

Major League System

Chapter 141 - 141: Prefecture Tournament (1)

Coach Hanada watched his players complete the drills he had set out with an enthusiasm that was infectious. He was a little suspicious at first, however he simply chalked it up to them being excited about the upcoming prefecture tournament.

They had played 6 games over the past 2 months, trying out different line-ups around the same core players. To his surprise, everyone had improved greatly up to now, with the standouts being Shiro and Yusuke.

Hiroki also seemed to have gone up a notch in the last 2 days, bringing him a sense of joy.

His gaze moved over to Ken who had seemingly taken over the drills, yelling out at players if they were slacking and encouraging everyone as they worked up a sweat. It was surreal, almost as if he had ascended to the Captains position organically.

Even Akira who was supposed to be his rival seemed to greatly respect him, doing his utmost to excel in training.

Seiji was not dumb, he was very aware of what his players were up to after practice finished up for the day. Which was why he made sure that club practice was fun, focusing on game scenarios and practical skills that were used on the field.

This was his way of showing his trust in Ken that he would handle the physical strength and conditioning, while also ensuring that the teens weren't overworked.

There was an unspoken agreement between himself and Ken, a mutual respect of sorts.

Once he was happy with everything, he moved forward and blew his whistle, telling everyone to gather around.

"Well done everyone, we're shaping up well so far." He said with a smile.

"I have just received the Kanagawa prefecture fixtures and placed them in the locker room. Our first game is next weekend. Once you're done cleaning up, go have a look."

At his words a wave of excitement broke out within the players who seemed to be chomping at the bit to play.

What happened next seemed like a blur to the coach. One moment he was looking at his players fondly, caught up in their excitement and the next everyone was sprinting towards the equipment.

In record time, the field was cleaned and all equipment collected and packed away, leaving the coach flabbergasted.

The players piled into the locker room, their attention focused on the notice board that was placed at the entrance.

Makoto muscled his way to the front of the pack, climbing over anyone and everyone in his way. As the captain, he felt that it was his right and duty to announce the fixtures.

"Ah so we're playing Zama High first."

A voice came out from behind him, causing his eye to twitch in response. He slowly turned his head and was about to start throwing obscenities to the person who would dare take this away from him.

However, once he saw the handsome face and chiseled jaw of the perpetrator, he quickly swallowed his complaints. Due to his growth spurt, Ken was at least a head taller than most on the team, making him easy to spot in a crowd.

There was also the fact that he'd been punishing the entire team with extra workouts after practice, paying special attention to those who were caught slacking or spoke out against him.

"Our draw is a bit unlucky this year." Yuta said, a frown forming on his face.

Ken was also frowning, but for a different reason. In his past life they had received a bye in the first round and had an easy run of teams all the way up to the finals. Yet now they were up against one of the big four in the very first round.

Since it was a single elimination tournament, if they lost that would be it.

"It looks like Shuei are on the other side of the bracket too. If we both win all our matches we'll meet in the finals." Hiroki added, yet he was sporting a grin.

Ever since he made his breakthrough, Hiroki had felt unstoppable. Not only was he in the best physical shape in his life, his mind also felt clearer, as if it had pierced the veil of fog that used to cloud it.

Of course with these factors, it wasn't surprising that he would gain a tremendous amount of confidence.

"I'm fired up!"

Hiroki's enthusiasm seemed to lift everyone's mood considerably. If their best player was like this, then why wouldn't they also be confident. They cheered out together, breaking into chants.

"BEAT ZAMA!"

"TO KOSHIEN!"

"YEAH!"

Seeing how everyone was in such a mood, Ken couldn't help but smile.

'I guess a lot has changed since my past life. We're a lot stronger and closer as a team.' He thought inwardly.

"Alright! Let's train extra hard today." Ken shouted, feeling himself get swept up in the atmosphere.

Silence.

Everyone who was fired up earlier suddenly felt all of their enthusiasm disperse. Some even felt their stomach churn uncomfortably as they thought about having to go through such crazy exercises right now.

"As expected of the Training Demon." Hiroki said with a grin. He was the only one who shared the same level of excitement as Ken for such things.

"Ah, I also brought some pastries." A soft voice called out from the entrance of the locker room.

"And I brought some sliced Oranges to keep your sugar levels up!"

"I-I..." The cute girl with dimples held out a container which held some rice balls, feeling a little too embarrassed to continue her words since a certain twin was looking at her intently.

Seeing their cute managers Ai, Yuko and Kaori arriving with all sorts of treats, what teen could keep quiet? Once again the excitement levels broke through the roof, eliciting some cheers.

Ken turned to see Ai staring at him and sent a smile her way, seeing her cheeks redden.

First round of the Kanagawa Prefecture Tournament, Yokohama High vs Zama High.

Ken was one of the last off the bus. His tall figure stuck out amongst the team as he looked at the neutral field in front of them.

'Today is the day, the first step towards Koshien.'

It almost felt surreal.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 142 - 142: Prefecture Tournament (2)

"Not getting nervous are we?" Coach Hanada stepped off the bus and asked Ken, a small smile creeping onto his face.

"Nah. I'm just happy to be playing baseball again." He responded truthfully.

'Huh?' Seiji tilted his head in confusion, not entirely sure of what he meant. Hadn't he played baseball all the way from elementary school?

Without clarifying, Ken walked off, following the rest of the group towards the dressing rooms.

The coach shook his head and mumbled under his breath, "As long as he plays like usual there shouldn't be any issues."

Soon enough the team had gathered after getting changed into their uniforms. The atmosphere was serious and determined, yet there was an undercurrent of excitement amongst the teenagers.

"I won't say too much before the game. Trust all the hard work that each and every one of you have put in this year and execute. If we can do that, there's no one that can beat us.

Words of agreement broke out within the team as they felt their confidence increase at the coach's words.

"Alright good. We're running mostly the same line up for this game. Ken, Yusuke, you'll be starting in place of Akira and Yasushi."

"Yes coach!"

Both Ken and Yusuke called out, showing their readiness.

"Okay good. There's a few players that we need to be wary of on their team. The catcher & pitcher duo made it to top 16 at Spring Nationals earlier this year. Not only is their defense top notch, they also have some sluggers."

Coach Hanada began to outline some areas that they needed to focus on in order to not let the game get away from them.

Ken listened, his mind half occupied.

DING

SYSTEM HAS DETECTED THAT USER IS PART OF THE LINEUP FOR KANAGAWA PREFECTURE TOURNAMENT.

#NEW MISSION: Kanagawa Prefecture Tournament

*Task 1: Strike out 30 players

*Task 2: Hit 6 home runs

*Task 3: Make the finals of the Kanagawa Tournament

*Task 4: Win the Tournament

*Task 5: Win player of the Tournament

REWARDS:

>Task 1 rewards - 300 Major points

>Task 2 rewards - 300 Major points

>Task 3 rewards - 500 Major points

>Task 4 rewards - 1000 Major points

>Task 5 rewards - 1500 Major points

A smile formed on his lips as he looked at the mission in front of him. He originally thought that the system wouldn't have a mission for him until he made it to Koshien, however he was pleasantly surprised.

Sure the rewards were just major points, but that just happened to be what he needed the right now. He was currently 2500 away from being able to afford the next system upgrade, which meant he would need to complete at least the first 4 tasks.

This suited him most since these were things that were actually within his control. Ken never liked to rely on things such as luck which he had little impact on. If any of the judges were to dislike him for whatever reason, he'd miss out.

"Ken? Does that work for you?"

Coach Hanada's voice broke him out of his thoughts, causing him to almost yell out in fright.

"Sure, no problem." He answered, his Poker Face skill automatically activating and saving himself some trouble.

"Great. With Ken at the 5th spot, everyone else will shuffle down in the batting order. Yusuke, you'll be 9th."

"Yes coach."

Yusuke didn't seem disappointed at all, in fact he looked happy to be a part of the starting line up. Ever since recovering from his knee injury, he had improved by leaps and bounds, particularly in his agility.

Since he was drafted as a lead-off batter, having him 9th in the batting order could take the opposing team off guard.

The coach placed his hand in the middle of everyone, to which the players also reciprocated.

"YOKOHAMA!"

"FIGHT!"

The whole team joined in, raising their voices loudly as a declaration for the battle that was about to begin.

The team trudged onto the field and lined up from the batters box towards the mound in a straight line, awaiting the players from the opposite team.

They didn't have to wait long as Zama High came sauntering onto the field, dressed in their white and purple baseball uniforms. Not long later, the two teams faced each other and bowed as a sign of respect.

Such was the custom in Japanese baseball, dating back for many years.

Since Ken hadn't played against Zama High before in his previous life, he wasn't too sure which players he should be on the lookout for. He scanned the opposition, finally focusing on another player who was around his height.

Perhaps it was instinct, but he could tell that this guy was strong. Yet he wasn't so worried that he would use Identify on him, especially since it almost felt like cheating.

The player in question seemed to see Ken looking at him and proceeded to glare back, trying to look menacing. Ken found it quite amusing, yet his face remained stoic thanks to a very handy skill.

Seeing that his intimidation tactic wasn't working, the tall Zama High player clicked his tongue and looked for someone else to intimidate. His eyes suddenly fell upon a shorty in the line up with messy black hair and bags under his eyes.

From an outsider perspective, this kid looked as if he was the kind of person who would get no sleep the night before a game due to nervousness.

Thinking he was an easy target, Hiroshi Asami the tall Zama High pitcher performed his best scowl, wanting to intimidate the shorty till he pissed his pants.

'This is it, he's looking my way.' Hiroshi thought, his excitement rising.

The kid's dull brown eyes locked onto his, however there was no reaction in his features. His face looked dead and his eyes seemed empty, yet it felt as if they contained an infinite abyss of pain and suffering within.

Hiroshi felt his blood run cold and he instinctively took a few steps back out of fear and fell onto his backside, almost dragging his teammates back with him.

"Eh? Hiroshi are you okay?"

'W-What the hell is with that guy!?'

Shiro watched as the guy who was scowling at him suddenly fell over, creating a disturbance. While he was puzzled, he was far too sore and worn down to care.

'Everything hurts. I wanna go home...'

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 143 - 143: Yokohama vs Zama High (1)

"It's heads. Decision goes to Zama High."

The muscular figure of Makoto was on the field, flanked by the umpire and another player dressed in the Purple Zama High uniform.

"We'll field first." The Zama High player said with a smile, his eyes subconsciously moving to their tall pitcher Hiroshi.

"Bring it on."

Makoto offered his hand, only to be ignored by the opposing captain.

The umpire frowned, however he said nothing. Inwardly he was displeased with the lack of respect from the Zama High captain.

Yet Makoto didn't seem too upset and made his way back to the dugout. He had expected this much from their opponent in this game, especially since they'd knocked them out in the previous years tournament.

"Let's give em' hell." Makoto announced with a grin.

"Yeah!"

The players shouted out, feeling their blood pumping in response.

The Aoyama twins headed onto the field, performing some warm ups and getting limber while the pitcher warmed up his arm.

"This pitcher isn't as fast as you, but he's got at least 3 breaking balls." Yuta said to Ken whose eyes were on the tall player upon the mound.

"Oh?" Ken was surprised.

It was odd that such a young player would have so many different pitches.

Since the pitcher was a 3rd year and he had not played against Zama High in his first year of High School, he did not know the guy. However, he wasn't too worried.

Tatsuya was the first up to bat, looking as flashy as ever. He was prone to swinging on the first pitch, especially during the first innings when the pitcher had yet to get into a rhythm.

DONG

This time was no different as he sent the ball in between the 1st and 2nd baseman for an easy single. He struck a pose on 1st base, however since there weren't many spectators, it failed to elicit the response he was looking for.

"Tch." He clicked his tongue in annoyance.

'Wait till I get to Nationals...'

As his mind was fantasizing about all of the cheers and attention he would be receiving on the grand stage of Koshien, his brother Jun stepped up to the plate for his turn.

The two locked eyes for a moment, not even needing to speak a word between them to know what to do next.

Tatsuya took a lead off first base, shuffling stealthily as he waited for the tall pitcher to begin his pitch.

DASH

The moment Hiroshi began his wind up, Tatsuya was already sprinting towards second base.

DONG

"TWO!"

Jun yelled, accelerating to first base with breakneck speed.

Since Tatsuya already had a lead, he quickly rounded second base and flew towards 3rd. He could hear the shouts from the Zama High players, along with the 3rd base coach's rushed signals for him to slide, telling him it would be close.

