

Major League System

Chapter 321 - 321: Team Announced (1)

The entire cafeteria went silent after hearing Chris's words. This was what they'd been waiting for all along, to find out if they'd be representing their home country at the world cup.

"If I call your name, please come forward."

Chris paused before looking down at the clipboard in his hands. His face was neutral, not showing any emotions so as not to give anything away. It took a lot of his willpower in order to not look at his two boys who were up the back.

"Riku Sato, Masayuki Yamazaki."

The two at the front stood up and made their way over to the staff members. The looks on their faces showed that they were not too surprised at being named part of the squad.

No one else in the room seemed to have any complaints either.

"Satoshi Subaru, Kei Hama."

The messy haired teen with sword-shaped eyebrows got to his feet abruptly and pumped his fist before heading up to where the others were.

Kei with his bleach blond hair also stood up, a hint of surprise on his features. However, it quickly turned into excitement.

"Kuro Tojo, Akimitsu Jin."

Ken frowned a little. He wasn't sure what kind of order his father was reading the players in since they had announced 2 outfielders, 2 infielders and 2 pitchers at this point.

'Is this just another way of testing our patience?' Ken thought.

Yet he quickly steeled his heart. No matter if he made the team or not, he was still in his first year of high school. If the staff failed to choose him, he would just have to do his best next year.

This mindset didn't mean that he'd resigned himself to not being selected this year, just that he didn't want to be too upset if his name didn't get called.

After the gloomy Kuro and clumsy Aki stood beside the others, Chris's gaze imperceptibly shifted to Ken's table.

"Hiroki Kondo, Keiichi Mizuno"

"Ah."

Hiroki stood up in shock after hearing his name, not quite believing his ears. As if he needed reassurance, he looked at his two friends and pointed at his chest, wordlessly asking if it was him they were referring to.

Ken couldn't help but let out a wry grin before slapping Hiroki on the leg.

"Get up there you idiot." He said with a chuckle.

Only after receiving a shove from Daichi did Hiroki finally move forward towards the other players who'd been called up.

With those two names, the amount of people was now 8, meaning half of the line up had already been chosen. Out of these 8, there were already two pitchers and a catcher, making both Ken and Daichi nervous.

Since Coach Takashi had already mentioned he'd only be taking 3 pitchers and 2 catchers, if they called up another one of either, it would essentially mean they hadn't made the team.

"Ichiro Kimura, Atsushi Ikeda."

Daichi felt his heart sink as he heard the name of one of the other catchers who was trying out for the team. Disappointment was evident on his features as he tried to process the negative emotions that surfaced.

Since this was the second catcher they'd called, it meant Daichi would not be part of the team.

Ken's face was one of puzzlement. He had seen how Atsushi had performed as a catcher and could guarantee that he was not as good as Daichi. Even in the batting drills the guy had been sub par in comparison to his brother.

Yet what was he meant to do in this situation?

He was in no position to make any demands, if anything it would have the opposite effect if he were to create a scene.

Ken could only place his hand on his brother's arm in an act of consoling him.

Atsushi Ikeda was a wide-shouldered teen who wore a stylish bowl cut. He was a little surprised to be selected, yet he still walked over to the rest of the players with a proud smile nestled upon his features.

'Just 6 more spots...'

Ken clenched his fists, feeling nerves begin to creep in once again. Even his Dauntless trait failed to hold back such emotions, showing just how much being a part of the team meant to him.

"Daisuke Narita, Yoichi Aoki"

The more names they called, the more anxious Ken became. It was to the point where his teeth were grinding from the suspense.

Daichi who was still dealing with his disappointment for not making the team, noticed his brother who looked as if he was about to pass out from torture.

Pushing his own feelings down, he moved his hand and grabbed Ken's as a form of support.

Ken was knocked out of his spiraling thoughts at the action and quickly turned his head in confusion, only to see Daichi smiling warmly at him. He didn't need to say anything, his expression was enough.

'I believe in you.'

He suddenly felt his tumultuous emotions begin to calm down. Just the presence of his brother was enough to put him at ease, showing just how close they were.

Ken let out a sigh and collected himself before sending a thankful smile Daichi's way.

'Even in this life you're still worrying about me instead of yourself...'

Daichi was his only true friend in his previous life, always putting him above his own problems. No matter what was happening in his own world, he would always take the time to reach out despite Ken pushing him away.

Yet Ken would only think of himself. Seeing his friend achieve his dream and make it to the professional leagues only reminded himself of what he had lost.

Not once had he thought about how his actions could have affected his best friend.

Ken shook his head.

'I won't let that happen again... Not now, not ever.' Ken vowed in his heart as he gripped his brother's hand tightly.

"Tomoya Shibata, Daichi Takagi"

Ken suddenly felt his heart rocket into his throat at his father's words. He slowly turned to his brother who had the exact same expression as him.

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

Chapter 322 - 322: Team Announced (2)

Daichi didn't know how to react after hearing his name called. He had already resigned himself to not making the team after hearing 2 catcher's names get called out before him.

Ken grinned widely as he let go of his brother's hand and slapped him on the back. His emotions were genuine, feeling proper joy for Daichi who had worked his hardest to make it this far.

While he would be lying if he said he wasn't a little jealous of his two friends, it was overshadowed by the joy of Daichi making the team after thinking he hadn't made it.

"Go and get up there." He said with a smile.

Daichi felt elated, yet there was still a part of him that didn't want to move. He had experienced this feeling before when he was offered a scholarship instead of Ken.

Yet instead of acting childish and declining the opportunity like last time, he stared at his brother for a few moments before making his way up to the others. He knew that he would get his ass kicked by both his dad and brother if he were to make a scene.

Only after being left by Daichi did Ken feel the strength seep from his body. He stared at his brother's retreating back and began to zone out, his mind going off tangent.

It had taken a lot of hard work and time to get to where he was at this moment, not to mention torture he had experienced from the elixirs.

However, with the system he felt like it was only a matter of time before he was ready for the professional leagues. All he needed to do was buckle down and continue on the grind with his goal set.

While it would have done him some good to experience some International play, he still had 2 years of eligibility remaining to make the under 18 National Team.

Once the likes of Riku and Masayuki had graduated High School, they would leave gaping spots open for the next generation of young players.

"...agi, Tetsuya Yada"

Ken's mind began to think of his next steps so he could improve, zoning out all of the noise outside of his mind.

'I should increase my arsenal of pitches even further. Maybe I'll choose the splitter or slider next since it'll be harder for the batter to pick my pitches.'

"Ken Takagi..."

"KEN."

Ken was suddenly broken out of his thought process by the sound of his father's voice. Out of reflex he quickly stood up and saw the entire room looking at him, yet none as fierce as his father's.

Seeing his confused expression, a few players next to the coach's laughed in response.

"Please come up to the front young man." Chris said, his tone showing a hint of annoyance.

'Huh? What is it now?'

Ken was still confused, however seeing how annoyed his father was, he did as he was told.

It was only when he saw both his brother's and Hiroki's shining eyes did he finally feel like something was amiss.

'N-No way. I made the team!?'

He couldn't believe it. No, he didn't want to believe it, just in case he found out it was not true. Ken quietly made his way to the lineup and squeezed next to Daichi, causing the player next to him to click his tongue in annoyance.

Just before he could ask Daichi if he had indeed been selected, his father's voice rang out in the next moment.

"If I haven't called your name, it means that you haven't been selected for this year's World Cup. I'd like to thank you all for going out of your way to attend the trials."

Ken felt his whole body ignite with excitement, yet thankfully his Poker Face had been activated in time. It would not be fair to the other players who had missed out if he were to celebrate too much.

The aforementioned players did seem rather disappointed, however some of it was watered down after the next words from Chris.

"Please keep your phone's on as you will be our back ups in case anything were to happen during our campaign."

What he really meant was that if there were some injuries while playing in the World Cup, these guys would be the replacement for the affected players.

"Everyone will need to grab your things, we'll need to vacate in the next hour. Those who were selected please stay behind for a few minutes."

With that, the 7 players who were left seated in the cafeteria made their way to the dorm's to gather their things as instructed, leaving the staff and the team remaining.

Once they'd left, Chris turned to the squad and let out a small smile.

"First off, congratulations to you all. Since we'll be heading overseas, I'll need you all to take home some documents and get them signed by your parents. You'll also need to send us your passport details so we can apply for a visa on your behalf."

No one seemed to have any complaints about what Chris had said so far, so he continued.

"We'll be reconvening in 2 days time back here for a further 4 days before flying off to America. For now, go home and get your parent's approval and send the forms as soon as possible."

The player's nodded along like pecking chickens. Both Ken and Daichi were beside themselves with excitement, particularly after not expecting to get into the team.

Daichi still didn't understand why the coaching staff had selected 3 catchers in total, but he quickly put that to the back of his mind.

After they were adjourned, they returned to the dorms to collect their belongings. They would be heading home with their Dad, so there was no need to catch the train like the others.

