at the time, in heavy rain.

And that night of ambiguity, the two of them, with their thoughts wandering in the room as they waited for George Wood who was out to come home...

In the time that had passed, was a moment that he developed an affection for her deep in his heart?

As Twain was lost in his thoughts, heard Woox suddenly cry out behind him, "Madam!"

He snapped out of his reverie in an instant. When his eyes refocused, he saw Sophia opening her eyes and gazing at him.

"I'm so glad to see you, Mr. Twain..."

It was so heart-wrenching to hear her voice so weak.

Chapter 987: Everyone Has Their Own Worries

When Wood changed into a new track suit that he brought from the training ground and exit the bathroom, he could see through the thick glass window that his mother's ward was full of people. Doctors, nurses, and also Twain and Woox, who were pushed to the outside.

The doctors all looked serious and solemn, and Wood had his heart in his mouth when he saw that. He had a bad feeling about it, and he could not stop himself from rushing into the ward. He pushed everyone in front of him away, he could not have cared less about who those people were. When he finally made it into the circle, he saw his mother smiling at him.

Wood's rapidly beating heart finally calmed down after he saw that. The first thing he asked when he calmed down was to ask the doctor, "How is my mother's condition?"

The doctor replied without even looking up, "We're still checking."

Wood knew that being hasty now would not have any results, so he walked over to Twain as he saw him beckoning him.

"Let's get out of here. There are too many people here, let's not disturb their work," Twain pointed to the visitor's area outside.

The three of them took a seat outside and watched as the people inside were busy with work. Miss Vivian kept going in and out and she was so busy that her face was flushed and sweat glistened on her neck.

Twain and Woox sat on the couch but Wood could not sit for long. It was not long before he stood up and looked into the ward from the window, peering at the busy crowd.

After a while, Wood realized that there was another person next to him. Tony Twain's reflection appeared on the window.

"Don't worry, your mother will be fine," Twain said.

Wood did not reply to that, instead, he asked him a question, "Woox asked you to come back? I heard you were holidaying in Los Angeles."

A smile broke out on Twain's face as he laughed silently.

"I'm afraid you might do something silly," Twain said as he smiled.

Behind them, Billy Woox had already left when Twain stood up to walk towards Wood. He left the place to the two of them so that they could be totally alone, and they could then speak their minds.

"I'm not doing something silly, I considered for very long."

"As long as one night?"

Twain turned to look at Wood. Wood only had eyes for the bustling scenes inside the ward.

Wood obviously was not in the mood to discuss about this with him now. The fact that he did not reject him with an aggressive tone showed that he had matured a lot, and that he was showing Twain a lot of respect. After all, Twain brought him up himself and they were like father and son.

When Vivian came out again, she did not walk towards the exit, instead, she walked straight to Twain and told him, "Madam would like to see you, Mr Twain."

That surprised Twain, and Wood also could not help but to look at him.

Twain pointed to himself as he looked at Vivian with lots of questions on his face. Vivian nodded.

Twain did not rush inside but waited outside by the door instead. He waited for the doctors to leave before he entered the ward. Wood saw his mother say something, then Twain turned to close the door.

Looks like it was a confidential talk.

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Twain sat down in the same chair as the one Wood sat in earlier, then held Sophia's thin hand naturally.

"Why are you here, Mr Twain?" Sophia was very soft as she was still very weak. It was a good thing the room was very quiet and Twain could still hear what Sophia was saying, "I heard from George that you're accompanying Shania and your daughter in Los Angeles."

“Woox asked me to come back,” Twain was thinking in the back of his mind. If he told this patient in front of him that Wood had decided to retire, he was afraid that Sophia might not be able to take the blow and faint again. That would be disastrous...

As the thought flashed across Twain’s mind, he decided not to tell Sophia for now. He had better let her rest well for now. If Sophia’s condition became better, Wood would not think about retiring anymore.

As for the reason why Woox called him, it was not something that could not be explained. Wood and Twain were very close, and Sophia had also known Twain for many years. Now that she was hospitalized and she was even in a coma, how could he not be here?

“You should rest and recuperate; Wood is still waiting for you.”

Sophia looked towards the large glass window and she saw Wood standing outside, focusing all his attention on her.

“That kid... I can never stop worrying about him,” it seemed like she was chiding him, but she sounded full of pride and there was a smile on her face.

Twain turned and looked at where she was looking at.

When he realized that they were both looking at him, Wood averted his gaze and he saw Vivian Miller who was waiting at the door. Vivian was looking at him too...

Twain found out that Wood seemed to be acting strange outside and he looked back at Sophia.

Sophia continued to say, “It’s all thanks to Mr Twain that George can have the accomplishments that he has now. At first, I was merely hoping that he would get a proper job and not get into trouble all the time like the thugs in Sneinton...” She stopped to catch her breath. She was still very weak and could not speak too much at one go.

“But I didn’t expect George to become a star one day. I have to thank Mr Twain for that.”

“Hey, we’re good friends, aren’t we? Twain waved his hand, “Besides, that was all due to George’s own hard work. I’ve seen so many talented people who were not willing to put in the hard work. George only got his accomplishments today because of his diligence, that has nothing to do with me.” The first part of what Twain said was true. A person who had talent, but was unwilling to work hard, was not worth cultivating. Wood was indeed the most hardworking person he had ever seen. It might be because of his family’s situation which caused him to have no sense of security about life. In order to have a better life, he had to work doubly hard. But the second part of what he said was wrong. No matter how talented and hardworking someone was, if he did not have the opportunity, he would still amount to nothing. A sharp blade needs someone to wield it too.

Sophia did not care about Twain’s humility, she continued saying, “George is a stubborn child, but he listens to you. I hope that Mr Twain can continue to guide him...”

“My words are not as effective as yours, Madam,” Twain replied with a laugh, “Take care and recuperate, Wood is waiting for you.”

Sophia nodded.

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When Vivian realized that Wood actually turned to look at her, she knew that there was no way for her to avoid it this time. Rather than turning away, she would rather be more open, and so she took the initiative to talk to Wood, "Now that your mother is awake, you should be very relieved now, right Mr Wood?"