In one smooth motion he slid towards the bag with his hands, touching it just before the glove came and tapped him on the arm.

"Safe!"

"ORYAAA! Nice one Tatsu!"

"Nice run!"

Cheers came from the Yokohama dugout, praising him for his heroics.

Next up to bat was Makoto who made his way up to the batters box. The Zama High captain who had refused his handshake happened to be the catcher, part of the deadly battery the coach had referred to.

"Hmph, you guys don't seem to be off to a good start." Makoto said, a small grin creeping onto the side of his lips.

"Heh. Hiroshi is a slow starter, don't think you'll continue to be so lucky." The catcher sneered, placing his face mask back on.

As if to back up his words, Hiroshi's next pitch was sharp and seemed to creep its way inside. Makoto didn't swing, allowing the ball to almost graze his elbow on its way to the catcher.

"Ball."

"Tch." Hiryu clicked his tongue in annoyance. He was hoping to shake the confidence of the opposing captain by having him back off from the pitch, yet the muscle brain ignored the danger and stayed still.

He threw the ball back and squatted down once more, signaling the next pitch.

Hiroshi nodded and threw the ball forwards.

Makoto's eyes lit up as he felt the ball looked slower than the last. He loaded up and sent his bat billowing forward, trying to send it out of the park.

DING

'Crap!'

The pitch had curved downward thanks to the forward spin placed on the ball, causing him to hit the top of the ball and send it towards the pitcher after ricocheting off the dirt.

"Home!"

Hiroshi who was originally going to send it to first base to secure the out, suddenly heard the shout from Hiryu and picked up the ball in one smooth motion, sending it right into his glove.

Tatsuya did his best to avoid the tag, however the wily captain Hiryu had closed off all opportunities. He tried to quickly slow down and run back to third, but he was promptly tagged in the middle of the back by the catcher.

"Out!"

"Hehe. Not so fast now are ya?"

"Huh!?"

Tatsuya felt his anger stir, feeling the urge to throw his glove at the catchers face with his hand still inside of it. However, he saw Hiroki coming up to bat out of the corner of his eye and instantly calmed down.

"We'll see who is laughing soon."

'Hmm?'

Hiryu was surprised. He thought that he'd be able to get this player to lash out but it seemed like he was wrong.

He made his way back to home plate and looked at the next batter curiously. He recognized him from when they faced Yokohama last year, but he didn't remember anything that stood out.

Hiryu couldn't be blamed since Hiroki was only a first year back then and had just made the first squad. He'd also been placed further back in the batting order since he was still new.

'I'll waste a couple of pitches before we beat him inside with some breaking balls.'

The catcher gave the sign to the tall pitcher on the mound who in turn nodded in confirmation.

He completed the wind up and sent the ball towards the outside of the strike zone as per Hiryu's instructions. Seeing the speed of the ball, a smile crept onto the catchers face.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

[- Chapter 144 - 144: Yokohama vs Zama High \(2\)](#)

Chapter 144 - 144: Yokohama vs Zama High (2)

'Good course and good speed.'

DOOONG!

"Eh?"

Hiryu watched on in shock as the ball which was meant to be sitting securely in his glove soar into the air towards the right foul post.

'G-Go out!'

He quickly stood up and shouted inwardly for the ball to enter the foul zone. He didn't want to give up 3 runs in the very first innings, especially since they had only gotten 1 out so far.

BANG

The sound of the ball hitting the foul post reverberated around the grounds, crushing the hope of the Zama High players.

"I'm home~" Jun called out, placing his foot onto home plate after rounding 3rd base.

He waited for Makoto and Hiroki to complete their victory lap, ruffling his hair affectionately when he arrived.

"ORYAAA! Nice homer Hiroki!"

Makoto went a step further and pulled Hiroki into a bear hug, almost causing the air in his lungs to be squeezed out.

Ken who was next up to bat let out a genuine smile. Hiroki's improvement had been immense and he would only continue to get better, especially since his potential was now unknown.

"Nice work."

They were simple words, but between these two there was not much else that needed to be said. Hiroki grinned and held out his fist, bumping it with Ken's.

"Don't let me outshine you Ace."

"Hehe."

Ken watched as the three made their way back to the dugout, receiving the praise and cheers from their teammates. Tatsuya especially seemed to be the most excited, poking his tongue out towards the catcher who still seemed to be stunned.

"Alright, let's get some more runs." He mumbled, stepping up to the batters box.

"T-Time out please."

Hiryu called out to the umpire after seeing that their Ace was unresponsive.

He quickly ran over to the mound and began to chat with Hiroshi.

Ken was forced to be patient as he gazed upon the two. He knew how it felt to be in such a situation after giving up some runs. There was so much pressure upon these teens shoulders that it could either crush them or turn them into diamonds.

Soon enough, the umpire had gotten impatient. This was the same umpire that was present at the coin toss and witnessed the lack of respect from Hiryu towards the Yokohama captain.

"Zama High, you've had long enough. Return now or you'll forfeit."

His words were harsh, letting them know he was not kidding around.

Hiryu frowned. They were able to use up to 2 minutes for a timeout on the field, yet only a minute had passed by his calculation.

However, when he was about to argue that point, he saw the expression on the umpire's face and decided not to pursue the matter.

"Hiroshi your pitches are sharp. That last hit was just a fluke, let's claw our way back into the game okay?"

After a moment the tall Hiroshi nodded, feeling himself get injected with a fresh dose of confidence.

"OK Hiryu. Let's do this."

Letting out a sigh of relief, Hiryu returned to his position after apologizing to the umpire. It would do him no good to get on the bad side of this person, especially since he was responsible for calling the pitches.

"Play!"

Ken approached the batters box and squared his shoulders, maintaining the form that his father had drilled into him. His eyes narrowed as he stared at the pitcher on the mound.

'Let's see what you've got.'

Hiroshi went into his wind up before whipping out his arm and sending the ball down the lane towards Ken.

'Huh?'

Ken almost called out in surprise as he felt everything slow down to a crawl. He could count the amount of times the ball had spun and even predict its course, instantly figuring out that it was a curveball.

'Why did Crunch Time activate? It's the first innings.'

Crunch Time was not a skill that he could activate by himself, it only happened in certain scenarios where it was a turning point in the game. Therefore one would assume it would activate during the final innings.

However, there was no way that he would complain in such a situation.

The increase to all of his attributes made the ball even easier to hit.

DOOOONG!

Ken felt the ball hit the center of the bat, producing a sound that he loved as a batter, but hated as a pitcher.

Hiroshi on the mound didn't even turn and follow the ball's path, showing just how much shock he was in.

"No... It can't be."

Hiryu felt his legs grow weak as he suddenly fell to his knees from his crouching position. How could a first year smack the very first ball, Hiroshi's curveball at that.

Ken made his way around the bases and looked at the pitiful pitcher on the mound. He could only shake his head, feeling pity for the young man.

However, they were currently opponents. If he were to feel bad for the opposition and hold back, he would never make it to Nationals, let alone the professional league.

"See? I told you he'd hit a homer." Yusuke said gleefully.

The person he was talking to was Shiro who seemed to have recovered a little from his earlier situation. He looked at Ken with sparkling eyes, feeling his respect for him rise to another level.

He had played against Ken last year and although he knew that he was a good batter, it was rare that a middle school player would make the first squad of a High School team.

To see Ken hit such a bomb against a 3rd year pitcher on the mound, only highlighted how special he really was.

Of course Shiro knew that it wasn't just talent involved. He knew how hardworking and diligent Ken was, so much so that he didn't want to be left behind.

This was why he continued to go through the torturous training sessions despite feeling as if he was going to die.

'He really is special.'

There was another person in the dugout who was looking at Ken with sparkles in their eyes, watching him intently as he glided around the bases.

'He's so cool...'

Ai felt her face heat up as she made eye contact with Ken.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 145 - 145: Overwhelming (1)

Ken finally made it back to the dugout after his home run. He was well received, dishing out high fives like they were free samples at the grocery store.

"Looks like you broke that pitcher." Coach Hanada said with a somber tone.

While it was good for their team that they had overcome the opposing pitcher, Seiji Hanada was passionate about mentoring the younger generation. Seeing such things filled him with sorrow.

He glanced at the opposing coach who was calling out words of encouragement from the dugout. There was a look of panic in his face, yet it eventually changed into acceptance.

"Good... At least that guy noticed." Coach mumbled.

The opposing coach then organized for a pitcher change, personally heading up to the mound and collecting Hiroshi to bring him out of the game.

Since he had now been substituted, there was no way he could get back into the game, meaning Zama High was now without their Ace.

Ken too watched this transpire, feeling an ache in his heart. Yet thanks to the Poker Face ability he was able to put up a stoic facade, not revealing his true thoughts.

He finally understood why his Crunch Time skill activated in that moment. Somehow the system had detected that if he smashed the first pitch it would do enough mental damage to take the Ace off the mound.

Had he missed the pitch, it was very possible Hiroshi would be able to recover after enough balls, hardening his resolve.

The new pitcher clearly wasn't expecting to be out so early and had ended up throwing a few meatballs which were quickly punished by the Yokohama batters.

The next at bats were as follows; Single, double, sacrifice fly and a single. At the top of the 1st innings, Yokohama found themselves up 5 runs with 2 outs and runners on 1st and 2nd base.

Yusuke walked up to the batters box, his face filled with determination. This was his first game back since his injury, considering the coach had decided not to play him in any of the friendly matches.

Despite being up 5 runs, he didn't look like he was about to take it easy.

Hiryu was currently a wreck after what had happened this innings. In all of his years of club baseball, he had never felt so utterly helpless in a match. It was as if every batter on the Yokohama squad were in prime shape.

His eyes stared at Kazuo on the mound who already looked to be worn down after being toyed with.

'Will he even make it through the rest of the game?'

He shook his head. The game was not over yet, they had another 8 innings to go.

Hiryu called for a ball outside after seeing how tense the batter was. Since he was the 9th batter, they should be able to secure the final out of the innings and go on the attack.

Kazuo nodded, bringing his glove up to his chest before following through and sending a pitch right where he was lead.

'Good! As long as he keeps pitchi—'

DOOONG

The ball rocketed into the air straight into center field, causing the fielder to run back with all his might. Since there was 2 outs, both the runners on base and Yusuke began to sprint around the bases.

"CATCH IT!"

Hiryu shouted, his face full of panic.

However, the fielder soon slowed down and stood in place.

'What the hell is he doing?'

"What are you—"

He suddenly swallowed the words back down in his throat, finally realizing why his teammate had stopped chasing the ball.

"Nice Homer Yusuke!"

"ORYAAAAAAAAA!"

The Yokohama dugout went crazy, celebrating the triumphant debut of another one of their rookies. The hype was even more since everyone knew how much work Yusuke had put in to get back into shape after his operation.

Ken felt his face light up into a smile. It was so genuine that even his Poker Face skill did not activate, showing the world how happy he was in this moment.

If it wasn't for the system, Yusuke would have pushed through his injury right until the moment he became a professional, only for it to all be taken away seemingly overnight.

On the field, the Zuma High players was silent. They were down 7 runs and had lost their Ace, things were not looking good for them. Their heads were bowed and it looked as if they had already given up on the game.

"...not over yet."

"It's not over yet!"

Hiryu shouted from home plate after seeing the state of his team. As the captain, it was his responsibility to pull their team out of the fire end back on track.

At the sound of their captains voice, they slowly raised their heads, looking in his direction. Tears began to form in some of their eyes as they looked towards the only person who had yet to give up on the match.

"Y-Yeah."

"One more out..."

"ONE MORE OUT! LET'S GO!"

What started as one person slowly grew in number. Soon enough the whole team on the field were screaming out at the top of their lungs, trying to find the inner strength to persist against such odds.

Tatsuya who had stepped up to the batters box felt the resolve of his opponents and nodded somberly. Even though he had been taunted by the opposing catcher not long ago, he did not want to trample on their fighting spirit.

'I'll take this seriously.' He thought, getting into his batting form.

Kazuo on the mound seemed to be an entirely different person as he sent the ball down the lane towards the catchers glove.

'He's desperate...!' Tatsuya thought, feeling as if the course was predictable.

DING

"Crap!"

The ball seemed to come alive at the last moment, drifting towards the batter and jamming his swing. It popped straight up into the air and was promptly caught by Hiryu with relative ease.

"YEAHHHH!"

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 146 - 146: Overwhelming (2)

It wasn't just Hiryu that celebrated. The entire Zama team seemed to come alive as they let out a collective shout of triumph, instilling some fighting spirit back into them.