"Congratulations on making the team."

The delinquent Kei held out his hand as Ken walked into his dorm room, surprising him.

"Ah, you too man. Looks like we'll be on the same team this time."

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

Chapter 323 - 323: Next Phase of the Plan (1)

After a brief and slightly awkward conversation with Kei, Ken grabbed his things and headed towards Hiroki and Daichi's room. As he walked along, the news still hadn't settled in.

Everything felt so surreal.

Ken had to pinch himself a few times on the way, to make sure he wasn't dreaming.

When he finally arrived at the room, he found Daichi once again in the middle of doing some core exercises. His earlier dazed expression was filled with determination.

Once he saw Ken he quickly stood up and approached him with excitement on his face.

"We did it bro, everything is going according to your plan."

He could hardly contain his excitement as he bounced around like a kid in a candy store.

"Plan?" Ken tilted his head in question.

If Daichi wasn't so pumped up right now, he probably would have noticed that something was amiss. Yet since his mind was only on one thing, the object of his affection, he let out a nervous laugh.

"Ha ha, you're so funny big bro." He replied, slapping Ken on the arm.

"O-Ow, what the heck?"

The jolt of pain seemed to have jogged his memory, bringing his fraudulent plan back to the forefront of his mind.

'Ah crap... I thought he'd forget.'

Instantly, Ken started to feel some trepidation as he stared at Daichi's expectant expression. Only now did he regret his earlier words to his brother.

"Y-Yes... Of course I didn't forget little bro hahaha."

Ken slapped his brother on the back a few times, a little harder than was probably necessary in that moment.

"Good! So? When should we go talk to her?"

Hiroki who was nearby was not sure what they were talking about. However, after hearing Daichi's next words, his eyes widened in shock.

"H-Hey Daichi, about Miho. Did you know she's th—"

"I'm serious Ken, let's go with the next step of the plan."

Daichi didn't even let Hiroki finish the last part of his sentence as he was too eager. He grabbed his bags and draped his arm around Ken's tall shoulders before walking out the door.

Hiroki was left by himself in the room, feeling a rush of anxiety. However, in the next moment he let out a sigh and shrugged.

"As long as it's not me hitting on the Head Coach's Granddaughter..." He mumbled.

Thus, the two brothers walked down the hall in order to complete the next step of the plan. Even if the plan was made by someone with no knowledge of women, nor relationships in the least.

Perhaps it was the blind confidence of youth that would allow someone with Daichi's intelligence to trust a long time virgin with his love affairs. Or maybe it was because he thought Ken would have experience with Ai.

Either way, Daichi had unknowingly misplaced his trust in the wrong person.

Ken who looked as if he was marching to his own execution quickly tried to brainstorm ideas.

That was when he remembered.

'Isn't Mika a woman?'

He was so overwhelmed with joy that he actually stopped dead in his tracks, prompting Daichi to give him a questioning look.

'Mika what—'

[Mika is an AI powered by the system. Mika is neither male nor female.]

The cold and monotonous voice didn't even allow him to finish the question, instantly squashing the embers of hope that had begun to spark from within.

He frowned in the next moment.

'But aren't you binary? Since you're kind of like a computer program.'

[...]

[Activating Flatulence protocol]

'AH NO WAIT! IT WAS A JOKE'

BRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRT

Ken who was standing in the hallway of the dorms, suddenly became the epicenter of an explosion of deadly gases. There was something like a shock wave which rattled some of the nearby open doors.

Daichi stared in horror at Ken who had all of a sudden stopped before letting out an outrageous fart.

A moment of silence ensued in which no one reacted.

In the next moment, Ken was like the wind as he bolted down the hallway at full speed as if he had just committed a crime, Leaving Daichi to stare at his retreating figure.

His face morphed in the next moment as the deadliest part of the attack surfaced, drilling into his nasal passages with ill intent.

"Dude what the hell was that!?"

"Argh man it's in my mouth."

"BLEEERGH"

The sounds of the affected players entered Daichi's ears as he was suddenly snapped out of his confusion.

'Oh no... they're going to think it was me!'

As the players started peaking into the hallway to see what had caused the disturbance, they could only see a flash running towards the doors to the lobby.

"Who the hell was that?"

"Dude just dropped a bomb and ran for it."

Daichi felt his heart race as he finally managed to make it outside. Thankfully he had managed to remember his bag amidst the turmoil, meaning he wouldn't have to go back to the battlefield.

He saw Ken a bit further away and was about to confront him about what had happened, however he quickly halted in the next moment after seeing who he was talking to.

'Miho? What's going on?'

"Ah Daichi, just the man I was talking about." Ken said with a refined smile.

'Eh?'

Miho turned her attention towards him, her beautiful green eyes filled with question.

Instantly, Daichi became encumbered by his emotions after seeing her pretty features looking at him wordlessly. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see Ken beckoning him to come forward.

Finally, he managed to get his body to move and stepped forward to enter in the conversation.

"Uh, hey." He said, sounding a little thick headed and slow.

Resisting the urge to face palm, Ken tried to steer the conversation before Miho lost interest.

"Ah, I was just telling Miho here that you were also interested in nutrition and sports science." He flashed a look at Daichi, as if to tell him to play along with it.

Daichi inwardly panicked however, he soon nodded like a pecking chicken.

"Y-Yes, I'm always looking at ways to improve my health and performance on the field." He managed to say, surprising Ken a little.

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

Chapter 324 - 324: Next Phase of the Plan (2)

As Ken was about to continue the conversation, Daichi opened his mouth once more.

"Your nutrition plan has already worked wonders for me, see." With those words, he pulled up his shirt and showed off his abdominal muscles in which there was a clear 4 pack.

Ken's mouth widened in shock and utter disbelief.

'W-What the hell is this guy doing!?'

However, contrary to his expectations, Miho moved her face forward to inspect his mid section and evaluated it. She even moved her hand forwards and pinched the skin on his oblique, as if to check his body fat percentage.

"Mmm, not bad. You've improved a lot in a single day." She said, pulling a notepad out of her jacket pocket.

She began to write on the page before handing it over to Daichi.

"If you want a proper nutrition and work out plan, send me a message."

With that, she walked over to the car park area, leaving both Ken and Daichi with slackened jaws.

It wasn't until they lost sight of her figure that the two looked at each other.

"Bro! It actually worked!" Daichi stared at the email address on the piece of paper before running over and grabbing Ken into a bear hug.

'That worked?'

As Ken was being crushed, his mind was feeling a whole bunch of confusion.

First off he had been running for his life after dropping a bomb in the hallway with no intention other than to get as far away from the crime scene as possible.

Unexpectedly he had been caught by Miho out the front of the building who had called out to him. She'd given him some advice for both his diet and exercise since he was now part of the team.

Yet after seeing Daichi run out of the front doors, Ken had to improvise quickly. He didn't want his brother to bring up anything about the embarrassing thing he'd been forced to do in the hallway.

His plan was to kill two birds with one stone. Shift the conversation to Daichi and prevent him from mentioning the incident.

Ken was able to work well under pressure and was moving towards the goal of setting up a mutual interest, even if it was not true. While he had no knowledge about women, he knew that it was better to start on common ground.

However, once Daichi showed his stomach, Ken had lost all hope. He had thought that he was awkward in front of women, yet his brother had taken not only the cake, but also the table it was sitting on.

But his mind was not prepared for what happened next.

Not only was Miho not weirded out by his antics, she also complimented him before giving away her email address. This was surely an unprecedented event in the "How to Pick up girls" handbook.

Only when Ken's lungs had fully depleted their stock of air did Daichi release him from the bear hug. All thoughts of Ken's explosive presence within the hallway were forgotten as he stared at the piece of paper in his hands.

"Dude, quickly put it into your contacts. I don't want to see you depressed if you lose it."

"Ah good idea! You're the best, big bro" Daichi said with glee before bringing out his phone and furiously typing into it.

Just as Ken was shaking his head at Daichi's reaction, he saw the players start to emerge from the main entrance with foul expressions on their face.

"Quick let's go!" Ken said, grabbing his brother by the arm and rushing towards the car park.

Since they were the only 2 players who'd left the building, it would be pretty obvious that one of them was the perpetrator for the stink bomb laid out earlier.

Ken only stopped running when he had found his father's car in the car park.

Daichi didn't seem to care, or perhaps he was too preoccupied to register what had just happened. He dreamily stared at his phone, as if he was the most content he'd been in his life.

Seeing his brother like this, Ken let out an exasperated sigh.

'Perhaps I would have been like that if I got Ai's number in my previous life.' He thought inwardly.

"AH"

Suddenly as he thought about Ai, he forgot that he had not replied to her messages since last night. He quickly brought out his phone and turned it on, yet there were no new messages.

'Maybe I should call her...'

With that, he selected her contact in his phone and placed it up to his ear.

"The person you have called is unavailable, please try again later."