Wood did not expect her to take the initiative to talk to him and he was stunned for a little. Even though he appeared to be calm, he was contemplating if he should reply, and if he was to reply, what should he say?

The problem was regarding Vivian's question... He was very happy that his mother was awake, but he was not relieved yet.

However, he found another topic to talk about, "How is my mother's condition?"

Vivian was put in a spot because of this question. That was because the specialist doctors were not optimistic about Sophia's illness. Even though she was awake, she was not out of danger yet. The illness had been tormenting Sophia's body for a very long time and her immunity system was already destroyed by it. Any minor illness would bring upon disastrous results to Sophia. However, was it really a good thing to tell Wood these? Judging by his feelings for his mother, if he knew about the truth, it would just be another heavy blow for him.

When she thought about it that way, Vivian smiled and told Wood, "It's getting better."

After saying that, she could see Wood breathing a sigh of relief. She felt guilty for lying to a good man.

Just when the both of them were feeling the awkwardness of this conversation, the door opened.

Twain appeared at the door and said to Wood, "Go see your mother, George."

Wood hurried into the ward past Twain. He was in such a hurry that he even forgot to close the door.

Twain was the one who closed the door behind him, then he looked at the nurse, Vivian Miller, who was still waiting outside.

"Thank you for taking care of Sophia." This famous Englishman who was almost as famous as the queen was nodding at her to express his gratitude.

"It's my job..."

"We'll have to trouble you to continue taking care of her in future."

Looking at his sincerity, Vivian did not reject. However, she cautiously asked a question, "I heard that Mr Wood is going to retire, is that true, Mr Twain?"

Twain did not expect this girl to ask such a difficult question right off the bat. He touched his nose and looked at her awkwardly.

When he was on the way here, Woos had told him that someone from the media had caught wind of the news that Wood might choose to retire. Someone from the hospital had leaked this news to the outside. It should be someone who overheard the conversation between Wood and him and leaked the

story out to the media. However, they did not know who the leak was at that time. Even if they did, they would not be able to do anything to that person.

But when he thought of someone being so nosy, Twain felt uncomfortable. He had never had any fond feelings for the media, which he felt were troublemakers.

Could this girl be the one who leaked the news?

The girl was still waiting for Twain's answer. She looked up at Twain, who was half a foot taller than her with questions in her eyes. As Twain stayed silent, her questions turned into an awkward situation. She had obviously realized that she had asked a difficult question.

If they continued to stay silent, would this girl be so embarrassed that she would leave with her face in her hands? Twain had an evil thought in his mind. When he arrived, he caught her gaze twice. Twain did not see anything wrong with her gaze both times. Even though he could not be sure, Twain was more willing to believe that this girl did not sell any information to the paparazzi. Once he thought about that, he could not allow the girl to continue feeling awkward anymore.

"Yes, there's a possibility of that." He did not deny it.

"Ah!" Vivian exclaimed in shock, but she quickly covered her mouth. Her beautiful eyes were wide open as she looked at Twain, then turned to secretly look at George Wood through the glass window.

Twain was suddenly interested about this interesting girl. He asked, "Are you a football fan, Miss Miller?"

"Not really," Vivian shrugged her shoulders after she recovered, "it's just that, it's difficult for me to not know about football as a local living in Nottingham, isn't it?" She asked Twain.

Twain chuckled. She was indirectly praising him for his influence in leading the team some years back. Who would not like to be praised? Twain suddenly liked this well-behaved girl a lot.

Next, the two of them chatted a little about some other topics. Twain knew that she was the nurse who was in-charge of taking care of Sophia. So, he reminded her as a joke that Wood was a very stubborn person, and he was not someone whom others found easy to get along with. He told her not to take what Wood said seriously. Actually, he was also reminding her not to let the emotions of the patient's family affect her work. After all, the nurse in-charge of taking care of Sophia controls Sophia's life. If they were in China, Twain would have given Vivian a big, fat red packet.

Vivian did not think much about it, instead, she started talking about the first time she met Wood. Her story was interesting, and her tone had no trace of grievance at all. Twain enjoyed it very much. He had a good time communicating with this girl.

As Wood left Sophia's ward, Twain could not detect any change in his emotions from his face. He told Wood to have some rest, at least get some more change of clothing from home if he was still insisting to live in the hospital. Vivian took the opportunity of them talking to enter the ward and help Sophia lie down, cover her with the blanket properly, ensuring that none of her limbs were out. Next, she started to copy the data on the monitoring devices into the report.

"This is a good nurse," Twain praised.

Wood grunted in agreement.

“Go get some rest. I think you should just stay here, I’ll get someone to get you some clothes.”

Wood did not object to it. He took another look at his mother who was resting on the bed, before he turned to get some rest in the visitor’s room.

At this moment, the door opened behind him.

Billy Woox who just left appeared in front of them again, but there were two more people behind the old man...

One of them was very prominent. His tall frame blocked the whole door so much so that one could not even see his face. Other than Aaron Mitchell, Twain could not think of anyone else who might appear here. Next to Mitchell was another person who was peeking in, this was naturally the “Little Monkey”, Gareth Bale!

Twain was surprised at the arrival of these two, but the level of his surprise could not be compared to how surprised the two of them were to see him.

“Boss!!” The two of them shouted at the same thing. The volume was so loud that they thought that it would have summoned some reporters over.

“Long time no see, pals,” Twain waved at them as he gave them a greeting.

Chapter 988: You Really Want to Retire?

Mitchell and Bale had no idea at all that they would be able to see the head coach in Wood’s mother’s ward. They then excitedly surrounded Twain, almost forgetting why they had even come in the first place.

It was Twain who took the initiative to update them on Wood’s mother’s condition, and the two then realized they were a little disrespectful. Luckily, Wood was not the petty type who would take their uncouth behaviors to heart.

Mitchell and Bale were visiting Wood and his mother at the hospital as friends. Wood did not tell them about his decision to retire as a football player, but they brought up the subject themselves.

“George, I heard you are thinking about retirement. Is that true?” Bale stared at Wood, questioning him.