"Three outs. Changeover."

Tatsuya looked as if he just swallowed a lemon as he made his way back to the dugout.

"My bad."

"Don't mind don't mind." Yuta patted him on the shoulder, a smile on his face.

"We're up 9 runs, we just need to keep the same momentum."

Ken nodded. They were in a commanding position right now in only the first innings. While it looked like Zama High was on the verge of rallying their fighting spirit, it would all hinge on how they batted next.

He made his way up to the mound and picked up the rosin bag, rolling it in his hand a few times before beginning his warm up pitches.

After about 12 pitches using only 60% power, he felt warm enough to begin.

The first batter walked into the box and glared at him, his fighting spirit almost visible to the naked eye.

Without a word, Ken looked over at Yuta who called for a fastball right down the middle and couldn't help but smile behind his poker face.

'Looks like Yuta isn't as kindhearted as he seems on the outside. If they miss a pitch like this, it will kill any hope of a comeback.' He thought inwardly.

Ken performed his wind up, something he'd done thousands of times in the past and sent the ball whipping forwards with power.

PAH!

The sound of the ball meeting the leather glove resounded in everyone's ears, causing a deathly silence to reverberate through the field.

"Strike."

The first batter whose face was filled with resolve and determination just moments before suddenly looked as if his whole world had crumbled.

Ken raised his glove and received the ball back from Yuta, his heart calm as a lake.

'Sorry, but we'll be heading to Nationals and taking the title this year.'

"OSAKAAAAA"

"FIGHT ON!"

"OSAKAAAAA"

"FIGHT ON!"

The sound of cheering filled the field as Daichi squatted into position behind the batters box. He adjusted the mask over his baby face before turning his attention to the player on the mound.

Even though it was his first game as a starting catcher in an official tournament, there was no signs of nervousness. In fact, there was a serene calmness that seemed to take over him, like he was born to be in such moments.

Yatsuo squared himself up, not giving anything away as he waited for his catchers lead. His long hair was hidden underneath his cap and tied in a ponytail which sat on his back, giving him an exotic look.

Daichi made the signal, calling for a fastball to the inside.

He received a nod from Yatsuo before he began his wind up, whipping the ball out with impeccable accuracy and speed.

PAH

"Strike."

"Nice pitch."

Daichi threw the ball back, feeling at ease. He had initially been worried that Yatsuo may refuse to listen to his calls, but he was wrong. Not only did he follow every one of his leads, his control was nearly flawless.

His attention turned to the scoreboard and he could only smile wryly.

Shimizudani: 0

Osaka Toin: 14

It was currently the 5th inning and they were already 14 runs ahead, showing the stark difference between the teams. He had led Yatsuo to throwing a flawless no-hit game thus far.

As long as they got this batter out, the game would end via the mercy rule.

If a team was up by 15 runs by the 4th innings or 10 runs by the 5th innings, the umpires would call an end to the game. This was referred to as the mercy rule, allowing the losing team to avoid further humiliation.

Daichi knew that their team was strong. They had great facilities and coaching staff, paired with comprehensive training. This was one of the biggest allures of going to a prestigious baseball school in Japan.

However, he felt a little empty.

Even as he called for the next pitch, he couldn't help but feel like there was something missing. It was almost as if he was numb, his body just going through the motions.

"Strike two."

'Why did I even start baseball in the first place?'

His thoughts traveled back to when he first moved to Yokohama, a huge turning point in his life. He saw his Mother and Father's smiling faces, yet they were eclipsed by the face of his brother, the man who had saved him from his painful life.

He was introduced to baseball by that man, something he grew to love. However, did he truly love baseball? Or did he love it because he could play alongside Ken?

These questions bounced around inside of his head while the game continued.

"Strike Three! Out. Game Set."

"OSAKAAAA"

The crowd erupted into cheers, beginning their victory chants.

Meanwhile, Daichi stood up feeling his emotions in some turmoil.

It was funny, while he was training at Osaka he did not have any of these thoughts, even after finding out that Ken had lied to him. Yet as soon as he stepped onto the field during an official match, he felt despondent.

'I wonder how Ken's doing.' He thought, looking off into the distance.

"Nice work rookie."

Yatsuo made his way over to Daichi who seemed lost, holding out his fist.

"Ah, thanks Senpai."

Not expecting such a thing from the Ace, Daichi was a little taken aback, but he quickly recovered. The two made their way back to the dugout where everyone was already in high spirits.

"What a debut! A 3 run home run and 2 doubles!"

His teammates crowded him, giving him compliments for his performance. Yet something about the win didn't seem right, there was something that was still missing.

As if having an epiphany, his mind returned to the game he had in middle school against Fujimi.

["Hey man, I was just saying that a game like this isn't fun at all."]

"Hah, fun? What's the point in having fun if you can't win? As long as we win the game then nothing else matters..."

"Those don't sound like your true feelings."]

Remembering the conversation between Ken and the Fujimi catcher seemed to spark something inside of him.

'Fun... Was that what this game was missing?'

Daichi's face dulled for a moment, his mind going into overdrive.

'Is that why Ken didn't want to join Osaka? Because there would be no challenge?'

He shook his head, as if he was trying to remove the thoughts that had taken hold in his brain.

'Ken wouldn't have kept quiet if that was the case, he wanted to get into Osaka just as much as me.'

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 147 - 147: Motivations (1)

"Hey son! How are they treating you at Osaka?"

A cheery voice came through the phone, brightening Daichi's expression considerably. He was sitting alone in his dorm room, not wanting to join in on the festivities after winning the first round of their prefecture tournament.

"Hi Dad. They're treating me well here." He replied, yet his tone wasn't all that enthusiastic.

"Hmm? Why do you sound so down?" Chris asked.

"W-Wait, you guys didn't lose the first round of your prefecture tournament did you!?"

"Ah no, we won in the 5th inning."

"Phew, thank goodness. Then what's got you so down?"

Daichi could feel the concern in his father's voice, making him feel warm inside. Since being at Osaka he had been too focused on training to realize that he was lonely.

After living with his new family, he had almost forgotten what it was like to feel so alone and isolated, despite having others around. Yet these past few months away from them unconsciously brought back some trauma.

However, just hearing Chris's voice was enough to snap him out of his feelings.

He decided to open up to his father, letting him know about his revelation on the field today. Chris simply listened to his words, only speaking up when he had finished his piece.

"Haaah. So you're saying that the game was so easy that you weren't having fun?"

Daichi paused for a moment, having his feelings summarized in such a way made him feel a little uncomfortable.

"Daichi, buddy... Don't you feel like you're getting ahead of yourself?" Chris said, his tone lacking any of the warmth it had earlier.

"Huh?"

Not expecting such a response, Daichi recoiled away from the phone in surprise.

"People pour all of their blood, sweat and tears into the sport of Baseball. They sacrifice their life, leaving their loved ones, all in the pursuit of improving, and maybe one day become a professional."

"Do you think that just because you've trained for a few months on a superior team you can complain about how it's too easy?"

"I... That's not what I meant." Daichi said, not knowing how to react.

"Don't underestimate Baseball..."

There was a short pause as no one spoke for a few moments. Daichi had been yelled at plenty of times in his life, but his father's stern yet calm words had an even deeper impact on him than all of those experiences combined.

Chris let out a sigh before continuing, "It sounds to me like you need to find your reason to play baseball."

"My reason?"

"Some people play baseball because they love it, others play because they love to compete. Hell, some even play purely to become professional and get money and fame."

"You need to find out your reason and what motivates you to play the game. Kiddo you've got talent, I knew from the first time we walked into those batting cages that you had the potential to be great."

"But at the end of the day, your mother and I just want you to be happy. If you can't find your reason to continue playing baseball, then I'd rather you come back home and attend school with your brother."

Daichi was silent as he listened to his father's wise words. They seemed to strike a chord with him, deep inside.

He didn't start baseball because he loved it like Ken did. He started playing because Ken wanted to play with him, to become the best battery in the nation.

Now that he thought about it, was that what he really wanted to do? Did he want to toil away and sacrifice time with his family to attend this school?

At first, baseball was a way to escape from reality. When he was playing, he never thought about his circumstances at home, he could be carefree and have fun with Ken and his teammates.

Yet now that his reality had changed, was this something that he really wanted to pursue? As these questions bounced around in his mind, his conversation with Ken in the middle of the street suddenly appeared in his mind.

["Once your shoulder heals, let's aim to become pro together."

"Yeah it's a promise. Let's get to the NPB and then the Majors!"]

BA BUMP

BA BUMP

Daichi placed his hand on his heart, feeling it almost beating out of his chest.

His worried features seemed to fade away, replaced with a blossoming grin.

'That's right. I want to play with Ken... I want to go to the Majors with my brother.'

"Ah by the way, please do me a favor..."

Daichi's thoughts were interrupted by his father whom he almost forgot was still on the phone to him.

"A-Ah sure dad."

Chris paused for a moment before responding.

"Please give Kenny a call. Your mother has been bugging me since she found out you two haven't been speaking all this time." His tone sounded almost pleading.

"Ha Hahahaha!" Daichi couldn't help but laugh, feeling all of his negative feelings disappear in a flash.

"H-Hey this is no laughing matter. You know how she can get..."

"Okay okay, I'll give him a call now." He replied, unable to remove the grin on his face.

"Thank goodness." Chris said, feeling a weight off his shoulders.

"Alright I gotta go, we'll chat later. Make sure you call your brother otherwise I'll hear about it."

"I will, don't worry. Thank you dad..."

Beep Beep Beep

"Ah, he hung up." Daichi remarked, checking his flip phone.

He stared at the screen for a while, feeling much better than earlier.

"I better call Ken."

"I'm home"

Ken called out, walking through the front door and taking off his shoes. He was feeling rather refreshed since there was no additional practice on game days.

"Ah, he just got home. One moment."

He heard his mother's excited voice from the kitchen, causing a curious expression to appear on his face.

She popped her head around the corner with a giant smile on her face, giving her son a knowing look. Without a word, she handed him the phone before disappearing behind the wall once more.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 148 - 148: Motivations (2)

"H-Hello?"

"Hi Ken long time no speak."

Ken stiffened after hearing the voice on the other side, but he tried to play it cool.

"Haha yeah. Sorry we didn't get to chat after the game"

"It's not a problem. Umm, are you busy tonight?" The feminine voice on the other line asked, clearly feeling a little uncomfortable asking.

"Huh?" Ken almost jumped in fright, not expecting such a question.

"I-I mean, I don't have any plans in particular."

Ken almost pulled out his hair in frustration after hearing how awkward he sounded.

"O-Oh good. Did you want to come over?"

'HUH!?'

This time he really jumped in fright, almost dropping the phone in his hands. Thankfully he managed to catch it before it hit the ground.

"A-AH. I mean, my mom asked me to invite you to dinner at my house!"

As if she finally understood the words she'd used, Ai quickly added some critical information.

Despite this, Ken still felt his heart thumping away in his chest. Just as he was about to answer, he saw his mother's head poking out from behind the wall, doing her best to eavesdrop.

"Let me just check with my mom." He managed to say.

However, even before he could finish his sentence he received two enthusiastic thumbs up from Yuki who appeared as if her plans were all coming together.

He inwardly sighed before agreeing to meet Ai at her house for dinner.

"Okay I'll see you there soon." He said, hanging up the phone.

"Uwahhhhhh, my Kenny has a date~"

Yuki pranced around the kitchen after retrieving the phone from Ken, clearly in a great mood.

"It's not a date... We're just friends" Ken muttered, feeling embarrassed.

"Oho my dear boy. All relationships start off as friends." She said, wagging her finger at him.

"See, your father and I used t—"

"Mom. I need to go get ready so..."

Before he was dragged into the long story of how his parents met, he quickly interjected, using tonight's event as an excuse to break away early.

"Ah, yes yes. Go shower, I'll pick out some nice clothes for you honey." Yuki shooed him into the bathroom before heading upstairs.

Ken found himself in the bathroom in front of the mirror. He subconsciously began to check out his face, looking for any pimples or defects.

'Bah, what am I doing? Aren't we just meant to be friends?'

Of course he had said that he only wanted to be friends with Ai, but his heart and brain did not appear to be on the same wavelength.

He let out a sigh before jumping into the shower, his emotions in turmoil.

Ken jumped out of the shower and headed upstairs after getting dry, only to see some clothes ironed and laid out on the bed for him to change into.

"Mom..."

Seeing the almost formal-wear that she had picked out, he couldn't help but roll his eyes. Ai's father already thought that he was a grown man, wearing such an outfit would only serve to make him even more suspicious.