At the sound of the automated message, Ken frowned. Perhaps she didn't have reception, or her phone was out of battery.

'Maybe I'll stop by her house later today.' He thought.

Before he could think much more, Chris appeared in the distance and pressed the lock button on his remote, causing the car's horn to sound.

BEEP

"GAH!"

Daichi who was still staring at his phone, jumped up like a spooked cat, almost dropping his phone on the ground out of fright. Thankfully he managed to catch it in mid air with his amazing reflexes.

Ken had seen his father so fortunately he did not suffer the same level of shock as his brother.

"Hahaha! Got ya." Chris said with a grin, slapping Daichi's shoulder as he arrived.

He was in a fantastic mood since both of his boys were selected as a part of the National Team. This also meant that he could implement the next part of his plan.

"Let's get in the car, we've got some good news for your mother."

With that, he slotted his tall frame into the car and turned it on. Daichi sat in the back while Ken took the front seat since he needed the leg room.

After around 20 minutes, Chris noticed something amiss.

"Ken, why's your brother acting like that?"

"Oh that?" Ken's face morphed into a wry smile, "He just got Miho's number."

"Miho?"

"Yeah, the nutritionist for the National Team."

"Ohhh, that Miho..." Chris turned his attention back to the road for a few moments before the words finally sunk into his mind.

"M-MIHO!?"

His voice was so loud that even Daichi who was in his own world jumped in fright.

"W-What is it Dad?" Ken saw his father's face pale, as if someone had died and could only ask timidly.

"Miho is..."

"T-The Head Coach's Granddaughter."

"..."

"..."

"EHHHH!?"

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

Chapter 325 - 325: Back Home (1)

The trio spent the next 40 minutes of the trip in mostly silence. What was meant to be a triumphant return was marred by the dangerous exploits of the two teenagers.

Only when they were close to home did Daichi open his mouth and ask his father something.

"D-Do you think the Coach will be mad..." He said with a forlorn expression.

"I don't know..." Chris responded truthfully.

However, inwardly he was a little torn. He could tell from how Daichi was acting that he really liked Miho, however Chris had only just been appointed to the Assistant Coach role and did not know what sort of effect this could have on their work relationship.

Yet in the next moment his expression changed.

"Alright Daichi, I want you to keep contact to a minimum with Miho for now..."

Daichi lowered his head in the back of the car before agreeing. He definitely liked Miho, but he didn't want to put his father's job in jeopardy because of it.

Yet just when he was about to resign himself and stow away his feelings, Chris continued the next part of his sentence.

"Once we get to America though, you can pursue her wholeheartedly. Just make sure it doesn't interfere with your training or performance."

"Eh?"

Both Ken and Daichi were surprised at his words. After all, wouldn't the most prudent thing be to avoid such kinds of drama? Especially when it involved the Head Coach.

Chris on the other hand grinned widely.

"After all, it will be harder for him to kick any of us off the team while we're in the states."

"Hahahaha!" Ken couldn't help but laugh joyfully at his father's words. It had been so unexpected that it felt even funnier.

It wasn't long before Ken's laughter incited the same response from the other two. Daichi felt tears forming on the corner of his eyes, but he didn't know if it was from laughing too hard or some other kind of emotion.

He had never had this kind of figure who would risk it all just for his happiness. At least not until he was adopted into the Takagi family.

"Alright we're home." Chris said happily.

Although he had only been gone for 2 days and a single night, he was still excited to see his wife and bring the good news.

The trio alighted from the car and entered the house, feeling jovial.

"Honey, we're home."

"Welcome home"

Yuki's smiling face greeted them from around the corner, her face full of expectation.

"So? How did it go?" She asked, clearly not able to hold back her curiosity any longer.

"Heh, you're looking at the 2 latest additions to the National Team." Chris said with some fanfare. He had a proud look in his eye as he showed off his two kids.

"Congratulations boys!"

Yuki quickly moved forward and hugged each of them warmly, celebrating in their achievement. Yet in the next moment her expression faltered briefly before she could recover.

Chris who was behind the boys saw the sadness flash briefly in her face, yet he only smiled in response. He knew exactly what his wife was thinking in that moment, yet he let it be for now.

"Ah that reminds me..." She said, moving back and placing her attention on Ken.

"Have you been ignoring Ai lately? Naomi called me and told me something was up." Her face was in a frown, as if his achievements were already forgotten.

"I-I tried to call her before we left but it didn't go through." Ken stammered briefly, feeling a little guilty.

Chris couldn't help but let out an amused smile, however he decided to come to his son's rescue.

"Honey, Ken's been busy at the tryout—"

However, he quickly swallowed the words when she turned her fierce gaze towards him, feeling the wrath of his wife ready to burst.

"Ahem, I need to go get changed."

With that, he quickly ran up the stairs and left Ken behind like one would a dead man.

Once the big guy was gone, Yuki turned to him once more before letting out a small sigh. She turned around and grabbed some money out of her purse before handing it to him.

"Go and get some bread rolls for our hamburgers tonight. I don't want to see you home until you've patched things up with Ai." She said, a mixture of warmth and threat within her tone.

Ken was forced to take the money, yet he was feeling lost for words. He hadn't even had the time to relax, yet he was forced out of the house already.

He looked to Daichi only for his mother to snap at him.

"Don't look at your brother, he can't help you. Only you can fix your own mistakes." She said, giving a shooing motion.

Then in the next moment she gave Daichi another hug and told him to come inside.

Ken wasn't exactly proud of his next words, however there was a brotherly urge that overtook him.

"Oh Mom, you'll never guess what happened... Daichi got a girls email address today, the Coach's Granddaughter no less."

Daichi stiffened before turning his head slowly towards Ken who was wearing a haughty expression on his face.

Their eyes met briefly before a peel of laughter came out from the latter's face as he bolted out the door.

"I'm leaving!"

Since Ken hadn't had the chance to take his shoes off just yet, he was able to escape in record time, running onto the streets as he continued to chuckle in a diabolical manner.

'This must be what it feels like to be an older brother.' He snickered inwardly.

However, his playful mood didn't last too long afterwards as his mind drifted to Ai. Sure he felt a little bad for ignoring her while he was away, but like his father said, he truly was busy.

Technically Ai was his first female friend, so he didn't exactly know where he had gone wrong.

He hadn't even talked to Shiro since they last saw each other in Osaka yet he was certain that if he was to call him now, there would be no issues.

If his father could hear his inner thoughts right now, he would feel like a failure. How could the son of the Tall Casanova himself be so stupid when it came to women.

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

Chapter 326 - 326: Back Home (2)

Thankfully, Ken's thoughts were his own, as long as one didn't add Mika into the equation.

As he neared Ai's house, he happened to see a car with a trailer attached to it. The trailer had various things inside like a dresser and TV, as well as a study desk.

'Huh? What's going on here?'

It was then that he saw someone whom he was never pleased to see, dressed in his tank top and bakers apron. The muscular arms bulged as they carried another piece of furniture and placed it carefully on the trailer.

Tetsu stretched briefly before rubbing his hands together to remove the dust. His sharp eyes caught Ken who was standing in the middle of the street, causing him to pause his movements.

Their gazes met briefly before Tetsu started power walking towards him.

'Oh damn it, not again!'

Ken suddenly felt his body get pumped with adrenaline as he readied himself into a fight position. He had just been called up to the National Team and he did not want to risk another injury.

Therefore he ensured his body was side-on, protecting his right shoulder.

However, Tetsu was quick as lightning as he closed the gap between them in an instant.

'H-He's fast!'

He raised his right muscular arm, causing Ken to flinch instinctively, waiting for the pain of the strike that he had not been able to react to. Yet in the next moment, he felt an arm surround his shoulders and pull him into a half hug.

"Hahaha! There ya are Ken my boy. We've been waitin' fer ya."

Tetsu's gruff voice sang out jovially, as if he was meeting with an old friend.

Ken blinked a few times, feeling as if he had stepped into an alternative universe where Tetsu actually liked him. There were no words in his mind that could respond to such a situation, so he could only remain silent.

"Come come, the missus will make us some tea."

Ken was so bewildered that he could only walk alongside Tetsu with a blank expression into the house.

"Honey, Ken's here! Get us some tea" the middle aged man shouted as he entered.

In the next moment, he was ushered past the bakery area and into the back where the lounge room was before being pushed down into the chair.

"Ah I nearly forgot. I wanted ya to meet a friend o' mine." Tetsu said excitedly before leaving the room.

Still having no idea what was going on, Ken could only look around in confusion for a while. After a couple of moments, Naomi walked into the room with some tea, her smile brightening when she saw Ken.

"H-Hi Mrs. Koyama." He called out, feeling rather lost.

"Hello Ken dear, it's good to see you again." She said with a smile as she placed the tea on the table.

Seeing his confused expression, Naomi couldn't help but let out a knowing chuckle. She too had been surprised at her husband's sudden change of heart, yet in her mind it was all for the better.