Twain and Wood glanced at each other when they heard Bale’s question.

Bale did not notice the little look Twain and Wood shared so he and Mitchell looked at Wood, hoping for a reply from him.

Twain suddenly felt a headache coming on. Knowing Wood, he would probably not lie. However, if he spoke the truth, how would Bale and Mitchell react? Would they lose their spirits? And if that happened, what would he do? Wood was enough of a handful by himself, and if Bale and Mitchell joined in, the outcome would not be very pleasant.

Twain assumed Wood would lower his head and nod. However, Wood instead shook his head. "How is that possible? I have never said this."

This surprised Twain, and he quickly turned back to Wood, realizing how Wood was also looking at him with suspicion. Maybe Wood changed his mind after his mother woke up and decided not to retire?

If that was the case, that would be great.

Twain heaved a slight sigh of relief upon hearing this.

Hearing Wood say that, Bale happily turned to Mitchell to exclaim, "You see! What did I say? It was all rumors! Rumors aren't credible!"

Mitchell was relieved, too, as he felt embarrassed for doubting the team captain initially. He scratched his head and said, "That's good, I would not know what to do if you retired and left the team..."

"George is older than you. He would eventually retire, and you're going to have to keep playing," Twain said suddenly.

However, Mitchell unexpectedly shook his head and said, "I'm 28 this year, while George is 32. He would at least be able to play until he's 40, by which time I would be 36 and long retired."

Not knowing that Mitchell had this idea all along, Twain did not know whether to laugh or cry. Everyone said that Wood would be able to play till he was 40, but was that really true?

Wood did not elaborate further. He pulled Bale and Mitchell over to ask about the squad's condition for the past two days. Naturally, there would not be any good news. Bale told him that the players in Nottingham Forest were very worried after losing the core of the team in an instant.

Mitchell asked Wood if he would be available to participate for the away game against Liverpool on the day after.

Wood hesitated for a moment. In this period, he really did not have the spirits to play football, so even if he forced himself to go onto the field, he would definitely be off form. Regarding this point, he was blunt and said at once that he would definitely not be able to go Anfield.

Mitchell was obviously a little disappointed, but he did not push any further. Wood's mother was stuck in the hospital with a severe condition and forcing him to play would be inhumane, so he was simply asking for reference.

They did not talk for too long since George Wood needed to rest, so Wood walked with both of them out of the ward. As they were leaving the hospital, this naturally attracted a large uproar of reporters, but with the aid of the security and policemen, they were able to leave without much trouble.

As soon as they left, Twain immediately asked the question he had on his tongue. "You have decided not to retire, George?"

Wood shook his head. "I lied to them."

Twain did not continue to question or try to convince him to change his decision. Once he knew that was the final decision George Wood made, he did not offer any additional comments. He only slightly

nodded. This guy was definitely very stubborn, and would not change his mind so easily? George was currently not himself, so it was better not to mention this subject.

Wood then went on to rest, while Twain sat at the guest room for a little longer. After Wood came back, he bade farewell to him, then left. As Wood was able to rest in the ward while he could not, he would rather return home to rest and think about how to convince Wood to change his mind.

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At 10.30 in the morning, the bar was not even at its designated opening hours, and a “Closed” sign hung on the main door, reminding customers that the bar was not operating.

Kenny Burns was sitting behind the bar wiping glasses as the door made a squeaking sound, indicating that someone walked in.

“I’m sorry, we’re not working yet, please...” He raised his head whilst talking as he realized that the figure was familiar. As he was blinded by the light from the door, he could not tell clearly who the person was. He could only guess from his body shape.

John? Nope, he was too thin. Bill? No, he was a little fatter...

So who was it?

That dark shadow opened his mouth, and the voice made Burns pleasantly surprised.

“For more than a decade, I’ve had a question which I could never solve. Kenny, are those glasses in your hands never-ending? Will you never finish wiping them? I was thinking, other than the first time when I met you, you were always sitting in that same position wiping glasses.”

“Ha, Tony!” Burns put down his cup, came out from behind the bar, and welcomed Twain with open arms. “Why are you back?”

Twain also opened his arms and gave Burns a warm hug.

“I got a call from George’s agent and came back.”

Burns stayed silent, as the news about Wood’s mother being in a critical condition and staying in the hospital was no longer news since everyone knew about it. Twain and Wood had such a close relationship, so his rushing back was not a surprise either.

Twain sat at the bar with a glass of water placed in front of him, and Burns stayed behind the bar, continuing to wipe his glasses.

Because the place was not operating, not a lot of the lights were switched on in the bar. Only a few ceiling lights were working. The curtains were still shut at the windows, where only a few rays of light were able to come in, lending a bit of light to the dark room. The dust within the room was rolling around under the light, looking like the water vapor special effect used for the dance stage.

Such an environment was suitable for talking about some intimate topics.

After the two chatted for a while, the conversation was back onto Wood. "Recently there were rumors saying how George was going to retire." Being a Nottingham Forest fan, Burns was also concerned about Wood.

Twain nodded. "It's not a rumor."

Burns did not act surprised, he only looked slightly at Twain and continued wiping his glasses. "Because of his mum's medical condition?"

"Yeah."

"You came back because of this?"

Twain made a slight 'mm-hm' noise.

"Have you seen Wood?"

"Yes, I've met him, but I haven't mentioned this issue... I don't even know how to start."

Burns nodded. "George has been emotionally unstable lately. Let him cool down for a while before you try to convince him..."

He did not expect Twain to interrupt him. "No, Kenny. There isn't enough time. Woox told Wood that if he plans to retire, he has to discuss it with the club. In order to stall him, Woox wanted to wait for Sophia to wake up before dealing with this issue. During yesterday's afternoon, Sophia regained consciousness, so we can't stall this matter any longer."

Burns was relieved to hear that Wood's mother had woken up. "Now that his mother is awake, isn't it much easier? Wood only listens to you and his mother, so you can let his mum convince him."

Twain shook his head again. "Sophia's extremely weak, and she is in poor spirits. I do not want to tell her such groundbreaking news. We have to prevent her from getting agitated again..."