He decided to keep the white button up shirt, but paired it with some jeans instead.

After making his way down to the kitchen, he was met with his frowning mother.

"Why didn't you wear your nice pants?"

"Mom. I'm going for a casual dinner, not to a job interview..." He replied, rolling his eyes.

"Tch, you would have looked super handsome if you just listened to me. Come here."

She motioned him over and began to style his hair with her fingers, not letting him complain.

"Ow!"

"Oh don't be such a baby."

Ken looked at the clump of his eyebrows that she had just pulled out and blinked a few times in response.

'Are any of my eyebrows left?'

"Okay I'm going!"

He took the opportunity to quickly run to the front door before his mother tried anything else.

"Have fun Kenny~ just relax and be yourself!"

She watched as his figure left the house, a smile forming on her face.

"They grow up so fast..."

Meanwhile, Ken had finally escaped his mother's clutches and began to casually walk the streets. The air was still warm even with the sun about to retreat over the horizon for the night.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ

"Hmm?"

Ken pulled out his phone and answered.

"Hello?"

"Hey Ken, long time no speak."

Although the words were the same as his last phone call, the voice was much deeper.

"Ayyy little bro!" Ken's face lit up, happy to hear from Daichi after all this time.

"Have you got time to chat?"

"Yep I got some time. You'll never guess where I'm headed... To a girl's house for dinner!"

He suddenly felt like a kid again, talking to his best friend. It was only now that he realized just how much he missed hanging out and chatting with Daichi.

"What!? A girl's house? Let me guess, it's Ai right?"

"Huh!? How the hell did you know? Are you actually stalking me?" Ken quipped back, looking around to see if he was being followed.

"Nah I'm not that bored." Daichi's amused voice sounded.

Time seemed to fly by as the two yapped on to each other, picking up right where they left off almost 4 months ago. The conversation ranged from what food they served at the dorms, to how many cute girls were in their classes and of course, baseball.

It was only after 20 minutes of non-stop back and forth that Daichi suddenly got quiet. Ken knew that his brother wanted to ask something, so he didn't try to fill in the silence, merely waiting for him to speak.

"Ken... I know that you were offered a scholarship at Toin." He said.

Ken couldn't help but let out a sigh in response. He had a feeling that this would come up eventually, yet he couldn't bring himself to tell his brother, feeling as if the timing was not right yet.

If possible, he wanted to tell him when they finally matched up at Koshien.

"Hey man, I'm sorry I didn't tell you. But I thought you might understand after Dad explained it." Ken said.

"What? I never found out from Dad." He replied.

"Huh? Then how did you find out?" This time Ken was curious. Did Naoki tell him that he'd declined the scholarship?

"I overheard the scout and coach talking one day. He said that they'd offered you a scholarship but you turned it down."

"I see. Did they say anything else?" Ken was patient, not wanting to rush into an explanation.

"I... I left after hearing that." Daichi admitted. Now that he heard Ken's words, he felt as if there was more to the story.

Ken let out another sigh and headed towards a park that was nearby before taking a seat on one of the benches.

"Let me tell you the full story."

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 149 - 149: Family Dinner (1)

Within a well-lit room, three people sat at a table with a bunch of dishes laid out in front of them. However, no one had started eating yet, almost as if they were waiting for something, or someone.

Tap tap tap

The sound of a tapping foot seemed deafening over the silence.

"What the hell is with this guy?"

Tetsu finally couldn't handle it anymore and stood up from the table, his face turning red in annoyance.

"Calm down honey, I'm sure he just got held up." Naomi said, her gentle voice sounding out over the table.

As if the universe heard these words, the sound of the doorbell went off, cutting through the tense atmosphere.

Ai quickly got up and announced that she would go get the door, however her father had different plans.

"Sit down. I'll go see ta our rude guest."

With that, he stomped his way downstairs and swung the door open, donning his best intimidating father expression.

He was a little confused at first, being met with a sharp jaw and defined chest peeking through a white button up shirt. Tetsu raised his gaze slowly, finally stopping when he could see Ken's face.

"What the hell man? Do ya have roots or somethin'?"

Last time he saw the kid in front of him was a couple of months ago, yet it looked like he'd grown another 7-8cm in that short period of time. Since he himself was only average height, the boy towered over him.

"Sorry I'm late Mr. Aoyama, I had an important phone call."

Inwardly he was thanking his lucky stars that he had acquired the Poker Face skill, otherwise the sight of Ai's burly father swinging the door open explosively would have caused him to cower.

Tetsu paused for a moment, before relenting.

"Alright Ben, come inside. Yer lucky I'm a patient man." He said, moving his wide frame out of the way and allowing Ken through the door.

Not having enough confidence to correct him, Ken walked in and was quickly ushered upstairs in a hurry.

"Ken, welcome welcome. Please take a seat." Naomi stood up, gesturing to the open seat next to Ai, much to the annoyance of her father.

"Thank you Mrs. Aoyama. Sorry I'm late." Ken bowed a few times.

He locked eyes with Ai who flashed him an apologetic smile. This was all he needed to know that this dinner invitation was likely not her idea.

As he sat down, he saw the spread of food and instantly felt his stomach rumble in anticipation. Surprisingly there was no sign of any baked goods on the table.

"Please call me Naomi from now on, okay?" Ai's mom smiled, her actions reminding him of his own mother when Ai had visited a while ago.

"Oh and tell Yuki that the curry she made was delicious."

'Huh? Since when did mom make them curry?' Ken was perplexed.

He turned to Ai with a questioning look.

Seeing this, Naomi took the initiative to explain further.

"Ever since we sent you home with those baked goods, Yuki has been coming to buy her bread from us. Your mother is such a nice woman." Her face seemed innocent, yet there was a glint in her eyes that told him she had ulterior motives.

'Don't tell me...'

Ken pictured his mother's face next to Naomi's, only now realizing the similarities.

'They're trying to set me and Ai up with each other?'

He once again turned to Ai, however judging by her facial expression he instinctively felt that she was not in on it.

'Those wily foxes...'

"Huh? That was Ben's mom!?"

As if finally catching on, Tetsu jolted to his feet and yelled.

"It's Ken. K-E-N"

Ai replied, starting to feel annoyed at her father's antics.

"Ay? That's what I said right?"

"Honey... It's time to eat." Naomi's tone was cold, quickly grabbing Tetsu's attention and forcing him to quickly sit down.

And thus began one of the weirdest dinners he had ever experienced. While the food was delicious, he was constantly probed by Naomi about what he thought of their daughter.

While that would have been bad enough, he could feel the murderous glare from Tetsu drilling into the side of his face before he could even answer. Without his Poker Face skill, he would have surely crumbled during this meal.

Finally the conversation was steered to something that he was comfortable talking about; Baseball.

"Ken, Ai tells me that you're the Ace pitcher for the team. That's pretty impressive since you're still a first year in High School." Naomi stated, smiling sweetly.

"Psh. It ain't that impressive." Tetsu interrupted, seeming like a jealous kid as he played with his food.

Tetsu ignored the two sets of fierce gazes that fell upon him in the next moment, putting all of his attention on his food.

"Ah thank you Mrs— Ahem, Naomi." He quickly changed his address once the glare was sent his way.

"We had our first prefecture tournament win today. As long as we win the next four matches we'll be heading to Koshien." Ken added.

"Wow that's great. What do you think of your chances?"

"Tch. Don't get too far ahead of ya'self. Once ya match up against my old club it won't be so easy." Tetsu looked proud as he said this.

Ken tilted his head in question, not expecting that Ai's father had also played baseball in high school.

Naomi chuckled, "Tetsu was the 3rd batter for Zama High back in the day. He's quite proud of his High School career, they even went through to nationals during his final year in the club."

"Haaah, he was so cool back then. That's actually where we met."

"Hehe." Ai's father rubbed his nose after hearing his wife talk him up. He sent a prideful look towards Ken, wanting to see his reaction.

"Um, dad." Ai's small voice sounded, grabbing his attention.

"Our team actually beat Zama High today."

"Eh?"

Tetsu blinked a few times, not able to understand right away.

Ken nodded. "We beat Zama High in the 4th innings, 20-0."

"Ooof"

Tetsu deflated, falling to the floor in a dramatic manner. The emotional blow was too much for him who had so much pride in his alma mater.

Ken felt a little vindicated since Ai's father had been poking at him for majority of the dinner, yet he didn't let it show.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 150 - 150: Family Dinner (2)

"Pfft Hahaha!"

Naomi broke into a fit of laughs as she heard the truth, unable to hold back in front of everyone at the table.

Instead of being mad, Tetsu got up from the ground and couldn't help but grin. It was hard to remain angry when someone heard Naomi's giggle, or even Ai's for that matter.

"Yeah yeah, I guess that means yer team is pretty good then." He said, slapping Ken on the back a few times.

Ken braced himself for impact, ensuring he didn't face plant into his plate on the table. Thankfully he was strong enough to withstand the baker's blows.

After this hiccup, the ice seemed to have been broken, leading to a much calmer and harmonious atmosphere.

In stark contrast to his rugged disposition, Ken learned that Tetsu was actually a rather caring father. He had difficulty expressing his emotions, particularly when those emotions were care and affection, but they were still perceptible.

A while later, Ken thanked them both for inviting him over for dinner.

"My dad is back from America in another month, maybe you all can come over for dinner next time?"

"Mmm that sounds lovely!" Naomi commented, placing her hand on her husband's arm.

Tetsu nodded, seemingly accepting the offer.

However, if one looked closely they could see the hand resting on his arm was actually digging into him.

Ai's face lit up, clearly excited for such a thing. At first she was a little uneasy about the meal, since she knew how her father could be sometimes. Yet once the initial awkward feeling of awkwardness subsided, she had found it quite enjoyable.

Ken seemed to have an air of maturity about him, treating her mother and father with respect and easily maneuvering through their questions.

Even though they didn't get to chat much, just being in his presence was like a breath of fresh air. If it wasn't for her mother sending her expectant looks throughout the dinner, she might have enjoyed it even more.

"Thank you for having me." Ken stood up and bowed toward Naomi and Tetsu, showing his gratitude.

"My my, so formal. It's no trouble, as long as you'll come again in the future." Naomi waved her hand dismissively, donning a big grin.

Tetsu too did his best to smile, however it looked kind of forced.

"Ah, I'll walk you out." Ai said, finally seeing her chance to get some alone time with their guest.

"Oi wait a se— Ow!"

Ai's father began to call out, however he was interrupted by the nails that were digging into the flesh of his arm.

"Come on Ken." Ai gestured, sending a thankful look to her mother.

Ken agreed to follow, choosing to ignore the clear domestic violence in progress as he did so.

Once the two left, Naomi loosened her grip on Tetsu's arm and glared at him.

"Why do you always have to be like this? Ai's not a little girl anymore, she doesn't need us to be so overprotective."

Tetsu's face soured at these words and he felt a mixture of emotions inside. He partly felt guilty, yet there was some sorrow mixed in.

The little girl that used to be like his shadow, following him around everywhere had grown up. Subconsciously he knew that she was becoming a woman, yet he didn't want to admit it.

What father didn't want to feel needed by their child?

Naomi let out a sigh, wrapping her arms around the muscular arm of her husband and leaning her head on him. It was as if she could see right through his thoughts, even when he was silent.

"We just need to take a step back and always be there to support her."

"Mmm..." Tetsu eventually nodded, feeling wistful.

Both Ken and Ai made it out the door, receiving a warm breeze as they stepped outside.

They were silent for a while before Ken spoke up. Despite feeling awkward because of the atmosphere, his face never showed it.

"Thank you for inviting me, I had fun." His words were genuine, bringing a smile to his face.

Ken surprisingly enjoyed the dinner, despite being put under the grill by Naomi and Tetsu. He felt as if he got to know Ai a little better, even though she rarely spoke up throughout.

Ai heard his words and felt her heart beat loudly in her chest. She looked at his handsome face and chiseled jaw and couldn't help but feel butterflies in her stomach.

She wasn't sure where her next words came from, but it was as if they materialized on their own.

"K-Ken. Do you think we could do this more often?"

Ken was a little taken aback at first, but he turned to face Ai before responding. "You might have to check with your Dad first, it looks like he can only take me in small doses."

He laughed a little awkwardly afterwards, unable to hold eye contact any longer.

Ai shook her head in frustration, that wasn't what she meant. She lifted her gaze and clenched her fist. There was something in the back of her mind telling her that it was now or never.

If she continued to be passive, it was possible that Ken would drift away.