"It looks like Tetsu has warmed up to you dear, so you won't have to worry about any more run-ins." Her eyes sparkled as she said this, as if her well laid out plans were finally coming together.

"Ah... I see."

Ken wasn't sure how to respond, especially since he'd been treated rather poorly in the past. He hadn't done anything different, so what was the reason for the drastic change in circumstances?

"Oh, I'm sure you're hear to see Ai off. I'll go get her now." Naomi said before turning around and leaving.

'Huh? See Ai off?'

Just as Ken was about to inquire about what she meant, Naomi had already left the room.

His mind started working furiously as he tried to piece together all of the information that he knew. The moving trailer out the front of the house, the vague messages indicating that Ai wanted to talk to him.

Even when they were in Osaka she had mentioned that she wanted to chase her dreams. He had even advocated for it, stating that it was better to pursue them instead of regretting later in life.

All these things swirled around in his mind before he came up with a theory.

It was like an explosion in his mind as suddenly everything seemed to make sense.

Why had Ai chosen to attend Yokohama High when she had some of the highest exam results in their middle school year? Why not an art or design school which would directly help her pursue her dreams?

She had made the same decision to attend Yokohama in his previous life, though she chose the Fashion Club in that instance.

'Does this mean she's leaving? That would explain everything...!' He thought.

For some reason, the thought of losing Ai caused his heart to ache slightly. Though he had decided to keep her at arm's length, there was no doubt that he enjoyed being in her presence.

Her smile, laugh and her cute mannerisms were etched deeply in his heart, leaving an indelible mark upon him.

Ken's face morphed as he came into the realization that he may not see Ai again for a long time.

Just as he was about to get up and go find her, two men walked into the lounge room, causing him to pause in fright.

The first guy was Tetsu, however the person next to him was a balding man in his early 40's with colorful tattoos down his arms. He was garbed in a sleeveless leather jacket, yet Ken's eyes were drawn to the bloodied knuckles of the guy.

"See brother? This is the kid I was tellin' ya about. The one whose been tryin' ta date my daughter." Tetsu said aloud, a vicious grin forming on his face.

"Oho, so this is the bastard going after my precious God Daughter." The tattooed man said, his face turned up in a frown as he massaged his bleeding knuckles.

'W-What the hell!?' Ken screamed inwardly.

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

Chapter 327 - 327: Visitor (1)

Ai was currently in her room, taking stock of her remaining personal items that she wanted to take to Tokyo with her. Her mood was filled with melancholy and she could be seen sighing every now and then.

She took her phone off charge and turned it on, checking for any new messages that would cheer her up. However, at a brief glance, there were none, causing her to once again let out a sigh.

Knock Knock

"Yes?"

Ai called out, her tone sounding dreary.

The door opened up slightly, revealing her mother's head peeping inside.

"You have a visitor downstairs." Naomi said, smiling gently.

"Not interested." Ai replied, not even glancing at her mother.

Naomi's smile blossomed even further, brightening her features. It was as if the years had turned back, showing glimpses of her not yet forgotten beauty.

"Oh I think you'll want to see this one." She said, letting out a hollow chuckle before closing the door behind her.

Her words echoed in Ai's half empty room, causing her to raise her eyebrow in question.

Who would she want to see right now that her mother knew?

In the next moment her body stiffened and her expression changed. Her heart beat quickened as a certain boy's face appeared in her mind, the one she had been thinking about all this time.

Ai got up off her bed and was about to walk through the door before she paused. She suddenly remembered that she was wearing baggy clothes since she was in the middle of moving.

'I can't let him see me in this.'

Meanwhile, Ken had just been confronted with the most Yakuza looking character he'd ever seen in his life. The bright tattoos and bleeding knuckles brought the fear of god into his world in that moment.

As the figure continued to approach him, Ken could only shuffle further and further away from him since he was still seated. He looked at Tetsu and finally understood why he'd been pretending to be so nice.

'That bastard was tricking me all along.' He thought inwardly, cursing his naivety.

'Mika, I may need your help getting out of this.' Ken said, trying to ease his panic.

He wouldn't mind dropping another fart bomb in the middle of Ai's house if it meant he could survive for another day.

[Flatulence protocol is currently recharging.]

'What!? The only time I would need such a thing and it's on cooldown?'

Ken was running out of options as he continued to back up and watch the scary guy in front of him.

Yet in the next moment, the man sat down on the couch before holding out his hand for a handshake, his face turning up in a grin.

"It's good to finally meet you, I'm Tsukasa."

"Eh?"

Ken's felt his heart beating out of his chest, a result of the scenarios that had been running through his mind throughout the harrowing experience.

The dump of adrenaline triggered by his fight or flight response suddenly began to wear off, making it feel as if all of his strength had left his body.

He warily placed his hand forward and shook the Yakuza looking man's hand. Unlike Tetsu's soft hands, his were filled with callouses, giving rise to Ken's suspicions about his line of work.

Tsukasa then grabbed Ken's hand and pulled it closer, inspecting the roughness which rivaled his own.

"Hehe, I see that you've also been practicing a lot with the bat. Truly admirable." He said, appreciating the callouses of the teenager.

Ken quickly took back his hand, feeling a little shook. However, since he didn't feel in any immediate danger, he tried to make some small talk.

"O-Oh you also play baseball?" He asked.

Tsukasa's eye's brightened before he shook his head in amusement.

"God's no, I'm far too uncoordinated for that these days."

Ken nodded, however in the next moment he shuddered. Tsukasa had insinuated that he'd also been practicing with the bat. If he didn't play baseball, then what on earth could he be swinging at with a bat?

However, he didn't need to think long to figure it out. The guy was tattooed and wore leather, the typical look for someone who was in a gang, Yakuza or otherwise.

The funny thing was, Tsukasa had a small frame and was already half bald. If it weren't for the tattoos, one might just mistake him for a run-of-the-mill average Joe on the street.

Whereas Tetsu seemed more like the kind of person Ken would expect to be in a gang. Yet as Ken looked upon his grinning face, he looked like an angel compared to this scary middle-aged man in front of him.

"Ya should be thankful to this guy." Tetsu said, placing his hand on Tsukasa's shoulder.

Ken raised his eyebrow in response, not knowing where Ai's dad was going with this.

Seeing as how Ken was puzzled, he continued his words. "Tsukasa helped out with the trash who was blackmailin' you and Ai."

"Ah..."

Suddenly he remembered that Tetsu mentioned he had some old friends who would be able to help track down the culprit. It turned out that this middle-aged guy was one of them.

Just thinking about such a person showing up to his house with ill intent gave Ken the creeps. He could already imagine the scenario of Kohei wetting himself upon coming home from school.

"T-Thanks for that." Ken responded simply.

In truth he had almost forgotten about the whole ordeal since he'd been so busy. First it was Koshien, then getting into the National Team, he'd hardly had enough time to reflect on the school year.

"It's no biggie. I've dealt with worse filth than that pissant."

The way Tsukasa shrugged so nonchalantly made Ken instantly believe him. After all, if his looks were an indication of his line of work, then it would make sense that he'd deal with a lot of unsavory people.

"Anyway, enough about such boring things. I saw you on the TV, you really are a superstar." Tsukasa said, letting out a sigh of admiration.

S

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

Chapter 328 - 328: Visitor (2)

"Right!? He's gonna be the next star of Japan." Tetsu exclaimed with a wide grin.

Ken was speechless. It felt quite odd to be praised by the figure in front of him, let alone Tetsu who had always seemed to hold a grudge against him.

"It reminds me of the time we played at Koshien." Tsukasa intoned, his face turning up in a self-deprecating smile.

"Hahaha. We never made it past the first round"

The two broke out into laughter, clearly enjoying the memory they shared together.

With this, Ken was able to put together some pieces of the puzzle. Since he knew Tetsu went to Nationals with Zama High, then the guy in front of him must have been on the same team.

It was also where Naomi said that she'd met her husband, meaning they probably all knew each other.

As he was thinking along these lines, Naomi walked into the lounge room with a smile on her face. She carried some freshly baked cookies and laid them on the table.

"Ai will be down shortly dear, she's just packing up a few more things."

"O-Okay, thanks Mrs. Koyama."

"Please, call me Naomi." She said, giggling as she walked out of the room and leaving the three once more.

There was a brief silence before Tetsu went and took a seat opposite Ken.

"It was lucky ya came now. We were about ta leave in a couple hours." He said, grabbing a cup of tea that was on the table and taking a sip.

Ken raised his eyebrow in question. He had already guessed that Ai might be moving, but he had yet to confirm with anyone the reason, nor where she was going.

Pushing down the lump that was crawling up his throat, Ken asked. "Where is Ai moving to?"

"Hmm? You don't know?" Tetsu looked at him with surprise.

Ken could only shake his head, yet he felt kind of judged after receiving both Tetsu and Tsukasa's gazes.

"I-I've been away at the National Team selections these past couple of days so I haven't had a chance to talk with Ai."