Twain did not continue, but Burns knew what was going on. Now he had nothing more to say. He knew convincing Wood to change his mind would be a very difficult task.

However, staying here was not a solution as well, after finishing that glass of water, Twain bade farewell to Burns and left for the hospital.

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Wearing shades and a hood, Twain bought a copy of the newspaper at the stand outside the hospital. He did not intend to buy it initially. He did not have the mood or the time to read the newspaper. It was while he was walking past the newspaper stand that he incidentally chanced upon the title amongst the colorful newspapers which caught his attention.

"George Wood has retired!"

The title was printed in large black and bold font, fit for groundbreaking news. There was no way he could not notice it. Previously, the titles were all labeled as "questions", but today the punctuation was changed to an exclamation mark. After thinking back to what Bale and Burns had said, it seemed like the rumor had turned into reality.

He walked over to put down the money, took the last newspaper, rolled it in his hands, and hurried away.

Under such circumstances, he had to convince Wood to change his mind immediately, and disperse this rumor. If not, the morale of the squad would definitely decline, and Nottingham Forest's results would take a turn for the worse.

Despite what some people thought, Twain did care about Nottingham Forest's record. If not, he would not even bother about their results. It was a fact that he worked with that team for 11 years and there were even players that he brought up from the beginning, so how could he avoid having any feelings for the team? Seeing how the majestic red tornado had declined into this state devastated him.

The great results he produced with his own efforts had now been reduced to nothingness.

Entering the hospital from a different direction to avoid those troublesome reporters, Twain dashed into the ward and saw that Vivian Miller was waiting outside at the guest room while Wood looked like he was speaking to his mother.

When she saw Twain enter the room, Vivian politely greeted him. "Good morning, Mr. Twain."

"Good morning, Miss Miller." Twain sat down on the sofa and began to read the newspaper he brought.

Vivian noticed the headline of the newspaper in Twain's hand. It was so eye-catching that it was hard to miss. The media really tried the hardest to blow up this topic.

"Mr. Twain..."

Twain, who was still reading the newspaper, heard her call him. He replied as he put the newspaper down, "What's the matter, Miss Miller?"

"Ah..." Vivian only realized then that she might have been rude, but it was not like she could simply say, "Nothing, I only spoke to you for fun." She could only harden up and ask curiously, "Is Mr. Wood really retiring?"

Twain did not answer the question immediately, but only tilted his head to look at the young nurse for a while. She had golden hair and beautiful eyes. She was pretty, with a few freckles that only enhanced the fairness of her skin. She was concerned about Wood...

After evaluating her looks, Twain then shook his head and said, "No."

"That newspaper..." Vivian pointed to the paper which was set aside.

"It's all rumors."

While the two were talking, Billy Woox pushed the door and entered. The two men looked at each other. Vivian was polite and knew the two must have things to discuss, hence she stopped talking to Twain and found an excuse to leave the ward.

When Vivian left, Woox fixed Twain with a questioning look. "The club knew that Wood cannot participate, so they attempted to make an excuse for delaying the match against Liverpool."

Twain heard this and broke into laughter. It looked like Evan was not dumb when it came to these matters. The man knew that Wood was his last hope and that if Wood retired, he would be finished. They might as well have not met with Wood at all.

“It’s all up to you, Mr. Twain,” Woox said as he looked at Twain.

There was a bitter look on Twain’s face. “Convincing him not to retire might be a lot more difficult than convincing him to take a rest.”

“It’s all the same, use his mum as a reason to talk him around,” Woox said.

Twain glanced into the ward through the glass window. The relationship between the mother and her son was particularly close.

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Sophia suddenly remembered something that did not feel right yesterday. Because she had just woken up with an unclear mind, she could not recall what it was. Now that she has been talking to Wood for almost a day, she finally recalled what the issue was.

“That’s right, George. What day is it today?”

Wood did not know why his mother suddenly asked that, and honestly replied, “Saturday.”

Sophia took her eyes off Wood’s face as she stared at the ceiling silently for a moment, then said, “Ah, I have recalled, don’t you guys have a match against Liverpool this Sunday?”

Seeing how his mother mentioned the issue, Wood felt like that was a bad omen.

“Well... The club gave me a holiday, Mom. I won’t have to play in tomorrow’s game...”

Sophia frowned. She cherished her son’s reputation. In professional football, when someone mentioned George Wood, he was the symbol of dedication. Those who were unhappy with him could abuse his ruthless actions on the field with rough play and injuring other players, but no one dared to blame him for being sloppy or unprofessional. Hearing Wood’s praises from the media, Sophia was happy as well – she could be proud of her son.

Now that she has heard that Wood was not going to play, however, it did not seem right. In her simple mind, she knew that a professional footballer’s role was to play football. Participating in competitions and training was part of the job and if George did not go to work, how could he be called a “professional football player”?

“George, Mom’s alright. There is Miss Miller here looking after me, you know. You’d better go to Liverpool for the game.”

Wood felt awkward. He did not know what to tell his mother in that instant. He heard Twain’s voice behind him calling out, “Madam, the club has already reported the final roster for tomorrow’s match and even if George rushed over now, he would not be able to play.”

It turned out that while Twain was talking with Woox, they felt like the atmosphere was different within the ward as if something had happened between Wood and his mother. He felt compelled to enter the ward, and that was when he chanced upon what Sophia said.

From this statement, Twain could guess Sophia's attitude towards this issue, and he felt like there was finally a possibility to convince Wood to change his mind. However, at the moment, he felt like he should help Wood cover up first. Wood was grateful that Twain helped him this time and that he should not show him such a grumpy attitude the next time they talked about his retirement.

Sophia thought about it carefully before realizing that Twain was right. She was too weak just now. However, thinking that her son could not play in the match because of her, she did not have the mood to continue talking about this topic. Twain saw the change in Sophia's face from the side, and knowing that she did not have the mood to talk anymore, he told Wood, "Let your mom rest for a while, George."

Having said that, he walked out of the door and waited outside.