'You can do this Ai...'

SLAP

Ken almost jumped in fright, quickly turning his gaze back to Ai. The first thing he saw was her rosy red cheeks seemingly glowing in the pale moonlight.

'D-Did she just slap herself?'

"Ken! I want to be around you. Will you be willing to spend more time with me?"

THUD

Suddenly a loud sound came out from the house, startling both Ken and Ai.

Before having a chance to respond, Ai's face turned bright red and she ran inside, leaving Ken with his jaw wide and staring at her retreating back. He managed to see the blinds moving out of the corner of his eye, likely from where they were being spied on.

He heard muffled voices inside before the door was slammed.

Ken stood awkwardly for a few moments, not knowing whether it was appropriate to leave just yet or not. His mind was racing, with Ai's words bouncing around in his head.

'Did she just confess to me?'

He suddenly felt a mixture of emotions within. However, happiness was at the forefront, confusing him even further.

Yet he didn't get to think for much longer as he saw the front door open with a burly man headed his way. Ken could tell that he was in a sour mood, particularly since his fists were clenched tightly.

'Crap is he coming to fight me?'

Ken panicked, but his rationality kicked in a moment later. He had done nothing, so he shouldn't be in the firing line.

"Ken... Take this."

Tetsu extended his fist, almost as if he was about to punch him in the solar plexus. Ken was just about to get into defensive mode before he saw the man open his fist, producing a piece of paper.

"Hmm?"

Ken grabbed it out of the man's hand and looked at it.

'AiLoveU133@dsn.com'

'Is this Ai's email address?'

Once Ken retrieved the piece of paper, Tetsu seemed to age a few years in an instant. He put his large hand on Ken's shoulder and opened his mouth.

"I'm sorry."

Without waiting for a reply, he turned his heel and walked back into the house. Once again leaving Ken outside by himself.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 151 - 151: Getting to know each other (1)

Ken began his walk back home, unable to enjoy the warm breeze as his mind was currently spinning. Everything had happened too fast for him to make sense of it.

'Did I really just get a confession from Ai?'

Since he had no experience with the opposite sex, he wasn't entirely sure how these things worked. Disregarding how the conversation ended, he felt perturbed about the situation he now found himself in.

It was clear that both his mother and Ai's mother had been conspiring to make them a couple. While it was commonplace for parents to try and matchmake their kids, he felt it was quite improper at this moment.

Of course his mother had no knowledge that her son had regressed and possessed the mind of a 24 year old at this moment.

He could not in good conscience take advantage of 16 year old girl, even if this girl was someone who he had a huge crush on in his previous life.

Ken subconsciously pulled out the piece of paper containing Ai's email address and read it a few more times. He thought it was cute that Ai would choose such an username since her name literally translated to the word Love.

'Do I message her?'

His jumbled mind debated if such a thing was a good idea. But if he left things as they were, it could become awkward at school and at club for both of them, possibly hurting the teams chemistry.

Before he knew it, Ken had already arrived home on autopilot. He saw the lights were off, which meant his mother was already in bed.

Ken breathed out a sigh of relief. He wasn't exactly in the mood right now to endure the inevitable rapid-fire questions from his mother.

Not long later he was in bed, still staring at Ai's email address.

"Maybe I'll just check up on her." He mumbled.

He then spent the next 30 minutes crafting a message before deleting it, over and over again.

'Damn it... This is harder than I thought.'

Eventually he got fed up and just sent a simple message.

[Hey, its Ken. Just wanted to say thanks for tonight, I had a lot of fun.]

"Haaaah, she probably won't reply." He said, letting out a small sigh and rolling over.

BUZZ

Almost as soon as he put the phone down, he received a notification.

[Hi! I also had fun, thanks for coming over :3 Sorry I stormed off at the end, my Dad was eavesdropping. But don't worry, I made sure Mom punished him XD]

Ken couldn't help but smile, imagining the scene of Tetsu being punished. He hadn't expected Ai to reply since it was so late already, with such speed as well.

He began to type back, beginning his first in-depth conversation with Ai. Since they were not face to face, she opened up a lot more, giving him much more insight into her as a person.

Before he knew it, it was already 11pm. He was just about to end the conversation before he read the most recent message from Ai, stalling his thoughts.

[Did you have time to think about an answer to my question?]

This time there were no emoji's, meaning it was a serious question.

Ken paused, unable to respond. He had been thinking about the question on his walk back home, evaluating all of the scenarios.

He didn't want to hurt Ai's feelings, but he also didn't want to lead her on or take advantage of her. If he was being truthful to himself, Ken really liked her.

However, that didn't mean he would throw away his morals for such a thing.

[Are you sure you want to spend more time with me? Everything I do revolves around baseball. Some even call me a baseball-idiot because it's all I ever think about.]

Ken sent the message, his eyes lingering on the phone for a little while longer. In reality he was feeling rather vulnerable right now.

[Of course dummy xD. Don't get me wrong, I didn't confess to you or anything. I just want to spend more time and get to know you lol.]

"Ah..."

Ken felt his face heat up in embarrassment. It seemed that he had jumped the gun, thanks to his inexperience.

He suddenly felt like an idiot. Why was he questioning his moral compass over such a small and seemingly insignificant request.

[Ok I agree to your terms. Since we live near each other we can start traveling home from practice together]

As Ken sent this message, he suddenly remembered why he hadn't done this previously.

"Crap. I usually stink after practice."

Before he could send another message, Ai quickly replied.

[It's a deal! Gtg goodnight :3]

"Ah..."

Ken massaged his temples. He would need to find a solution to this problem, otherwise he might ruin the budding friendship with his body odor.

He checked the time only to shake his head. His late night messaging meant he would only get around 5 hours sleep before he had to be up for his morning run.

"I'll deal with it tomorrow..."

Ken woke up the next day with bleary eyes. He slowly made his way to the bathroom in order to wake up, splashing some water on his face to speed up the process.

Just as he was about to head off for his run, Yuki bombarded him with questions about last night, something his tired mind was not ready for.

"Let's chat later Mom."

Yuki puffed out her cheeks in disappointment, yet she still agreed.

"Alright, but I want to hear everything when you get back."

Ken reluctantly agreed, heading off on his morning run shortly after. Thankfully, he always felt alive after a run, no matter the amount of sleep he had the night before.

When he returned he was forced to answer every one of his mother's questions before finally managing to retreat with the excuse of being late for school.

He stopped by the convenience store to pick up some antiperspirant deodorant, hoping that it would be able to mask his sweaty teenage self at the end of practice.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 152 - 152: Getting to know each other (2)

Ken arrived at school on time and made his way to class. He had already gotten used to the looks from those around him which were only exacerbated by the fact he was so tall and had some foreign features.

Adding on his Charismatic Air skill, he could only be described as a "head turner."

"Morning Ken!"

A cheery voice rang out from beside him, gaining his attention.

Shiro seemed like a completely different person this morning, almost glowing as he walked to class.

Since Shiro's physical grade had started on the low end, he was the person most affected by the grueling training they had been going through over the past few months.

This led to him coming to school in a zombie-like state, always exhausted. Unfortunately for Shiro, this had led to him being known as the "White Zombie."

(Shiro in Japanese translates to the color white.)

But seeing the exaggerated changes, Ken felt a little worried. He quickly used Identify on Shiro, only for his jaw to drop a moment later.

NAME: Shiro Masuda

AGE: 16

TALENT ASSESSMENT: B

POTENTIAL: SS-

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: A

>Pitching: D

>Fielding: A+

>Game Intelligence: B-

>Mental: B+

'W-What the hell is this?'

The first thing that Ken noticed was that Shiro had increased his Physical Fitness to A and his Fielding to A+ which was fantastic for only a few months of targeted training.

However, that was not the most amazing thing.

'How did his potential increase!?!'

Shiro had S+ when he first met him, yet right in front of him it was showing SS-, meaning it had gone up a single grade out of nowhere.

'Could it be because of the training plan we all did for Hiroki?'

Now that he thought about it, Shiro was one of the first people he dragged into the training with Hiroki in order to keep an eye on him.

If this was the case, did that mean others may have also improved their potential?

Ken's eyes sparkled in anticipation. If people like Yusuke, Yuta and Makoto had also benefited from the training, perhaps he could start a whole new wave of talents in Japan to take over the Major League in the future.

"Heh hehe"

His head filled with such a vision, Ken couldn't help but let out an evil laugh at the prospect of a national "invasion".

Shiro who had been chipper moments earlier, suddenly saw Ken's perverted expression and instantly felt his heart drop.

"N-No... I know that look"

'Training demon...'

He quickly sped through the halls and into the classroom, hoping to evade his friend's dreaded alter ego.

Ken on the other hand didn't even notice the disappearance of his friend. This new revelation seemed to have triggered a whole new wave of possibilities in the future.

Yet it still brought with it a few questions.

Just what was potential?

The system had said Hiroki had reached his potential and could not progress any further, yet it was able to create a training program in order to break through that ceiling.

He had seen Hiroki and Shiro both pushed to their limits every day for almost 2 months. Did that mean the way to improve your potential was to constantly reach your limits over a certain period of time?

Ken shook his head, he didn't have enough information yet to come to a definitive conclusion. He would need to use Identify on his teammates and see if their potential had improved.

If this was the case, then the benefits that could be gained were outrageous.

While he was deep in thought, he felt someone brush up against him, nudging him slightly.

"Hmm?"

"Hey stranger, what are you thinking about so deeply this early in the morning?"

Ai's sweet voice was like a treat to his ears as she spoke with more familiarity than he was used to.

"Hey, just the usual of course." Ken replied with a wry smile.

"Ah yes, I forgot that you've always got baseball on your mind."

She let out a small chuckle, clearly amused.

"Ha ha."

He also thought it was funny, even in his previous life all he thought about was baseball. Of course that was in between chasing after Ai back then.

As they walked to the classroom, Ken could feel a shift in the atmosphere. All of the eyes that were usually trained on him thanks to his Charismatic Air were now talking in a hushed whisper among themselves.

If it was only a few people then he might not have noticed, however it seemed that everybody in the halls was doing the same thing.

Ken looked at Ai, but she didn't seem to notice the stares and whispers.

"Hey, does it seem like everyone is staring?" He asked.

"Hmm?"

Ai looked around, only for everyone to turn their heads in response.

"I'm kind of used to being stared at." She admitted, albeit a bit somberly.

'Ah that's right, Ai was always popular in both middle school and high school.' Ken thought. He was also probably one of the ones who had given her unwanted attention in his previous life.

He suddenly felt a little guilty for his previous actions.

While the stares didn't bother him too much, he didn't like the fact that Ai was also being subjected to it. So he began to glare at everyone, receiving some looks of shock in response.

By the time they reached the classroom, Ken had intimidated most of the offenders, leaving him with a satisfied smile.

Ai stopped at the classroom door with her hand on the handle.

"Don't forget our deal." She said softly, not turning her head.

Before Ken could answer, she opened the door and made her way inside, leaving him to watch her retreating figure.

Ken blinked a few times, before a smile graced his lips. He headed into the classroom and located his friend at the back.

'Oh no! He's still got that smile on his face.' Shiro despaired, seeing the innocent looking grin that Ken was sporting.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 153 - 153: Odd Encounter (1)

Later that day, Ken finished up at baseball practice and was now flanked by all of his teammates. His expression was his usual poker face, however inwardly he was smiling deeply.

Out of the whole team that had been present during the extra training he'd been hosting, only Yusuke and Shiro had improvements to their potential. Of course that's if he ignored Hiroki who currently had an unknown potential.

However, this was still great news. Since Shiro and Yusuke had been present since around the time he started the training, it meant that it should only be a matter of time before everyone else increased their potential.

At least in theory.

Unfortunately for these guys, he would be pushing them even harder until Nationals started in August.

"Let's quickly pack up and head to the training site." Ken announced.

"Ah sorry Ken, I've got a date after club today." Tatsuya replied, a proud grin on his face.

Everyone remained quiet, saying a silent prayer for the daredevil twin who had spoken up against the Training Demon.

"Oh... I see." Ken replied quietly.

Yet Tatsuya felt a shiver run down his spine in the next moment, as if to warn him of his poor decision. He stopped in his tracks and slowly turned around, seeing the indiscernible expression on Ken's face.

"Ha ha ha, sorry I got my dates mixed up. I'll be at training..."

Everyone seemed to breathe out a sigh of relief once Tatsuya made the only correct decision available to him.

"Wonderful! Let's head there now then." Ken said, clapping his hands.