Although it was not a great excuse, he still said it aloud as if to try and justify his wrongdoings, at least to himself.

"Eh!?" Tetsu almost dropped his tea cup after hearing these words, his face turning up in excitement.

"You tried out for the National Team!? How did it go?" He eagerly sat forward, awaiting Ken's response with shining eyes.

Tsukasa too seemed to lean forward, waiting to hear the news.

Ken frowned, it seemed that his excuse had derailed the conversation.

"I made the team." He said simply, feeling a little frustrated.

Not wanting to deal with their reactions, he moved forward and went to grab one of the cookies that were sitting on the table. Just as he was about to touch one, Tetsu reached over and grabbed his wrist tightly.

Ken looked up in shock at the man, questions dancing within his eyes.

Tetsu's face was grave as he shook his head, almost as if warning him against a great danger. Ken could only take back his hand, yet he was still perplexed.

In the next moment, Tetsu grabbed one of the cookies and placed it in both of his hands, attempting to break it in half.

His large muscles bulged and his face visibly went red as he tried with all of his might to break it. However, as much as he tried, it was an impossible feat.

He then wordlessly tapped the cookie on the table, creating a loud thud like the sound of a stone banging against wood.

Ken's eyes widened in shock, staring at the stone-like cookie.

Tetsu leaned forward and whispered to him.

"Never eat the cookies..."

His tone caused Ken to shiver subconsciously, yet he was thankful that he had not tried to bite into the stone disguised as a cookie.

'I could have lost some teeth...' He thought inwardly.

Tetsu looked around cautiously before he grabbed the plate and left the room abruptly. He returned not long later with an empty plate, making a shushing gesture before placing the plate back on the table.

He let out a sigh of relief in the next moment, as if he'd dodged a bullet.

"Ah, what were we talkin' about again?"

Before he could restart the conversation, Ai walked into the room.

She was dressed in a white top and wearing blue denim overalls which showed off her long and flawless jade white legs.

Ken felt his heart stir as he looked at her, taking in the sight of the girl who was turning more and more into a beautiful woman each time he saw her.

There was silence in the room as the two locked gazes, making both the older men feel slightly uncomfortable.

It was only when Tsukasa cleared his throat loudly that the two realized they'd been staring at each other for a while now.

"Ken, did you want to go for a walk?" Ai asked as she fidgeted in place.

"Ah sure." Ken replied, however he was truly thankful for her appearance. He would have done anything to get away from these two right now, especially since Tetsu had been acting weird ever since he'd arrived.

The two then proceeded to exit the room, leaving Tsukasa and Tetsu in the lounge by themselves.

They were silent for a while before Tetsu's face changed.

"Ah! He said he made the National Team!?" He jumped to his feet in excitement and was about to run out the door to congratulate the kid, however he tripped and fell onto the floor exaggeratedly.

Tsukasa moved his foot back that had tripped his friend over nonchalantly before shaking his head.

"Man, it's no wonder Ai has trust issues. You can't even give her some alone time with her boyfriend before she leaves for Tokyo."

Tetsu sat up and massaged his knee which he had fallen on the hard ground, however his face slowly turned into one of recognition.

"I guess you're right." He said solemnly.

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

Chapter 329 - 329: Afternoon Walk (1)

Ken followed Ai's figure out of the house, passing by Naomi who sent him a wink from behind the counter. Her expression was one filled with expectation, at least from his perspective.

It was only now that he remembered both Naomi and his mother had been conspiring to get him and Ai together since the beginning.

However, he couldn't be bothered to think about this right now. He continued out the door and onto the street, eventually following beside Ai along the road.

The two walked in silence for a while with only the call of the cicada's chirping in their ears and their footfalls hitting the pavement.

Despite Ai not talking, Ken felt no anxiety in that moment. In fact, he didn't feel like he had to fill the silence with chatter, he merely walked beside the woman he'd chased for so long in his previous life.

No, that was wrong. Ai was no longer the same person that he thought he knew back then.

While he never really got to know her before he regressed, Ken felt as if the woman beside him was different. As he looked at her silhouette beside him, she just so happened to turn in his direction.

Instantly he was entranced by her soulful blue eyes. He felt all of his walls that guarded his heart fall at once, ready to embrace her if she were to just say the word.

It was a feeling he'd never experienced before in his two lifetimes. Something that invoked a mixture of emotions, fear, expectation and a lingering regret.

He who had experienced rock bottom was given another chance to live without regret. Yet his preconceived notions about his mental age and the fact that the girl in front of him was only 16 had almost prevented him from doing so.

Yet as he stood at the precipice of his epiphany, Ai turned away.

"I'm transferring to Joshibi High in Tokyo."

Her tone was soft yet it withheld untold emotion.

Ken moved his gaze back to the road a moment later, feeling his exposed heart quiver. All the evidence pointed to her moving away, yet none of it felt real until this moment.

Once again a long silence spread out between them, creating a sullen atmosphere.

"Is this what you were talking about that night in Osaka? About chasing your dreams." Ken asked, remembering his comments to her.

He had told her that she should pursue her dreams so as not to regret it later in life. At the time he was speaking from experience, not thinking about the implications of his words.

"Yeah..."

Ai didn't elaborate further. There was a part of her that wanted Ken to fight for her to stay, even if it meant that she had to give up her dream.

However, intuitively she knew that he would never do such a thing.

They had been proper friends since the beginning of the school year, yet their relationship hadn't progressed much, almost as if he'd been holding back all this time.

As she walked along, Ai let out a self-deprecating laugh, sounding harsh to the ears.

"I'm probably just wasting my time going through all of this."

Her words were dismissive, showing just how little faith she had in her abilities. Perhaps this was the reason why she'd never seriously applied herself towards her passion.

Ken was stunned. How could someone who appeared near perfect in his eyes have such a low opinion of themselves.

In that moment his body seemed to move on his own. He grabbed onto Ai's hand tightly before stepping in front of her in one swift motion.

Time seemed to stand still as the scene took place.

Ai was taken aback at the forceful actions of Ken, not expecting him to make such a daring move. Yet her gaze traveled upwards to his face which was filled with a range of emotions.

His chiseled jaw was taut and his bushy eyebrows were knitted together, yet his deep brown eyes were reflecting something else.

"Why do you not believe in yourself?"

Ken's deep tone washed over her, causing her to freeze in place.

'He sounds... angry?' She thought, inspecting his features closely.

Yet he didn't give her a chance to speak, forcing her to gaze upon him.

"You shouldn't speak like that, it's like you're giving up before even trying."

Ai's eyes widened as she heard this, finally feeling as if something clicked inside of her. She had been so afraid of failure that she'd never even taken the first step to pursuing her dreams.

Yet now, even after deciding to enroll at Joshibi High, she was still speaking like she was going to fail.

Perhaps it was a self defense mechanism, so she wouldn't be crushed if she did fail. Or maybe she truly didn't have the confidence to make it.

Either way, Ken was right. What was the point in chasing her dreams if she was expecting to fail?

As Ai was processing this, her mind thought back to all the times when she had seen Ken on the baseball field. Was there ever a time that he held back?

Even at practice, did he ever give up trying to get better so he could chase his dreams?

No, not once.

However, she wasn't like Ken. She couldn't continue forward with supreme confidence, she lacked such an ability.

These thoughts evoked emotions that she'd stored deep within herself, forcing them down to a place no one could see. Yet in the next moment, they came rushing out.

All of the stress, doubt and negative emotions poured out of her, causing warm tears to cascade down her pretty face.

"I'm scared..."

Ai could only utter these two words before she broke down and began to let out all of her grievances. It was as if the dam had broken, releasing all of her pent up feelings.

Ken saw the vulnerable woman in front of him and pulled her into his embrace. It was a reflexive action, but it felt right in the moment.

He stood there unmoving with Ai's head nestled under his chin thanks to their height difference. There were no words that were exchanged, with only the sound of Ai's gentle sobs on his chest as she let go of her insecurities.

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

Chapter 330 - 330: Afternoon Walk (2)

Only after 5 minutes did she finally calm down enough to remove herself from Ken's embrace.

The moment she took a step back, her face flushed red with embarrassment. Ai hadn't expected for this to happen, nor had she planned for it.

"I'm sorry, I—"

"There's no need to apologize." Ken said, cutting her off.

His face wore a supportive smile, one that filled her with reassurance. There was no judgment, nor expectations within his gaze, just pure and unadulterated support.

"Come, let's keep walking."

"Ah"

Ken grabbed her hand once more and pulled her along gently until she was beside him. It was unexpected, yet she didn't resist, feeling a genuine smile creep onto her features.

He wasn't sure what had made him so bold, but there was a part of him that thought he might not get a chance like this again in the future.

The two walked a bit longer in silence as they took in the scenery.

"Hey, do you remember this place?" Ken said, pointing at a place on the path.

Ai followed to where he was pointing and let out a small laugh.

"Yes, that's where you bulldozed into me."