After saying goodbye to his mother, Wood also walked out of the ward, but he saw that Twain did not sit on the sofa. Instead, he was standing by the door, as if waiting for Wood.

"How long have you been in the hospital?" Twain looked at Wood as he invited him out. "Let's go out for a walk, staying here for too long is bad for your state of mind."

Wood did not reject Twain's request. He simply nodded. It was clear that Twain's attempt at helping him get out of that sticky situation was useful.

Twain pressed the alert for Vivian to stay at the ward to take care of Sophia while he walked out with Wood.

Chapter 989: The Conditions

The University of Nottingham's Royal College of Physicians was situated in the southeast corner of the campus, and a lake separated the college, which also served as a hospital, from the rest of the school. One would be able to admire the beauty of the lake as it glistened in the sunlight through the windows of the hospital. Not only that, but one would also be able to see the iconic Trent Building in the distance. The Trent Building was white and resembled the White House.

Twain and Wood did not admire the lake from the hospital. Instead, they chose to take a stroll next to the lake itself. It was approaching noon and there were very few people around the lake. The patients who had been standing by the windows at the hospital earlier all retreated into their wards after experiencing the blazing heat from the sun. Twain and Wood did not mind the heat. They continued strolling along the side of the lake.

"I don't think you need to do a press conference to announce your decision." Twain passed the newspapers in his hands over to Wood. "Someone has pretty much done one for you."

Wood lowered his head to look at the newspaper. There was an article about his retirement, and the journalist who had published the article sounded convinced that everything he had written was the

truth. Wood did not know how the journalist was able to gain access to this information, but he did not particularly care.

“My mum is in a bad condition now. I want to be by her side as her life comes to an end,” Wood said in a low voice.

Twain jerked after hearing Wood’s words. He then stopped in his tracks and turned to look at Wood. Did he know that his mother’s days were numbered?

Wood paid no heed to Twain’s gaze. He turned around and looked at the building behind him. He appeared to be searching for his mother’s ward.

“I can’t bring myself to play football given these circumstances. I would definitely affect the team as a whole.”

“And so you decided to put your cards on the table and retire so that the club does not need to worry about you from here on out?” Twain asked.

Wood nodded.

Clearly, Wood did not act on impulse. It was just like he said. His decision to retire was made after careful consideration. However, if that was truly the case, Twain had an even bigger problem on his hands now.

There was a row of benches before them where patients could sit at and rest. Twain pointed at the benches and said, “Let’s go over there and rest for a moment.”

The pair sat down on one of the benches that faced the lake. The clear surface of the lake was painted in blue as it reflected the azure sky and white clouds above.

“Do you really think that announcing your decision to retire in the middle of the season would not affect the club in any negative way? Do you have any idea just what kind of status and influence you have as a player right now, George?” Twain said as he stared at the lake’s surface. “Do you remember how we first met?”

Wood froze. The images of what happened over a decade ago were hazy now.

Twain noticed that Wood did not respond, so he continued to speak, “You were covered in dirt when you suddenly appeared before my house and returned my wallet. You then told me that I should sign the best player in England.” Twain paused to glance at Wood, before going on to say, “The best player in England has suddenly announced his decision to retire. Do you really think that your decision would not impact others?”

Wood still did not respond. However, the fact that he did not refute Twain at once was a good sign.

“The team has already been impacted while you went into hiding in the hospital. Do you think Nottingham Forest can win against Liverpool tomorrow?”

Wood finally broke his silence and said, “It’d be difficult to win even if I were in the team.” He lifted his head to look at Twain before going on to say, “The Nottingham Forest of now is nothing like the Nottingham Forest of the time you were in charge...”

Twain was rendered speechless by Wood's words. Wood was right. With the way Nottingham Forest was now, it would be very difficult for them to defeat Liverpool at Anfield even with Wood on the team. He reminisced about how his Nottingham Forest team had conquered the whole of Europe back then. They slaughtered every single foe who stood before them. Twain's heart began to beat faster as those images from the past surfaced in his mind. Those were the times...

Twain raised his head and reclined against the backrest of the bench. He then squinted as he gazed at the skies.

Nottingham Forest has won! They were the champions! The champions of Europe! Tony Twain and his team have defeated AC Milan!

Absolutely unbelievable! Tony Twain's team becomes the first-ever team to defend its title after the Champions League changed its format! Nottingham Forest has made history!

They won the Premier League, the FA Cup, and the Champions League! The 2013-14 season belongs to Nottingham Forest! They are a treble-winning team!

What would things be like now if he had chosen not to leave and had forced himself to stay at Forest for a few more years? Nottingham Forest would most probably have had a few more years of glory. It would be nearly impossible to win another treble, but winning a few more trophies should have been possible.

"George, do you still despise me?"

Wood turned his head to look at Twain.

"It's partially my fault that Nottingham Forest has become the way that it is now, right?"

"Of course I despise you," Wood was honest with his answer. "How's life after retirement?" He suddenly changed the topic of the conversation.

"Er..." Twain did not expect Wood to ask this question all of a sudden. He thought about it for a moment but quickly realized that there was nothing much for him to say. "Nothing special. I stay at home every day to take care of my kid, and I also spend some time with Shania. What kind of life do you think a retired old man can possibly have?"

Wood smiled when he heard Twain say the words 'retired old man'. This was the first time in two days that Twain saw Wood smile.

"Why are you smiling?"

"I'm imagining the kind of life that a retired old man would have."

"Did you think I'd be in the garden watering plants and planting tomatoes or potatoes every day? Nuh-uh. No way. I won't ever do those things. I am still very interested in football. There might be a chance that I'd become a commentator in the future, and I might even provide a commentary on your matches, George." Twain seemed to have forgotten that Wood was intent on retiring as a football player. "You have been performing poorly for the past few matches. Why are you positioned at the front and playing as an attacking midfielder? How can you play as an attacking midfielder when you can't even receive the ball? Have you forgotten that offense is derived from the defense? Do you know why I insisted on playing you as a defensive midfielder back then and not at any other position? The defensive midfielder

is the pivot of both the team's offense and its defense. You are able to get the ball a lot more when you play in the defensive midfielder's position. You would also be able to get a better view of the entire pitch, and the opponents would not harass you as much either. All these factors are beneficial to you performing well on the pitch. But look at your position in the past few matches. You were almost playing as a second striker!"