Unexpectedly, the training wasn't as crazy as they thought. Instead of joining them, Ken directed the training from the side, looking like a coach with his clipboard and pen.

However no one was complaining.

After just over an hour, Ken put a stop to the training and everyone let out a breath of relief. Once again the managers provided some afternoon tea for the players, sparking a harmonious atmosphere.

Meanwhile, Ken was looking intently at the clipboard in front of him, deep in thought.

Hiroki who was probably the only one not appreciative of the breezy training made his way over to Ken.

"Hey man, what's up with the clipboard?" he asked curiously.

"Hmm? Ah I'm just writing down some things." Ken mumbled.

Hiroki peeked over, only to see everyone's names and some grades written beneath them.

"Oh? You're giving us grades now?" he said smilingly.

Ken merely nodded. In fact, he was trying to get a feel for how the team was graded physically. With the Identify function, he was able to get a total physical grade, but it was not broken down even further like his own system displayed for himself.

Therefore he tried to sit aside in practice and evaluate break down everyone's physical abilities, using his own grades as an example.

Strength, Agility, Balance and Coordination as well as Stamina.

All of these specifications made up the total Physical Fitness grade.

"Ooo, you've got me rated pretty high there boss."

Hiroki saw his S grades and couldn't help but feel a sense of satisfaction flow through him. It felt good for such a training junkie like Ken to evaluate him so highly, it meant that he appreciated his hard work.

Ken shook his head, a smile creeping onto his face.

"Just because I gave you a high evaluation, doesn't mean you can't improve." He said flatly.

He didn't want Hiroki to get comfortable with his current abilities. Since he currently had an uncapped potential, there was no telling how far he could improve if he kept up his work rate.

"Hehe yes boss!" He threw out a silly salute and retreated back to where the others were.

Ken smiled in response to the antics, before turning his attention back to the clipboard.

The plan was to use this information to segregate those who were lacking in the same areas, so they could move towards more specified training plans.

However, Ken wasn't so full of himself to think that he could create such a thing on his own. Therefore he planned to give all of this information to the coach and ask if he would be willing to take over.

He already trusted Coach Hanada greatly, especially since he once worked in the professional leagues. Even his father trusted the man to evaluate potential players that he'd scouted.

After a while, everyone began to go their separate ways.

Shiro was hanging back, planning on walking to the train station with Ken like he usually did, but he quickly changed his mind after seeing Ai talking to him.

"Ahem. I'll be heading off, good work you guys."

It seemed that Shiro had good situational awareness as he chose to loudly announce his departure before zooming away.

Ken couldn't help but laugh. The guy had gone and done something unnecessary.

Ai on the other hand couldn't help but inwardly give Shiro a thumbs up, happy that he was smart enough to know when to scam.

The two packed up the equipment and headed back to the club together. Ken felt much more at ease in her presence than he had before, making for a pleasant experience.

Just as he was leaving the club's store room, Ken caught the back of a person running away, causing him to frown.

'Who was that and what were they doing here?'

"Are we good to go?" Ai's sweet voice asked as she stepped out and locked the store room.

"Ah yeah sure." Ken replied, feeling a little distracted.

However, soon enough it flew out of his mind as they continued their conversation.

"Tch..."

A person clicked their tongue in frustration as he stared at the retreating figures of Ken and Ai.

The next day, Ken arrived at school a little earlier than usual. He wanted to have a chat to the coach and talk about possibly having him oversee the additional physical training directly after practice.

"Oh Ken, you're here early!"

A chirpy voice snapped him out of his thoughts, causing him to turn around to where the noise came from.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 154 - 154: Odd Encounter (2)

"Hmm?"

He saw a blond girl with pigtails wearing their uniform, waving at him enthusiastically. She had brown eyes and a cute smile, only accentuated by the small touches of make up strategically placed on her face.

The problem was, he had absolutely no idea who this girl was.

"Oh don't look at me like I'm a stranger." She said with a bright smile.

Before he could even react, the woman grabbed his arm and hugged into him.

His arm was suddenly surrounded by something soft, instantly making his teenage body react. Ken's face turned bright red and he felt a stir in the pit of his stomach.

Only after a good 10 seconds he was finally able to react, snatching back his arm and glaring at the woman.

He suddenly felt anger and a bout of humiliation since he had no control of his responses. If it wasn't for his Poker Face skill, he would have taken this out on the woman in front of him.

"Tee hee. Thanks for playing along." She said, sending a wink his way.

After that she walked in the other direction, leaving Ken flabbergasted yet still seething.

'What the hell was that about? Was she trying to embarrass me?'

He had never met the woman before, so why would she target him like that?

Ken felt as if he was missing something, but he had no one to ask for more information. So instead of dwelling on it, he continued on his way to the faculty office.

"Alright hand it over."

Hitomi Inoe held her hand out, a bored expression on her face. Her previous bright smile and bubbly personality seemed to have vanished, replaced by a cold mask.

A teenage boy fished in his pocket for his wallet and pulled out a few notes, handing it to the girl in front of him.

"J-Just remember not to tell anyone about this." He stammered.

"Tsk whatever." Hitomi scoffed before snatching the money and walking in the opposite direction.

The boy didn't feel offended by the treatment, in fact he seemed to be in a great mood all of a sudden.

"This will do the trick."

"Hmm, this is really in depth." Seiji Hanada mused, combing through the report in front of him.

Ken stood silently by the side, waiting for the coach to finish browsing the information.

Inwardly, the coach was rather shocked. He had been a professional trainer and evaluator for NPB teams, yet this kid's data was already so comprehensive.

He also had something similar, yet not in as much detail. Instinctively he knew where his players were lacking due to his experience, whereas Ken was merely a student, yet he showed great potential.

'If he wasn't so good at baseball I would have told him to focus on becoming a trainer for a club.' He thought, rubbing the stubble on his chin.

"So you want me to take over the physical training?"

Ken bowed his head in response, "I'm sorry for doing this on my own coach. I should have consulted you to begin with."

He had never really expected for the whole team to join in on the extra curricular training the system had made for Hiroki, yet it quickly got out of hand.

Coach Hanada smiled sincerely. He would be lying if he said that he wasn't a little worried since those kids could possibly overwork themselves, however he had been quite pleased with their improvements lately.

If he could manage the training there would be much less risk of any injuries or accidents occurring. He would also be able to see their work rate and improvements in real time, allowing him to more effectively coach in the long run.

"Okay okay, there's no need to be too formal. I'll gladly help with your additional training."

Ken breathed out a sigh of relief, allowing a smile to creep onto his face.

Having the coach on board would be a big boon to their improvement.

"Don't take it too easy on us. We won't be able to improve unless you push us to the limits." Ken added.

"Oho? I'll make you regret those words." He said with a smile.

Although Ken laughed in response, he wasn't laughing by the end of the day.

Not only him, it was also the whole team who was in a similar situation.

"K-Ken... What. Have. You. Done."

Yusuke who was running alongside Ken said between gasps of air, looking as if he was about to hurl.

'Must. Not. Fall'

Ken completely ignored his friend, going through his own mental battles in order to keep working. He couldn't allow himself to show any weakness, especially since this was his idea in the first place.

If he were to go down now, he might just lose all of the respect he had gained over the past few months.

He continued his run around the field, passing by the human shaped roadkill that looked suspiciously like his friend Shiro on the way past.

FWHEEE

"Alright well done everyone!"

Coach Hanada yelled out, getting everyone's attention.

"Thank goodness..."

"I'm beat."

"S-Someone help Shiro! I think he's dead."

"Stay away from the light Shiro!"

True to his nickname, the White Zombie was able to reanimate and make his way back to where the coach was standing, albeit looking half-dead.

Coach Hanada looked at his players and let out a smile. Using this training session he was able to figure out their limits, cross-referencing his own data with Ken's. Having now seen it first hand, he was even more impressed by the young Ace.

"Okay, we'll have some light targeted training tomorrow and the day after, before the game on Saturday against Shonan Senior. Make sure you rest up tonight so your bodies can recover."

Hearing that they would have some lighter workouts, the players let out a sigh of relief.

"Huh!? Light workouts? I can—"

Suddenly Makoto who had spoken out was tackled by the players surrounding him, preventing any other words from coming out of his mouth.

"What was that?" Coach Hanada asked, raising an eyebrow in question.

"Nothing Coach!"

Like an army battalion, the entire team answered at once.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 155 - 155: Distracted (1)

Ken woke up on Saturday morning feeling refreshed despite his alarm clock beeping at him at 5am. Since they had a light training yesterday, his muscles had time to recover and since he didn't text Ai last night he'd had plenty of sleep.

It was weird. Ai hadn't attended training on Thursday afternoon, and she was away from school yesterday, something that was very rare for her. He'd even tried emailing her last night to check on her, only to receive a short reply.

He shrugged, clearly not understanding how women operated.

"Maybe I'll swing by her house on my run." He mumbled.

Since it was game day, he had until 9am when the bus would depart to arrive at school.

After getting dressed and saying goodbye to his mother, Ken popped on his shoes and began his morning run. Now that it was summer he was able to catch the sunrise on most mornings, adding a touch of beauty to the Japanese skyline.

He completed his normal running circuit before veering off towards Ai's house which added another 10 minutes to his run.

It was around 6 by the time he arrived at the bakery which already seemed to be full of people. He popped his head into the shop and looked around, waiting for Naomi to finish serving the customers.

It was then that Tetsu spotted him from the back, his eyes narrowing. Without a word, he accelerated to Ken and grabbed him by the arm and led him outside and around the corner.

"H-Hey what are you doing?" Ken was taken aback. Not expecting such a firm reaction, even if it was Ai's father who didn't seem to like him.

"What did ya do?" Tetsu asked, his face showing a serious expression.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Don't ya dare play dumb with me..." He raised his finger to Ken's face and looked as if he was about to assault him.

This time Ken really started to get annoyed. He had just come to check on Ai since she'd been absent from club and school, yet he was suddenly accused of something?

"Look. I don't know what you're talking about, I just came to check on Ai. If she's fine then that's all I need to know." Ken stated, trying to control the anger within him.

While he liked to think he was a nice guy, he wasn't exactly a saint. If someone was violent towards him, he wouldn't always be passive in such situations, no matter who it was.

Tetsu's face softened a little. Even though he was likely overprotective, he had enough sense to judge if a man's words were sincere.

He let out a deep sigh in response.

"Ay look I'm sorry, I'm a bit on edge. Ai came in to the shop two days ago and went straight to her room cryin'. She won't speak ta me or her mother."

Ken could feel the concern from her father, yet he was equally confused. What was it that happened two days ago that could affect Ai in such a way?

He was silent a moment, desperately trying to comb through his brain in order to find an answer. Yet nothing was coming to mind.

"Is she coming to the game today?" Ken asked.

Tetsu shook his head. "She won't even leave her bedroom."

"I'll just have to try and message her later." He said, feeling a little helpless.

It was not like he could just go up and barge into Ai's room, that would probably only exacerbate the issue. Plus, what if he was actually the reason she was like this?

"Alright then... Thanks fer checkin' up on her, and uhh sorry." Tetsu replied, feeling a little embarrassed.

Ken bid his farewell, quickly getting back up to his running speed and arriving home in around 10 minutes. He sent another message to Ai, however she did not even reply this time, causing Ken to frown.

'Man, what has happened.'

"Ken... Are you listening"

"Hmm?"

Ken turned his head to Yusuke who was sitting on the seat next to him on the bus. It seemed like the teen had been chatting to him during the trip, yet his mind was elsewhere the entire time.

"The coach will be starting Akira this match, so you might not even get a chance to play" He repeated, holding eye contact with his friend.

"Ah, okay."

Ken had forgotten that this was the plan. While he had originally been a little disappointed, his mind was quickly preoccupied by the Ai situation.

'It's not like her to do such a thing.' He thought, trying to rack his brains.

The Ai that he knew was upbeat and would never miss a practice, let alone a day of school. Of course there were exceptions, but something didn't feel quite right about this scenario.

Yusuke saw that Ken had gone back into deep thought after his lackluster response. Eventually he decided that it would do no good to try and talk to him while he was in this mood.

He had expected a little bit of annoyance or something when he remembered he wasn't in the starting line up, however the response was almost as if it had nothing to do with him.

'What has got Ken like this? Is it because Ai isn't here?' Yusuke thought curiously.

He shook his head, there's no way such a small thing could have such an effect on him.

The rest of the trip continued in silence, bringing Yusuke down a little.

"Alright we're here everyone. Please head straight for the changing rooms and meet on the field in the next 20 minutes. If you need the bathroom, do it now."