"A-Ah, I don't know if bulldoze is the right word." He replied, feeling a little embarrassed.

This only caused Ai to laugh even more, seeing his coy expression.

"You know, I'm glad we collided on that day." She said wistfully.

"Eh?"

Ken felt it was a little weird to say such a thing. Who would want to be thrown off their bike by someone after all.

Ai nodded, her tone serious.

"If it didn't happen, then I don't think we would have ever gotten to know each other properly. I mean, all you think about is baseball."

"H-Hey, I think of other stuff besides baseball." Ken said, feigning being offended.

"Oh?" Ai raised her eyebrow and turned to him with a suspicious look.

"And what were you daydreaming about when we collided back then?"

Ken paused for a moment before letting out a defeated sigh.

Technically he was spinning the Gold Lottery wheel, but he couldn't exactly use that as his defense since he would just sound crazy. However, at the same time, it did have something to do with baseball.

"Pfft."

"Hahaha!"

Seeing his myriad of expressions, Ai suddenly broke into her trademark giggle, filling the air with her velvety laughter.

Ken's expression softened as if the sweetest music was playing in his ears. It was so infectious that even he couldn't help but laugh as well.

The two continued on their walk shortly after with no clear destination in mind. It was as if they were a couple, just enjoying each others company.

As they continued down the road, an older lady happened to be out the front of her house and spotted the two. Her eyes widened in the next moment before she called out to them.

"Well if it isn't Ai and her boyfriend." She said with a wicked grin.

These words caused both Ken and Ai's face to turn red. It was only now that they both realized they were still holding hands.

Ken resisted the urge to yank his hand back out of embarrassment, not wanting to offend the woman next to him. It was just as well since Ai gripped onto his hand tightly, not wanting to let go.

"Hi Mrs. Masuda. I hope you're doing well." Ai said sweetly.

"Ah, it's the ninja Grandma." Ken muttered, suddenly recognizing her.

Mrs. Masuda grinned even more after hearing that she didn't deny her claims.

"Don't mind me dear, you two continue your date." She said, quickly ascending her stairs and entering her house. Yet in the next moment they could see the blinds in the window flutter, as if someone was peaking through.

Ken's jaw dropped once again after seeing the supreme speed of the Grandma. Now he might actually believe it if someone said she used to practice Ninjutsu.

Ai was unfazed as she used her free hand to wave at the window on the way past.

The two chatted for a while longer as they continued their walk, the mood lighthearted. However, Ken felt as if something was looming over their head.

But he knew once the subject of Ai leaving was broached, it would mean it was the end.

Perhaps Ai also felt the same way, which was why she never brought it up again. She wanted to enjoy his company, without worrying about what would happen next.

All of the unknowns were currently not her problem. Even if this was the last time that she saw him, she could look back at this moment with happiness in her heart.

'This is enough'

'I'm satisfied with just this...'

However, the longer Ai thought about it the more upset she got.

As they rounded the corner, Ai's house came into view. She wasn't sure why, but her body froze in place and refused to move, causing Ken to look back with concern.

"What's wrong?"

Ai was silent for a while as she tried to sort through her emotions. She bit her lip hard, almost causing blood to be drawn.

"I don't want to go home..."

"Eh? What do you mean?" Ken asked, clearly perplexed at her words.

She shook her head, almost like a child about to throw a tantrum.

"If I go home this will be over... I don't want it to end."

Her eyes started to water after saying so. She felt as if the world was mocking her.

'Why couldn't this have happened months ago before I decided to go to Tokyo?' She thought, her emotions in turmoil.

However, instinctively she knew that if it had happened earlier, she would never have decided to chase her dreams. So while it could have been a happy period in her life, would she still be able to live without regrets?

Ken could see Tetsu and Tsukasa out the front of the house, staring in their direction.

Yet he didn't care.

Once again he brought Ai into his embrace and hugged her tightly, his mind feeling calm and composed in that moment.

"Let's chase our dreams together. I'll take you wherever I go, as long as you promise that you'll do your best."

His words were said softly, yet it caused a large shock wave to move through Ai's body.

"R-Really?"

Ai's soft words were full of hope, showing just how vulnerable she was in that moment.

"Mmm. I'll make it to the Major League with my Fashion Designer girlfriend by my side."

At the word girlfriend, Ai buried her head deeply in Ken's chest, feeling her face redden in embarrassment. However, in the next moment she lifted her head and stared directly at him.

"It's a promise okay?"

Ken looked down at her from his vantage point, feeling the warm breath from the beautiful woman in his embrace. His face flushed yet he did not look away, keeping his gaze upon her.

"It's a promise." He said.

The next series of events happened in a blur. One moment he was gazing into Ai's beautiful eyes and in the next he felt a hand grab the back of his neck and pull him down.

Suddenly he saw Ai's eyes close and something soft pressed up against his lips. A shock ran through his body as he was frozen in place, yet he felt warm in the next moment, feeling his strength leave him.

Instinctively he closed his eyes and got lost in the sweet sensation.

'My first kiss...'

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

Chapter 331 - 331: Hamburgers (1)

Ken dazedly walked back home, his brain feeling as if it was full of cotton. Every time he thought about his first kiss, his face would redden considerably.

As the afternoon sun cast his long shadow on the road before him, Ken felt a mixture of emotions run through his mind.

'Is this what they call the spring of youth' He thought.

He'd heard the term in plenty of anime and had even seen his coach utter these words before when looking at his teammates.

Despite being filled with happiness, he had a bitter aftertaste in his mouth.

'When will I see her again?'

After the kiss, Ai had quickly run back home, probably from embarrassment. She ran right past her father and Tsukasa before heading into the house, not once turning back.

Ken was left stunned as he watched her retreating figure, touching his lips with his fingertips. He could taste something sweet, almost like the flavor of strawberry which lingered.

When he finally snapped out of his reverie, he saw Tetsu and Tsukasa staring at him from afar, their gazes full of shock.

What followed one of the most awkward moments of his life, as he was forced to walk past them. It was like he was a model walking down the runway with those pairs of eyes gawking at him.

All he could do was lower his head to the ground before breaking into a brisk jog. The quicker he could get away, the less time he'd have to get stared at.

Only after he had disappeared from their view did he finally slow down his pace.

He had continued to walk slowly back home, in order to process everything.

Now as he rounded the corner he could see his house not far away. A big part of him wanted to go back and see Ai one last time, but he didn't want to ruin their last moment together.

BUZZ BUZZ

Ken felt his phone vibrate in his pocket, prompting him to grab it and see who had messaged him.

"Don't forget your promise, otherwise no more kisses..."

Her words were followed by a few choice emoji's, causing Ken to subconsciously grin. He eagerly messaged her back, feeling his heart flutter.

"I'll never forget. I wouldn't want my first kiss to become my last."

Just as he was about to put his phone away, it vibrated again.

"Wow that was fast." He commented.

"It was my first kiss too... I want my second to be with you as well."

Ken felt his face heat up and he began to reply.

"Hey man, what you doing?"

"UGH!"

Ken jumped a few feet in the air out of fright, accidentally flinging his phone through the air behind him.

The person who had spoken happened to be in the spot where his phone was going to land. With adept reflexes, he managed to safely catch it.

"D-Dude what the hell? Why you gotta sneak up on me like that?" Ken felt his already fragile heart almost beat out of his chest.

Daichi who had sweat on his brow grinned cheekily at him.

"I was going for a run because you took so long. I didn't expect to meet you on your way home." He said nonchalantly.

Ken let out a small sigh before holding his hand out, "Ah whatever, pass me my phone."

"Yep here you go."

Daichi held out the phone only to see a certain keyword flash in front of his eyes.

"Kiss!?! Hold on a moment."

With that, he quickly relinquished his hand and began to read the messages with interest.

"Oi ya bastard, give it back."

Ken's face darkened as he quickly tried to approach his brother and get back the phone.

However, Daichi was far too interested in the contents of the messages to dare give it back. He quickly dodged the incoming attacks using his lightning fast reflexes while still trying to read.

"Y-YOU!" S

This time Ken was really mad. His muscles contracted and he finally became serious as he ran forwards and threw a flying side kick at his brother.

'Those messages are private!' He yelled inwardly.

Daichi on the other hand freaked out when he saw just how pissed off his brother was. Yet, sometimes in life there were risks that one must take in order to get something they wanted.

He also wanted to get pay back for Ken telling their Mom about Miho before he had left.

"Sorry bro!"

He yelled out an apology, yet in the next moment he ran away at full speed, still clutching the phone in his hand. It was clear that he had no intention of giving it back until he read the contents of the message.

"ARGH! I'll Kill You!"

Ken sped off behind him, using every ounce of his strength in order to catch up to the criminal. He saw people coming out of their house, reacting to his yells as he chased with all of his might.

"HELP, THIEF!"

Using the opportunity, he called for help, hoping that his brother would be cowed into submission. However, he underestimated Daichi's shamelessness.