Twain sounded stern and stern as he spoke. It was as though the two were having this conversation while seated in the locker room rather than on a bench behind a hospital.

"I am not to be blamed for that. It was the manager's decision," Wood defended himself. "McAllister thinks that the team's offense is a huge problem, and so he decided to move my position further upfront. He wanted me to organize the team's attacks, and he told me to shoot from the distance whenever a chance to do so arose."

Twain frowned after hearing Wood's words. "I don't understand how Evan Doughty picks his managers..."

"There was only one managerial appointment that he got right all these years," Wood replied.

"Ha!" Twain started laughing. "That's right, he only got it right once."

The pair was not able to find any other conversation topic to talk about afterward, and silence settled between the two.

Twain gazed at the lake's surface absentmindedly, whereas Wood did not know where he should look. Quite a bit of time had passed before Wood finally opened his mouth to break the silence. "You are here to persuade me to not retire, right?"

Twain grunted his assent.

This whole situation was something that made Twain feel immensely vexed. He would rather be the manager of the China national football team as they competed in the qualifiers of the World Cup than sit here and face an obstinate Wood.

"I have an idea."

Twain turned his head sharply to the side and stared at Wood. He was afraid that he had misheard him.

Wood did not mind Twain's blazing gaze and went on to say, "I will not retire if you return to Forest."

Twain's mouth hung agape. He never expected to hear Wood say those words.

Wood continued speaking as Twain looked on in astonishment. "I'm not joking. I only said those words after thinking it through carefully."

"I've already retired, George..." Twain did not know what he should say. This was not an outcome that he saw coming.

"You took a plane back from Los Angeles just to persuade me not to retire. However, it's just like you said earlier. You've already retired. You are not the manager of the England national football team, and

neither are you the manager of Nottingham Forest. Then what does my retirement have to do with you?" Wood stared at Twain, almost like he was trying to read his mind.

Twain was at a loss. He never knew that Wood was this eloquent.

"Do you really want me to stay?" Wood asked again.

"Er... Yeah, of course, I do..."

"Why? You are not my manager any longer. Why do you care if I retire or not?"

"Why?" Twain thought about Wood's question. "All right... I watched you grow up. You were just some hooligan on the streets at first, and I was the one who made you into a football superstar. I feel emotionally attached to you. I don't wish to see you leave this stage that belongs to you just yet. It's too early for that."

"What else can I possibly gain by continuing my career as a footballer? Why did you choose to retire? It's because you have achieved everything that a manager wants to achieve. You achieved success as the manager of a football club, and you also achieved success as the manager of the national football team. There's no motivation and drive left in you to achieve anything else since you've done it all, and it's the same thing for me," Wood responded to Twain calmly.

"No..." Twain shook his head. "Don't you think that playing football makes you happy? Don't think about fame, reputation or money. Just your joy in playing football..."

Wood laughed. "Who was it that said we would only be able to feel happy when we win in football? Who was it that said we only have the right to say that we enjoy football when we are the champions? Do you think there's any joy left for me as a player when I have achieved everything? Do you really think I'd still be able to enjoy playing football?"

Twain felt as though Wood had transformed into him, and that he had become the George Wood who needed to be persuaded.

"I've lifted the trophy for almost every competition. There's no joy left for me. So, tell me. Why shouldn't I retire?"

Twain realized that everything Wood had said was right. It only made sense for a player like him to retire. There was absolutely nothing wrong with that. But why was he so reluctant to see Wood retire?

He suddenly remembered something. It was an incident that had happened in the past, before he had not transmigrated, when he was just an ordinary Chinese man who liked football and playing Football Manager. There was a demonic-looking player in the Football Manager game whom he had groomed for over 10 in-game years, and the player announced that he was going to retire by the end of the season. How did he feel when he saw that scene back then? He told the player, who was nothing more than an NPC, that he should reconsider his decision to retire.

Honestly, what was there left to enjoy in playing Football Manager when you have pretty much cleared the game? He could lead even the worst of teams to become champions of Europe. It was as easy as ABC to win all the domestic competitions, and he also won the Champions League countless times. He never could finish spending the in-game money that could be used to bring in players, because all the

players in his team were the top ones from back then. It was just as George had said. He had won everything in the game, and he would never feel that same kind of joy as when he lifted his first domestic cup trophy ever again. He would never feel that same sense of accomplishment as when his team got promoted to the highest division of the football league for the very first time. What was the point in continuing the game when he no longer felt anything when he made yet another accomplishment? The only thing that kept him in the game was his desire not to see the players, whom he had grown familiar with, leave before him.

A total of 10 seasons had gone by in the game, and the NPCs who had nothing more than a name and data at the start were not just cold, emotionless NPCs to him any longer at the end. They felt real and alive. They would thank the manager for his guidance during an interview after they won something, and they would also tell how the manager had admonished them in the locker room after they lost a match. 'All of us felt his anger' were the words that the players would say. They would feel happy when he praised them about their recent performances, and they would react differently when he criticized them for performing poorly... To others, Football Manager was just a game. Everything in the game had been pre-programmed. But the true fans become emotionally invested in the game.

Indeed, that was exactly what was happening to Twain now. He was emotionally invested in Wood.

Hence, Twain did not wish to see Wood retire early. He was just like one of those true fans of the Football Manager game, and he would advise his most favorite player to reconsider his decision to retire even if he was well aware that his advice could lead to conflict between them.

"I can't help but feel a little lonely when there are fewer and fewer people on the pitch whom I'm familiar with," Twain sighed. "And that's why I don't wish to see you retire. You are one of the few people on the team who I am still familiar with."

Wood opened his mouth, but no words came out. He continued to stare at the surface of the lake, and silence settled among them once again.

A long time had elapsed before Twain heard a soft voice coming from Wood's side, "You are one of the few people left in football who I'm familiar with, too..."