With that, everyone got off the bus in a single file.

"Ken, we're here." Yusuke nudged Ken's figure, finally snapping him out of his trance.

"Alright, coming."

The coach waited until everyone was off the bus before meeting up with the umpires and opposition coach. Since Shonan Senior was also part of the Kanagawa big 4, the two coach's knew each other rather well.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 156 - 156: Distracted (2)

An hour later, Ken found himself on the bench watching Akira pitch. Thankfully, an active game of baseball seemed to take his mind off the Ai situation.

His brain began to breakdown Akira's pitching form, analyzing his release point and ball rotation.

'He's really improved a lot...!' Ken remarked inwardly.

Akira had been training just as hard as all the others, increasing his leg and core strength and therefore his stability which in turn beefed up the power and accuracy of his pitches.

His now higher pitching speed paired with Yuta's leads were enough to get through the first 5 innings without giving up a run. However, it was not only these two who had improved their game.

Yokohama's fielding team was just as sharp, making impeccable decisions as a team while also showing their physical prowess.

Shonan Senior who was part of the Kanagawa big 4, also featured some up and coming players. If Ken didn't have the utmost confidence his team would win, he probably would have used Identify on their pitcher and clean-up hitter.

Despite their status, Shonan Senior were beginning to look like amateurs against the superior batting skills of Yokohama.

The score was currently 0-9 in favor of Yokohama at the bottom of the 5th innings.

Hiroki was up to bat after Makoto had sent a long drive past the right outfielder for an easy double. There were now 2 outs and 1 runner on base, a dangerous spot for Shonan Senior.

If they gave up a run here, the match would end thanks to the mercy rule. Yet if they could secure the out, it was possible to drag out the game and get the chance for the batting line up to face the pitcher a third time.

While this may sound improbable, batters were more likely to hit pitches after facing a pitcher for the third time since they were able to make adjustments.

However, judging by the expression on Hiroki's face, Ken believed that he was not going to leave the door open to such an opponent.

DOOOONG

Just as Ken had expected, Hiroki smashed the ball with the middle of his bat, sending it way over the pitchers head and heading out of the grounds.

The umpire checked his watch, getting ready to call the game once the last batter placed his foot on home plate.

However, Ken's eyes narrowed as he watched the center outfielder sprint towards the edge of the field. He was like a cheetah as he galloped over the grass at full speed towards the wall.

Instead of crashing into the wall, he jumped and used his feet to run up the wall. Time seemed to slow down as he leapt straight up, using the entire length of his body to reach out and yank the ball out of the air.

PAH

The sound of the ball hitting leather sounded out, causing everyone to turn their attention towards the direction it came from.

Silence.

"DAMN IT!"

The fielder cried out in despair as the momentum of the ball knocked the glove right off his outstretched hand, causing it to fall onto the ground on the other side of the wall.

Ken let out a small whistle of surprise, seeing such an athletic and acrobatic play from the outfielder. This was the same clean-up hitter that was so dangerous.

If it wasn't for Yuta's thorough research and razor sharp leads, this guy would have likely carved up Akira and done some serious damage.

"Game set."

Ken's eyes stayed on the athletic player for a while. It was scenes like this that reminded him just how brutal Japanese Baseball tournaments were in High School.

Unlike the professional league which can have up to 144 games in a regular season, all of the High school tournaments adopted a single elimination bracket. This meant that a team's campaign would be over after only losing once, leading to immense regret and frustration.

However, it was because of this reason that getting to Nationals in and of itself was already an amazing achievement.

For those who win the National title, they are crowned the best without a shadow of a doubt. For holding up the flag meant that the team was better than almost 4000 high schools across the 47 prefectures in Japan.

Ken congratulated Hiroki on grabbing another home run. Now that he thought about it, his chances of winning the player of the tournament system mission were all but over now.

This was especially the case if the coach planned on only letting him play every second game during the Prefectural Tournament.

However, it didn't matter too much to him. As long as he completed the other 4 missions, he would have enough Major points to be able to upgrade the system once more.

"Come on, we need to line up." Coach Hanada said to his players, ushering them onto the field.

They did as they were told and lined up from home plate towards the mound and faced the opposition team.

"Thank you for the game!"

All of the players bowed towards their opponents.

Ken could see that there were tears pouring out from most of the players, it was a sight he had seen often and even been a part of in his past life.

Baseball was a serious sport and it was treated with the highest level of respect by all those who played and watch it. There were some who believed if a player didn't cry after losing in a tournament, it meant they didn't care enough.

Of course Ken didn't exactly believe in these words, but it was a fact that some people did hold that belief.

"Alright let's head back to the bus."

Around 20 minutes later, the Yokohama High team departed from the location of their second round prefectural tournament against Shonan Senior. Once again they had become victorious, even with their Ace sitting on the bench.

"Well done everyone, you all played tremendously." Coach Hanada said with a smile.

"Since we only played 5 out of 9 innings, how about we do some additional training when we get back to the school?"

"EHHHHHH!?"

Everyone on the bus who was feeling proud just a moment ago, called out in despair.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 157 - 157: Twisted (1)

A few days earlier, Ai had just finished class and was making her way down to the school entrance to change her shoes before heading to the baseball club.

She was in a great mood, sporting a smile as she reminisced about yesterday's encounter with Ken. It was their first time going home together after practice, yet everything felt so natural.

Ai didn't feel like she had to wear a mask, she could be her true self in front of Ken. He was always respectful, never saying anything inappropriate, nor overstepping his bounds.

While it was true she felt he was holding back a little, it more felt as if he was being respectful rather than deceitful, a welcome change.

'He said that we can head home together every day after practice.'

A beautiful smile blossomed onto her face unknowingly, the sight of which was enough to make any boy stop in their tracks and stare in awe and appreciation.

As she opened her locker to retrieve her outdoor shoes, a letter fell out, startling her. Instantly her smile vanished as memories resurfaced in her mind.

This was not the first time someone had left a note in her shoe locker. She had received many such confessions from strangers she had never even talked to at school.

However, this letter looked a little different.

'Maybe I'm over-thinking it.' She thought.

With practiced ease, she opened the envelope and looked inside. There was a piece of paper and some photographs within, piquing her curiosity.

"Hmm?"

Her eyes narrowed as she saw a buxom blond girl holding onto Ken's arm which sat in between her assets. As her eyes moved to Ken's face, she could see that his face was red, looking embarrassed.

In the next photo his face changed to one of a stoic mask. For those who did not know Ken, they would just assume it was his regular expression. Yet for some reason, Ai could see the emotion in his eyes.

'He's angry?'

Without jumping to conclusions, she opened up the piece of paper and read it.

'Dear Ai, I've seen you hanging out with this guy from the baseball team. He is playing with your feelings, all for the simple goal of deflowering you. I could not allow him to continue his wicked ways so I hid away and snapped this photo as proof.'

Ai frowned as she read the first part of the letter, starting to feel sick in her stomach.

'This piece of trash doesn't deserve to be in your presence. Your beauty is like a shining star that blinds us poor mortals, yet you are so down to Earth. I couldn't possibly let him taint such a pure and beautiful soul. - Kohei Gomi'

A look of disgust appeared on Ai's face as she read the rest of the letter. She did not believe any of the words that were written on the note, in fact she was extremely appalled that someone could write such garbage and try to pass it off as truth.

Without a word, Ai scrunched up the contents of the envelope and walked over to the bin before throwing it inside.

"What a load of crap." She said, not caring if anyone heard her or not.

With that, she headed back to her locker and retrieved her shoes before heading towards the baseball field behind the school for practice.

"T-This bitch..."

A boy mumbled to himself, balling his fists in anger. However, he quickly composed himself before a nasty grin appeared on his face.

'Good thing I made a back up plan.'

He pulled out another envelope from his pocket and quickly ran towards the retreating figure of Ai.

"Ai, please wait a moment."

His tone was respectful, which made her turn around almost on instinct.

However, when she made eye contact with the teen, her expression quickly turned to one of disgust. She instantly recognized the person as a 2nd year that had confessed to her in only her third week of high school.

Upon first glance, he looked like a typical shut-in teenager like one would see in those Anime and Manga. He had oily hair and wore glasses and could only be described as "unathletic" if one was being nice.

Instantly she put the pieces together, suspecting that the boy in front of her was the one who had left the letter she'd just discarded.

She debated giving him an earful, but decided against it. Ai turned on her heel and was about to continue on her journey, at least until she felt a hand grab her arm, preventing her from leaving.

"H-Hey!"

"Lower your voice... Unless you want this to spread." Kohei said, placing another envelope in her hand.

As soon as he handed over the envelope, he turned tail and left swiftly. He didn't want to draw too much attention to himself.

Ai rubbed her arm that was grabbed, as if wanting to remove the filth left there by that person. Since his words sounded ominous, she decided to find a quiet place and open up the letter.

After finding such a place, she hesitantly opened the envelope and was once again greeted by a letter and some photos.

Her eyes widened and tears began to form, clouding her vision slightly.

The photos looked a little blurry, but she could clearly see herself and Ken in the baseball club store room. However, these photos depicted the two doing embarrassing acts that never happened.

As she went through the photos, each one was worse than the next, her tears began to silently fall upon them.

'No... These aren't true.'

Ai felt her stomach crawl as she looked at the sick and twisted doctored photos in front of her. What kind of disgusting person would do such a thing, and for what reason?

It took Ai almost a full 5 minutes to calm down after seeing such shocking imagery. After composing herself, she managed to open the letter and read it to herself silently.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 158 - 158: Twisted (2)

'If you don't distance yourself from Ken, I will post these pictures all around the school. Don't even think about sacrificing yourself for this guy either, just imagine what would happen to him if this scandal got out. He'll likely lose his spot in the club, possibly even be expelled from the school.'

Once again, the tears began to pour down Ai's face, staining the note with their wetness.

'You could have done this the easy way, but you were too stubborn. I never wanted to resort to this, but you can only blame yourself. This is for your own good.'

His words conveyed the kind of delusion that his twisted mind had deemed as truth. Not only did he blame the victim for her reaction, he truly seemed to believe his words.

Ai's mind was in turmoil and she suddenly felt cold and alone

As a 16 year old teenager, her emotions were already at the mercy of her hormones. To be so blatantly targeted like this, she did not know who to turn to in this moment.

'Ken... Help me.'

However, if her stalker found out that she had gone to Ken for help, he would do as he said and potentially ruin both of their lives. She would be known as a loose woman, and Ken could lose his opportunity to play baseball.

She slowly picked herself off the ground and walked towards the school gates, seemingly on autopilot.

In the present time, Ken was currently on his way back home from the surprise practice that the coach had sprung on them after the game. Since he did not play, he made sure to work hard, setting a good example for the rest of the team.

As he slumped against the train window, he pulled out his phone and checked for any new emails, only to be disappointed.

'Just what is going on with Ai?' Ken asked himself.

She hadn't responded to his emails since yesterday and even then they were short, very unlike her usual responses.

"I should go see her before I go home." He muttered.

If he couldn't get her to respond via mail, maybe she'll talk to him in person.

Around an hour later, he arrived out the front of Ai's house. Since it was already late, the bakery had closed to customers.

He pressed the doorbell and stood back, only to hear the sound of footsteps coming down the stairs.

"One moment."

Ken frowned. It was Ai's father, and his tone seemed as if he was pissed off.

His worries came to fruition after Tetsu opened the door. Upon seeing Ken at his home, his face fell, quickly transforming into one of rage.

"You dare show yer face here again!?"

His thick accent seemed even more wild as he stared at Ken with pure unadulterated hatred.

Ken felt the hairs on his neck raise up as his instincts screamed at him to flee. However, his concern for Ai outweighed his nerves, forcing his feet to stay rooted to the ground.

'Why is he so angry?' Ken thought in confusion.

"I-I'm here to check on Ai. She didn't come to the game today." He tried to sound confident, however he inevitably stammered.

WHOOSH

THUD

Ken was suddenly knocked backwards by a looping hook from the burly man, forcing him back onto the street. He felt his equilibrium quiver from the unexpected blow, almost falling on his behind from the shock.

"W-What the hell was that!?"

He felt his cheek throbbing from the punch, yet the adrenaline masked the pain, causing his heart to beat faster.

Tetsu didn't answer, choosing instead to walk forward, violence etched on his rugged features.

"How dare you do that to my Ai!" He bellowed, loading up for another punch.

This time Ken was ready for the punch, managing to duck under it just in time. The sound of wind rushing sounded above his head, giving him a fright.