The two continued their cat and mouse game until arriving at the park where they usually stretched and cooled down their muscles.

It was only then that Daichi slowed down and held his hands up in submission, holding the phone out towards Ken.

"Okay I give up!" Daichi yelled, however his face was turned up in a grin.

Ken seemed to calm down at these words, slowing his approach. He sent an annoyed glare at his brother and snatched the phone out of his hand before putting it in his pocket.

Just as he was about to turn away and head back home, his brother's words froze him in place.

"So? How was your first kiss?" He asked, a gloating smile creeping onto his lips.

In that moment Ken snapped. In a flash, he quickly turned around and grabbed Daichi by the waist. His muscles bulged as he picked up his brother's sturdy frame and yanked him over his head.

Daichi's body flew as he was thrown into a German Suplex. His shoulders and back were driven into the sand beneath them, stunning him and causing the air in his lungs to be expended.

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

Chapter 332 - 332: Hamburgers (2)

Ken nonchalantly got up off the ground and dusted the sand off his clothes, not even sparing his brother another glance before walking back home.

Only after a full minute did Daichi recover, yet the first thing he did was let out a chuckle. He had never seen his brother so mad, yet he knew that as long as he apologized later, his transgressions would be forgiven.

"Hey, wait up." Daichi yelled out, jogging towards Ken who had begun his trudge back home.

However, he was promptly ignored.

Daichi didn't despair however, merely walking next to him the remainder of the way home. He knew Ken well enough to know that this would all blow over soon enough.

Yet just as they rounded the corner to their house, Ken spoke.

"Ai's leaving Yokohama High."

Those words caused Daichi to let out a gasp of shock. This was not something that he had expected at all, especially since the two were practically dating at this point.

"Wait, what do you mean she's leaving? Are her parents moving or something?"

Ken shook his head.

"She's transferring to Joshibi High, the art and design school in Tokyo. So she can chase her dreams to be a Fashion Designer."

His words held a tinge of sadness, yet there was a hint of pride within his tone as well.

"Oh..."

Daichi didn't have any other words to say. He didn't really know Ai, so it wasn't like he could comment on her transferring schools.

So he did the only thing he could do, try and console his brother.

"Don't worry man, there's plenty of other girls out there." He said, placing his hand on Ken's shoulder.

Ken sent a fiery glare his way, causing Daichi to let out a peel of laughter and take back his hand.

"I'm kidding I swear!"

Inwardly, Daichi knew that Ken only had eyes for Ai. His brother had a kind of magnetism, causing those to be drawn towards him. This of course included women.

Yet even in middle school, Ken did not even take a second glance at them.

'If he feels the same way about Ai that I do Miho, then I can understand what he's going through.' Daichi thought in his heart.

"I'll put it this way, she's only a 1 hour train ride away." Once again he placed his hand on Ken's shoulder, this time his words were serious.

Ken nodded, feeling his mood brighten a little. It wasn't like she was moving countries or anything, he could still see her during the school breaks as long as it didn't interfere with his training.

Seeing his brother's mood increase, Daichi smiled.

"Well at least we get to have hamburgers for dinner tonight."

It was then that Ken froze on the spot, prompting Daichi to pause.

"What is it? What did I say?"

He panicked a little, worrying that he might have brought back his brother's bad mood.

"I forgot the damn buns..."

Ken looked at the sun which was setting and could only let out a sigh. His mother had sent him to Ai's house to pick up some buns for the hamburgers, yet he'd been too caught up in his own matters and had forgotten.

He also didn't want to return, particularly since he would have to interact with Tetsu once again.

Ken let out a deep sigh and walked back to the house in defeat.

"I'm home."

After stepping through the door, Ken felt exhausted. With the trials which were held for the first half of the day and the emotional gymnastics of this afternoon, he wanted nothing more than to crawl into bed right now.

"Welcome home you two." Yuki's chipper voice sounded from the kitchen as she chopped up the salads and made the sauce for dinner.

As she turned around, she saw her son's glum face and resisted the urge to laugh.

"What's got your knickers in a knot?"

"I... forgot the hamburger buns." Ken replied, drooping his head.

"Hahaha" This time, Yuki couldn't help but laugh.

Chris also entered the room from outside, a grin etched on his face.

"Your mom said this would happen. Don't worry, I went out and bought some just in case."

Ken breathed out a sigh of relief, thanking his thoughtful parents.

"Alright everyone, let's head out to the grill." Chris said energetically. It was clear that he was in a great mood, lifting the energy of the household.

Soon enough, everyone was sitting around the barbecue together as a family while Chris was busy attending to the burger patties.

A delicious aroma drifted through the air, causing a salivating sensation to appear in those who caught a whiff.

"So, as I said earlier we'll be returning to Tokyo University in 2 days time for some training. Then after 4 days we'll be headed to America to compete in the World Cup."

Chris addressed his sons, his tone chipper.

Ken and Daichi both nodded, they were already aware of the plan.

Yuki smiled, however her eyes seemed a little forlorn. Yet she didn't want to ruin the atmosphere, especially since this was a time to be celebrated.

"I've already sent your passport to the staff Ken, and I'm working on getting Daichi's set up now. Luckily I've got some contacts in the government office who owe me some favors."

It was only now that Ken remembered Daichi did not have a passport. He breathed out a small sigh of relief. It would have sucked if he missed out because of such a thing.

"Thankfully, I was also able to get a holiday visa as well." He said with a grin.

Ken tilted his head in question, "What would you need a holiday visa for? Wouldn't you also get an athlete visa because your a part of the coaching staff?"

He didn't know too much about immigration, but what he said seemed logical.

Chris gave a knowing smile, "Well, it's not for me..."

With that he turned to Yuki who was staring at him in disbelief.

"I already told you that we'd go together as a family didn't I?"

Yuki's hand flew up to her open mouth and she instantly felt tears pooling at the corner of her eyes. She truly hadn't expected this, it was such a wonderful surprise.

"Thank you Honey." She said, standing up and hugging her man tightly.

Meanwhile, Ken and Daichi couldn't help but smile at the scene in front of them.

This was how a true man treated his family.

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

Chapter 333 - 333: New Pitch (1)

The next day, Ken awoke from an amazing sleep thanks to Mika. Sometimes he wondered just how tired he would be without her Sleep Protocol that allowed him to get the proper amount of rest.

He had been busy last night, selecting another pitch from the Mentor function of the system.

Since he'd been selected for the National Team alongside 2 other pitchers, he wanted to increase his chances for playing time during the World Cup.

He understood why both Satoshi and Kei had gotten into the lineup. One was a southpaw pitcher and the other was a solid and dynamic player on the mound.

The thing they both had in common, was their large portfolio of pitches.

This was common for Japanese youths, considering more often than not, they lacked the same power and strong build as those from the Americas. They were often shorter and less athletic also.

Of course there were outliers in that regard. Ken himself was over 6'1 and rather strong for his age, while Kei and Kuro were also around the same height.

Either way, Japanese baseball was focused on repetition and technique, rather than overwhelming opponents with their athleticism.

Knock knock

Daichi knocked on the door quietly before propping it open, locking eyes with Ken who was sitting on his bed.

"You ready for our morning run?" He asked with a grin.

"Yeah give me a sec."

Soon after, they left the house for their run.

It was just like old times as the two competed for first place under the instructions from Mika. Of course Daichi couldn't hear Ken's personal trainer, he would just try his best to catch up to Ken.

Once they were finished, they returned to the park to cool down their muscles.

Catching his breath, Ken spoke up.

"What are your plans these next 2 days?"

"Ah, not much. We won't really have a break over in America, so I was just planning on relaxing." Daichi replied nonchalantly.

"Mmm, good. I've got a new pitch I've been working on so I'll be counting on you." Ken said with a grin.

"Huh? You're adding a new pitch now?" Daichi seemed a little confused.

Until recently, Ken had only been pitching 2 fastballs and his forkball which had pretty much been enough to get to the finals of Koshien.

With the added curveball, he didn't think there was any need increasing the amount of pitches in his arsenal.

"Wouldn't it be better to perfect the pitches you've got already?" Daichi asked, not feeling all that confident.

"Bro don't worry. I've already perfected my curve and forkball. This new pitch will make my weapons even more effective."

Ken dismissed his brother's concerns. Once he had 100% completed the curveball, it became a skill just like his forkball, meaning the system had judged his proficiency was at the peak.

Daichi shook his head in exasperation, mumbling something about pitchers.

As a catcher, he was often overlooked from an outsider perspective. In his opinion, catching was 10% research, 10% playing and 80% coddling the pitchers ego.

Hearing Ken brag that he had perfected his two breaking balls made Daichi a little annoyed.

"If you can throw 20—no, 10 perfect curveballs and forkballs to me today then I'll help you with your newest pitch."

"It's a deal!" Ken's face lit up in excitement, quickly throwing his hand out to shake it.