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BBC made the decision to broadcast the blockbuster match between Nottingham Forest and Liverpool throughout the whole of England. Thus, millions of spectators watched as Liverpool thrashed Nottingham Forest by scoring five goals against them. The Nottingham Forest team had no fight in them. They played like a team who wanted to leave the pitch as quickly as possible the moment they stepped onto it. When the team went one goal behind, McAllister blew his top at the side of the pitch and was visibly upset with the team's performance. However, when the team went three goals down by the 15th minute, McAllister displayed indifference and simply remained in his seat quietly.

Motson, who was the commentator for the match, said that Nottingham Forest's performance had clearly been affected by George Wood's absence from the team. Twain and Wood were watching the live broadcast of the match on the television in the guest room. Upon hearing those words from Motson, Twain turned his head to glance at Wood, and he found Wood's face to be bereft of emotion.

In the end, the team suffered a humiliating 0:5 defeat to Liverpool, and the Nottingham Forest's fans' nightmare came true.

The next day, Wood was forced to end his 'break' early and return to team practice due to Sophia's insistence. Before he left, he told Twain that he still had not changed his mind about wanting to retire and that the only way he would not retire was if Twain returned to the team.

Twain did not make any form of response to his words.

That same day, Nottingham Forest Football Club held a press conference to announce that their manager, McAllister, had turned in his resignation and that the club had agreed to his request after careful consideration. The youth team manager, Greenwood, was appointed as the caretaker manager for the time being.

In the eyes of the outsiders, the change in personnel at the club signified that the once almighty Nottingham Forest was spiraling down into an abyss of nothingness, and its descent was gaining pace...

Chapter 990: Nottingham Forest's Circumstances

Wood had no intentions of discussing about his impending retirement in front of the interim manager, Greenwood, and club chairman, Evan Doughty. Faced with the intense pressing of the reporters, he remained tight-lipped, as if nothing ever happened.

Evan breathed a huge sigh of relief.

No matter what, the crisis had been averted for now. However, Evan Doughty could not feel relaxed about it. With the piling up of all the negative news such as the continuous defeats, the frequent change in managers and the rumor of Wood's retirement, the Arabian consortium suddenly changed their minds. Although they did not indicate that they wanted to stop all negotiations about taking over Nottingham Forest Football Club, they had obviously slowed the process down and they had also leaked out some news to indicate that they would prefer to take over the club at a lower price.

This was something that Evan Doughty did not wish to see. Allan Adams was on the receiving end of numerous scolding from the chairman with a growing temper. Even though there was a friendship between them coming from the time when they started their careers together, it had been more than a few decades, the friendship had already faded. Besides, he was the most trusted person for Evan, yet he could not settle such a major issue properly, how could Evan not be infuriated by that?

Ever since Tony Twain left, Allan Adams was the only one that Evan Doughty could depend on in the club. However, Allan's performance planted a doubt in Evan's mind—He might not be able to depend on this person in future.

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Tony Twain did not return to Los Angeles just because Wood went back to attend training and play in the matches as the matter was far from being resolved. Besides, now that Wood was back at work, he had to stay behind to take care of Sophia. Even though Miss Vivian was around, Twain was the only one who could have a heart to heart talk with Sophia.

Therefore, Twain gave Shania a call to inform her that he would not be able to return for a while, and if she was not too busy after her work concluded, she could come to Nottingham too. After Shania heard that Sophia was not doing well, she specially gave her a call to check up on her. She agreed with Twain's request without any other conditions.

Twain had originally sneaked back without any media knowing about it. However, as he stayed on, the media eventually caught wind of his whereabouts too. It was not long before pictures of Twain visiting the hospital appearing on the sports section of a few newspaper.

The day after news of Twain's return hit the newspaper, there was a special guest for him at Sophia's ward.

Officially, Evan Doughty was visiting Sophia on behalf of the club to wish her a rapid recovery, however, in truth, he was here for Twain.

"When did you come back? Why didn't you tell me?" Evan Doughty acted as though he was very close to Twain in the visitor's room outside.

Twain smiled, "A couple of days ago. I was too busy to tell you. You still came, didn't you?"

This was the first time the two of them met each other face to face in four years. The conflicts they had then was already water under the bridge. At least, one could never imagine that they had treated each other as enemies before from what he observed on the surface.

Later, the two of them chatted about anything under the sun, except for football and the recent difficult times that the club faced. Eventually, when they had nothing else to talk about, Evan Doughty took his leave.

Twain saw him out until the entrance of the ward. After Evan left, he returned to the ward and was deep in thoughts on the couch.

Based on his understanding of Evan Doughty, he would always bring Allan Adams with him, no matter where he went. However, he came to "visit" Sophia alone this time. Even though Evan said that Allan did not come because he was in-charge of negotiating with the Arabs, it had become public knowledge that the Arabian consortium had called off the negotiations for now and had returned to UAE. This had even been reported in the minor newspaper as they wanted to reconsider their offer for Nottingham Forest Football Club. It was obvious that they did not think that the price quoted by Evan Doughty was a fair evaluation of such a terrible club. It did not matter how glorious its past was, a businessman would only care about now and the future, not the past. If it could not bring them profit now, then there would be no value to them. If there was no room for improvement in the future, then the value would be even lower.

Everyone knew by now that the takeover of Nottingham Forest had reached an impasse, but the Forest fans did not know what they should be feeling now. They were tired of the club chairman who had brought them countless glorious moments before but was just a clown now. However, they did not wish to see their club handed over to a bunch of Arabs who knew nothing about football, about English football in particular. Just take a look at Manchester City, a mercenary team built by money. They were just a plaything for the Arabs.

As one of the clubs with the longest history in the world, how could it fall to such an extent?