"DO WHAT?" Ken screamed out, feeling his heart beating out of his chest.

He had no idea what Tetsu was talking about. Everything happened so suddenly that his mind was struggling to keep up. It probably didn't help that he was still in disarray from the earlier surprise punch to the face.

"Don't ya play dumb!"

Once again, Tetsu moved forward. This time throwing a left hook which hit Ken directly on the right shoulder thanks to their height difference.

"Ah!" Ken screamed out in pain, feeling a stabbing pain in his shoulder.

'Oh no...'

Ken stumbled back a few times, gripping his shoulder tightly. The pain which had disappeared in this life seemed to come rushing back, bringing with it the despair and anguish which he thought was left behind.

'No... Damn. Damn'

"DAMN IT!"

Ken shrieked, feeling the last bit of self control he had disappear entirely. He stared at the man who was the cause for exposing him to such a trauma once again and felt his body heat up, his anger exploding.

He jolted forward, using the Agility he'd honed through countless hours training and threw a left uppercut, feeling his knuckles connect with Tetsu's jaw.

Not expecting such a swift movement, Tetsu was knocked back a few feet, however it was clear that not much damage was dealt by the blow.

But Ken did not care.

Once again he blitzed forward before sending out a looping left hook towards Tetsu's liver. The dull sound of flesh colliding rang out, evoking a sickening feeling to those who heard it.

True to his name, Tetsu's body was like striking iron. If it wasn't for the adrenaline pumping through Ken's body, he'd be experiencing a lot of pain just from that last blow.

"What are you two doing!?"

A shrill shriek came from the side, forcing the two fighters to move their gaze towards in the same direction, only to see Naomi and Ai coming towards them, holding bags.

Both women dropped what they were holding and ran forwards.

Naomi ran to her husband and Ai ran to Ken.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 159 - 159: Discussion (1)

Ai saw Ken cradling his shoulder and instantly felt her blood boil.

"DAD WHAT THE HELL HAVE YOU DONE!?"

The fury was evident in her voice, something that neither of the 3 present had ever heard before. However, the most shocked was Tetsu himself who had been defending his daughters honor, only to be yelled at by her.

"Ai... He did all those things to you, how come yer mad at me?"

Tetsu was confused, yet seeing how his daughter was sticking up for the perpetrator only served to eat away at his heart.

"What things!? Ken has done nothing to me!" She screamed loudly, feeling the tears well up in her eyes.

"B-But the photos." He stammered.

Ai suddenly froze, feeling a pit in her stomach. She looked at her father with the face of someone who had been betrayed.

However, Tetsu interpreted the expression incorrectly.

"See, I knew he—"

SLAP

A resounding slap sounded out, shocking everyone.

Tetsu slowly lifted his hand up to his face in disbelief, looking at his daughter with a confounded expression.

"Ai!" Naomi called out in shock.

"Inside..."

"Let's talk inside."

Without answering for her lashing out, she walked back over to Ken and a look of remorse appeared on her face. She saw him still cradling his shoulder and felt horrible.

'If only I spoke up sooner then...'

After his adrenaline wore off, Ken felt his body ache in response. His shoulder didn't feel as bad as before, allowing him to breathe out a sigh of relief, however it still ached.

Now that things had come to this, he wanted to see it through. He still wasn't sure what Ai's father was mad about, but it seemed as if he had misunderstood something, leading to the whole situation unfolding as it did.

"Please follow me." Ai said, grabbing him by the hand and leading him inside the house.

Both her parents watched them walk inside, after which Naomi turned to Tetsu with a stern look. Since they were about to discuss what had just happened, she decided to not say anything, only shaking her head before heading inside.

A few moments later, everyone was sitting at the table where they had had a lovely dinner just the week before. Yet things were much different now with Ken battered and bruised, while Tetsu seemed empty and confused.

"Firstly, Ken please tell me what happened." Naomi said, feeling an immense guilt looking at the boy who was cradling his shoulder.

Ken looked at Tetsu for a moment, noticing how dull his eyes looked, then turning to Ai and seeing her morose expression. He thought for a moment before making a decision.

"Nothing happened, we were just having a discussion." He said, donning his poker face.

He had contemplated telling the truth, however he eventually decided against it. Seeing how ostracized Tetsu was already, adding this on would only deepen the rift within the family.

While he was still angry at being attacked out of nowhere, he believed that Ai's father was not usually so rash. There had to be a reason.

Tetsu's eyes widened at his response, almost not believing the words of the youngster.

Naomi reacted a little differently, frowning in response.

"A discussion? With your fists?" She said incredulously.

Ken nodded.

"Women discuss with words, men discuss with their fists." He replied matter-of-factly.

Tetsu couldn't help but have his opinion of Ken raise considerably at these words, however he had still yet to be convinced. He had seen the photos and still felt the boy was guilty.

Yet there was a part of him that had its doubts. This was further increased thanks to his daughter's actions after seeing them fighting.

Ai sat next to Ken, her mind in turmoil. She had told everyone to come inside and discuss the issue, but she couldn't bring herself to talk.

Ken happened to see the lost expression on Ai's face and felt a pang in his heart. He reached over and placed his hand on top of hers, causing her to raise her gaze.

"You can do it Ai, we're all here to support you." He said, reassuring her.

Ai felt even worse, seeing how understanding and supportive Ken was. Her eyes drifted to his right shoulder, feeling even more guilt threaten to overcome her.

However, she eventually nodded and pulled out an envelope from underneath the table, placing it on the table.

Tetsu's eyes lit up, that was the envelope where he found those photos.

Naomi reached out to grab the envelope, however Ai placed her hand on top.

"Before you open this... Just know that the photos are fake, they've been fabricated by someone." She said with a serious expression.

At these words, her father stiffened.

Naomi nodded, trusting her daughter.

As she opened the envelope, she gasped before placing a hand on her mouth from shock. The explicit photos were confronting, yet they were a little blurry, but not enough to hide the faces of the two in them.

From where Ken was sitting, he could not see the photos, yet he was intrigued by the reaction of Naomi.

Ken held out his hand, wanting to get them from Naomi. However, she looked at Ai as if asking for permission first.

Ai nodded slowly, feeling her face heat up in response.

A moment later, Ken looked at the photos and instantly felt rage.

He quickly placed them onto the table before he accidentally crumpled them in his hand.

"Who would do such a thing? And for what reason?" Naomi asked, still not understanding the full picture.

Ai then pulled out a note from her pocket and placed it on the table. This time it was Tetsu who picked up the note first, quickly reading through the contents.

"UGH"

His face suddenly turned darker by 3 shades, making him look as if his head was about to explode. The rage he felt was even more than what he faced Ken with, causing his teeth to grind because of it.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.

Chapter 160 - 160: Discussion (2)

Before her husband could destroy the piece of paper, Naomi grabbed it from him and read it. She paled after seeing the twisted logic within the words, not unlike those sick bastards who belonged in a mental hospital.

She was about to hand it to Ken, but he refused. He wasn't sure if he could keep the paper in tact if he was to get a hold of it.

Seeing this, Ai seemed to understand his reasoning, so she quickly summarized it for him.

"The note says if I don't stay away from you then he will distribute the pictures around the school."

Ken felt his blood boiling once again, but he did his best to calm down. Getting angry would not solve anything right now.

"Who is the bastard?" He asked, his tone calm yet dangerous.

"Keiho Gomi." She responded succinctly.

Ken didn't recognize the name, but he thought it was an appropriate last name for someone who was such a piece of garbage.

(Gomi literally translates to Trash or Garbage).

Tetsu was silent for a moment, before his face changed.

"Gomi... Why does that name sound familiar?" he murmured aloud.

He turned to his daughter and asked what the kid looked like, to which she described him aptly. She didn't pull any punches, labeling him as a large and slimy kid with glasses.

A hint of recognition crept into his expression before he cried out.

"Ah! That sounds like a guy I used to know from school... He joined the baseball club as a manager to get closer to one of the girls."

He paused briefly, as if trying to remember something.

"I think his name was Minoru Gomi!"

Everyone looked at Tetsu with surprise. Could it be possible that this man was Kohei's father? By the sounds of it they were cut from the same cloth.

Ken narrowed his eyes and asked icily, "Do you know where this Minoru guy is?"

Tetsu shook his head, "We weren't exactly close. The last I heard, he had inherited his father's tech store. But this was almost 20 years ago."

The four were silent at the table for a while, as if they were processing the new information laid out.

"So what are our options?" Ken asked.

He was currently in a terrible mood. His shoulder was throbbing and he had a headache, all of this in addition to finding out he had been framed doing unspeakable deeds to the woman sitting next to him.

If he was honest, he wanted to find the kid who had done this and give him a lesson he'll never forget. However, if he did this, what would happen if the photos were distributed through the school.

Even if he got the issue cleared up with the school, both he and Ai's reputation would be forever sullied. While he might not care what others thought about him, he could never allow Ai to suffer such a fate.

"Do we go to the principal?" Naomi asked, not feeling certain of this option herself.

However, the principal was just a single man. Even if he were to confront Kohei about the issue, he could still retaliate and spread the photos if he didn't care about the consequences.

"How about the police?" Ken suggested.

Tetsu finally interjected after thinking for the past couple of minutes.

"No, we may not need to go that far yet. I'll talk to my old buddies and see if they know where Minoru's tech store is. If he really is this douchebag's father, I'll sort it out."

His words were firm, showing his resolution to put the matter to rest.

Ken nodded. If they could go directly to the source and get his parents involved, it would be possible that the matter could be resolved without additional risk.

"Until then, let's try to avoid giving him a reason to suspect us. Ai, keep your distance from me at school until this is taken care of." Ken said, standing up from the table.

He bowed towards Naomi and Ai and bid his farewell.

Ai looked at his solemn figure and couldn't help but feel pain in her heart. It was her fault that she didn't speak up sooner, but even more so it was her father who acted out on his own.

"Ah, let me walk you out." Ai said, getting up from the chair.

"No need." Ken responded abruptly.

He was really in no mood to talk as of this moment. Apart from the pain wracking his body, Ken was pissed off after being set up by someone he didn't even know.

His whole second chance at life could have been ruined by one jackass chasing after a woman that was out of his league.

Ai looked crestfallen, however she did not insist. Her sadness turned to anger as she glared at her father before retreating to her room.

Tetsu felt a pang in his heart after seeing his daughter look at him in such a way. He couldn't help but feel like a failure in that moment.

Without a word, he got up and headed down the stairs after Ken.

"Hey wait a sec" he yelled, locating Ken who was already on the street.

The sun was still lingering on the horizon despite already being close to 7pm, casting long shadows of the two on the road.

"What do you want?"

There was not an ounce of politeness as Ken turned around and responded, still holding onto his shoulder.

"T-Thanks fer not makin' a big deal of the fight." Tetsu said, feeling a little embarrassed that a 16 year old was seemingly more mature than himself at 40.

"I didn't do it for you." He said icily.

"Then why?" Tetsu asked in confusion.

Instead of answering, Ken began to talk.

"I never knew why you didn't like me. I was always respectful and treated your daughter well, with no expectations or intentions other than being her friend."

He paused, trying to find the right words to articulate his feelings.

"Yet all it took were some fake photos for your mind to instantly turn on me, trying to beat me into a pulp without giving me a chance to defend myself."

"The reason I didn't make a big deal out of the fight was because I know you're a good person who means well... Even if you are a terrible father."

Ken took a deep breath, gazing into Tetsu's eyes.

"I was afraid that if Ai blames you even more, she might push you away for good, fragmenting your family in the process. While you might deserve it, she certainly doesn't deserve to live without a father."

Tetsu froze, feeling the teen's words sink in. He could only look into the deep brown eyes of the boy in front of him which seemed to carry a vast maturity above his age.

"T-Thanks. And... I'm sorry." Tetsu bowed deeply, showing his immense gratitude for the second chance that he felt he did not deserve.

Ken didn't acknowledge the apology, instead turning around. Before he left though, he had a few more words to say.

"Until I've got my shoulder looked at, I won't accept your apology."

"If it turns out you've taken away what's most precious to me, I will never forgive you."

With that, he walked away.

It was only now that he stared at Ken's retreating figure cradling his shoulder, that Tetsu finally understood what he'd done. He felt his body tremble and his blood run cold.

How could he have injured the Ace's pitching shoulder? No wonder his daughter was so livid with him.

He inwardly prayed that Ken would be okay, otherwise he may lose his daughter for good.

Tip: You can use left, right keyboard keys to browse between chapters.