If Nottingham Forest was a club like Notts County, the fans could resort to crowdfunding and buying the club themselves. However, Nottingham Forest was a club with a long history and glorious achievements, it was not a club that could be taken over by the fans through donations alone. Tony Twain's annual earnings were quite considerable, but even his life's savings were not enough to take over the club, unless he could get a more powerful consortium to invest in it. However, he had never had any contact with the financial world as he had no interest in it. Evan Doughty placed a price of 1.2 billion pounds for the sale of the club, which the media mocked as an unattainable price. Nottingham Forest was under a debt of 400 million pounds, after taking that into consideration, the club was worth 500 million pounds at most, which meant that a price of 900 million would be reasonable. The Arabs drove a tough bargain too, offering a price of 600 million pounds. After using 400 million pounds to pay off the debt, the club was only worth 200 million pounds in the eyes of these people from the middle east.

It was no wonder why many Nottingham Forest fans did not like the Arabian consortium at all, with an offer like that—For a team that had a history of winning five UEFA Champions League, an actual offer of 200 million pounds was a humiliation. That was why the Forest fans were tired of the “selling drama” that Evan Doughty put on every season on one hand, yet on the other hand, they did not want the Arabs to really take over the club.

Twain was still deep in thoughts.

Allan Adams was Evan Doughty's right-hand man, and he was fully in-charge of negotiations with the Arabian consortium. In Nottingham Forest Football Club, which could no longer be considered as a listed company, Allan Adams was the most powerful person after Evan Doughty. However, Allan did not come with Evan this time. Twain was very concerned about this.

Could this be a sign of Evan's attitude?

He knew that Evan Doughty was a person who craves power, that was why Twain did not believe that he came alone today because Allan was “tied up at work”.

Looks like something is brewing internally in Nottingham Forest Football Club...

But, what has that got to do with me?

Twain shook his head and stood up. He decided to go for a walk as his identity was already exposed so it did not matter anymore. It was a good opportunity for him to visit his old friends at Forest Bar.

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If Wood had read “The Romance of Three Kingdoms”, then he must have understood the story of “being in the Cao camp but mind is in the Shu camp”. His situation now was the typical “being in the Cao camp but mind is in the Shu camp”. Even though he rejoined the team and the training, his mother's condition did not get better and she was still very weak. She even had to be warded into the clean room this week, which was a sign of her illness getting worse.

Under such a situation, how could he remain calm and focus on training and the match? Wood was just human after all, with blood, flesh and emotions, and not really just a piece of wood. He was also not a

robot killer from the future. Even though he promised his mother that he would rejoin the team, she could not control his emotions. He missed his mother, and she did not forbid him from missing her.

Greenwood had no solutions for that either. He was not an expert in controlling a player's mentality, and Wood did not listen to him either. There was only one manager whom Wood would willingly listen to, but that person had already retired.

His teammates could do nothing about it too. Nobody could possibly ask Wood to focus on football and lead by example at this moment as they had no rights to do so. As the only kin to Wood, his mother was lying in the clean room in the hospital now, with her life in danger. What they should do now was actually to persuade Wood to forget about football for now and take care of his mother, not request him to stay in the training grounds to lead by example, playing football without care for his family. To these professional players, football was just a job. No job could be more important than family.

However, once Wood made his decision, there was basically no room for anyone to change his mind. That was why even Wood's best friend, "Little Monkey" Bale, could not persuade him to go back and take care of his mother.

The Europa League match that followed was George Wood's first game after his return to the team. In the end, he performed very badly in the game. Even though he ran a lot, he was running like a headless chicken. He could not organize the attack or defense. Nottingham Forest's tactic revolved around George Wood. If Wood performed badly, the team would be like a pile of sand scattered in the wind, without any organization.

In the end, Nottingham Forest lost 0:2 to Sporting Lisbon at home.

For the next match in the League two days ago, Nottingham Forest faced Fulham at home. George Wood's performance did not improve, but Greenwood changed his tactics and did not use Wood as the core, choosing to use Balotelli as the core instead, focusing all the attacking moves around him. Under Balotelli's impressive performance, the team defeated Fulham 2:1 at home to put an end to their slump.

However, the good times did not last. In the next league match next week, Nottingham Forest lost to Newcastle. This time, using Balotelli as the core did not achieve the required impact as it was much easier to mark out a forward than a defensive midfielder...

Nottingham Forest's position in the table stopped dropping after the last round in the league temporarily, but it continued after the loss to Newcastle. Losing the Blackburn 1:3, then losing to Tottenham Hotspurs by 0:1... By the end of October, Forest's position had slipped from 10th to 14th. For the whole October, other than a 2:1 victory over Fulham, there was no other victories. There was not even a draw other than that. They only managed three points despite playing five games in October.

There was something even more troubling for Evan Doughty which followed. After leading the team for just four games, Greenwood felt that he was not ready to lead the first team yet after three losses. He approached Evan Doughty after the defeat against Tottenham Hotspurs, hoping that the club chairman would agree to him leaving the post as manager of the first team and return to coaching the youth team.

How could Evan Doughty possibly agree? He was already finding it difficult to find a suitable manager. However, his desire to keep him as manager was no match for Greenwood's strong desire to leave his post and he had no choice but to agree to Greenwood quitting as manager of the first team eventually.

Next, Evan Doughty had little choice but to name Freddie Eastwood as the next interim manager, to manage the team while he looked for a suitable manager.

To be honest, if Eastwood had a choice, he would definitely choose not to take this job. Firstly, he did not think that he was good enough to become manager, and the second reason was naturally because Nottingham Forest was like a blackhole for managers now. No matter how good, or competent a manager was, he would suffer reputational damage if he took over this job.

Eventually, Eastwood could only take the job unwillingly. He did not show any joy of being promoted to manager during the press conference. Even though it was quite interesting for him to manage his previous teammates, he had no mood to joke about it. When faced with questions by the reporters regarding the team's results and outlook, he merely said that he hoped he would not let the supporters and the club down, and he said nothing else. The atmosphere of the press release was a little uninteresting.

After the press release, the media released their articles describing the outlook for Nottingham Forest as bleak. This time, they were not trying to smear Nottingham Forest, or going against Nottingham Forest on purpose. They were simply stating the truth now. Even the most die-hard Nottingham Forest fan would come up with the same conclusion now.

"Looks like Evan Doughty should change their target for this season——It should be to avoid relegation, instead of qualifying for the Champions League..."