"Hey not so fast... There needs to be some stakes if you fail. I don't want you wasting my free time." Daichi remarked, a snide grin forming on his face.

Ken held back his laugh, already counting his winnings.

"What did you want?" His eyes sparkled as he gazed at his brother.

"If you lose, you'll have to do all my chores." With that, Daichi held out his hand as if wanting to finish the deal quickly. S

"Hahahaha." Ken laughed out loud before grasping the offered hand.

It didn't matter to him what stakes were on the table. In his mind he was 100% confident in completing the challenge. The only thing he regretted was not asking for more rewards.

"It's a deal then. I wouldn't act too confident if I were you, I have high standards."

Ken wasn't sure if he was referring to his chores or the pitches. Either way, he was not going to lose.

The two returned back home in order to get cleaned up and have breakfast. They returned to the park a couple of hours later, with all of their equipment.

"Are you ready for this?" Ken asked, rolling his shoulder back and forth.

"Hmph, I should be asking you the same question." Daichi replied haughtily.

In his mind, Ken had not been practicing the curveball for long which was why he found it hard to believe that he would be proficient with it just yet. Of course he had no knowledge of the system, therefore he was not ignorant.

Judging by conventional standards, even if a player had practiced a pitch for over a year, they might not be fully proficient with it.

Yet with his skills and Image Training, Ken was able to increase his proficiency in next to no time. Sure it cost Major Points, but since he'd gotten a huge haul from the National Tournament, he could spend them how he liked.

After Daichi got his gear on, he stood in front of a wall and gave Ken the signal.

Having practiced in the park many times over the years, Ken was already used to marking out the mound's distance from the plate. He was already standing ready and began his warm up throws.

After around 10, he was finally ready to win the bet.

"I'll start with the 10 forkballs before moving onto the curve's." Ken announced, his tone sounding as if it would be a literal walk in the park.

"Sure sure, let's see if you can walk the walk." Daichi remarked, shaking his head in exasperation.

Ken grinned and performed his wind up.

PAH

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

Chapter 334 - 334: New Pitch (2)

Around 10 minutes later, Daichi sat down and leaned against the wall behind him, his face full of disbelief. His mind thought back to the 20 balls he'd caught, each as sharp and precise as the last.

Even with his standards, the pitches were spot on. Not only were they at full speed, they also broke at the correct time, to the point where he could not find a single flaw.

"Hehe, so what do ya think bro?" Ken said, punching his fist into his glove with a smile.

He was ruthless, having no sympathy for the defeated party. His own brother no less.

Daichi let out a deep sigh, not having any words to reply. While he was a little depressed that his ploy had not worked, he was even more impressed with the pitching standards of his brother.

'He's a monster...!' Daichi thought inwardly, staring at the tall figure across from him.

Despite this, he felt a surge of excitement. He had the chance to form a battery with Ken on the world stage. While it wasn't the Major League like they had promised, it was the next best thing.

'I can't fall behind.'

With that, his features turned determined as he picked himself up off the ground.

"Alright, I'll help you with your new pitch." He said with a grin as he walked towards Ken.

"But I want you to help me improve also."

"Hmm?" Ken was a little surprised since he thought Daichi was doing quite well already. However, seeing the fired up expression on his face, he couldn't help but smile.

"It won't be easy though..." Ken replied in a sing-song tone.

"Hehe, it wouldn't be worthwhile if it was."

Ken nodded, happy that his brother had set his sights on improving. Making the National Team was just the first step, they still had to show their talents on the world stage if they wanted to stand out from the masses.

"I'll work on a training plan tonight for you. But now, it's time for you to hold up your part of the deal." Ken stated, snatching the ball from Daichi's hand.

He made a shooing motion for his brother to get back to his place, making sure to act haughty after winning the bet.

Daichi had no choice but to laugh it off, considering he'd made a promise.

The two then began to work on Ken's new pitch for the next couple of hours before deciding to return home.

As they were walking, Daichi was busy analyzing Ken's new pitch. Originally he had been skeptical, however the longer Ken pitched it, the better he became.

After around 100 pitches, his brother had managed to successfully throw 60% correctly. While it still needed some work, it was definitely improving at a fast pace.

"How long did you say you've been learning that pitch?" Daichi asked.

"Hmm? I just decided to learn it last night."

"Oh I see last night..." Daichi continued to walk for a few moments before suddenly freezing in place.

"WHAT THE HELL!?"

His shout was so loud that Ken quickly covered his ears from the impact. He turned to his brother with a frown which deepened as he wiped away the spittle that had been projected onto him.

"Dude, I'm right here, is there a need to yell?"

"Wha— I mean how— are you even huma—"

Seeing his brother go stammer and stumble through his words Ken feared that he might be having a stroke.

"One question at a time man, otherwise I'll have to call an ambulance." Ken said, patting Daichi on the back.

Only after a few moments was the teen able to compose himself enough to ask a proper question.

"How can you pitch like that when you've only just started learning it last night? That's not normal."

Ken let out a hollow chuckle and started walking slowly once more. In reality he had spent around 3 hours last night in the Image Training, doing his best to throw the new pitch.

He also received a boost in proficiency thanks to the "Pitching Variety" skill, bringing his total proficiency to 60% with just one session.

However, it wasn't like he could tell this to Daichi, so he needed to come up with a decent excuse.

"Well, the slider is pretty similar to a curveball so the learning curve isn't as steep as you might think." Ken's explanation had some truth to it, though it wasn't as exaggerated as he made it out to be.

Daichi was deep in thought for a moment as he tried to fact check. Since he wasn't a pitcher, he didn't focus on the specific grips and wrist movements a pitcher would use for individual pitches.

The slider had a lot of spin, yet it broke laterally in comparison to the curveball which broke vertically. Depending on the direction of the spin and the wrist action at release, theoretically it made perfect sense.

So while he still might not understand it as well as specialists in the field, he decided to take his brother's word for it. Also there didn't seem to be another viable reason as to why Ken could pick up the pitch so fast.

'At least he explained it, I thought he would have just haughtily proclaimed to be a pitching genius.' Daichi thought with a wry smile.

Now that he could comprehend Ken's abilities, Daichi felt a bit better. Though he wasn't naive to assume that every pitcher would be able to pick up a new pitch this fast.

"I guess it makes sense." He said finally, accepting Ken's words.

"I mean it's not like you can cheat at such a thing right? Hahaha."

Daichi laughed heartily after saying this, mostly because of how outrageous it sounded.

"Ha ha ha." Ken did his best to laugh along, however he felt a drop of cold sweat run down his back.

'If only he knew...' Ken thought inwardly.

He was lucky that no one in this world had invented some kind of truth serum that would cause one to spill out all of their secrets.

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

Chapter 335 - 335: Back to Tokyo University (1)

A couple of days later, the trio of Ken, Daichi and Chris arrived at the Tokyo University Campus. Since Chris was part of the coaching staff, they were here a lot earlier than any of the other players.

"You two go to the dorms and pick out a room. There's still two hours till everyone is meant to get here."

"Aye aye sir."

Both Ken and Daichi responded at the same time, unable to keep their chuckles at bay.

This had become their common saying since Ken's outburst at the tryouts.

Judging by Chris's reaction, it was not the first time he'd heard it.

Rolling his eyes, their father ignored the two and quickly walked towards the entrance doors.

Undeterred, Ken let out a stretch after the 1 hour car ride, making good use of the free space in his surroundings.

"Man, I still can't believe we both made it on the team." He said, briefly looking at his brother.

"Heh, speak for yourself. I had no doubts at all." Daichi said dismissively.

His words received a skeptical gaze from Ken, however he decided not to call him out. He could still remember the supportive look he received from Daichi even after he thought he hadn't made the team.

Some things were better left unsaid.

"Anyway, we get the first pick of the dorms."

Ken cheered inwardly knowing that he would not get bamboozled out of a room by Hiroki once more. For some reason he had a terrible win-rate in rock, paper, scissors.

"Sweet, let's go." Daichi moved forward a few paces before he froze in place.

"Wait, do you think Miho will be here already? I mean, she would have come with the Head Coach right?"

"Ah..." Ken's features became dire as he thought about it.

"But it shouldn't matter right? It's not like you two are dating or anything, she just gave you her email address." Ken stated what he believed to be the obvious.

Daichi nodded, but inwardly he was still anxious.

"What if she thinks I don't like her because I haven't sent her a mail?" His face turned grim in the next moment as he began his mental gymnastics.

Ken shook his head in exasperation.

"Dude, I'm sure women aren't like that." Despite only receiving his first kiss a couple of days before, Ken's words were filled with a dangerous level of confidence.

"Y-Yeah, you're probably right."

After finally calming Daichi down, the two walked towards the main entrance of the campus, taking in the familiar sight. They knew exactly where to go, heading left at the lobby towards the dorms.

As they did so, they saw a figure coming from the dorms. She had her black hair tied in a practical bun and wore the National Team jersey which seemed a little big for her size.

Ken felt Daichi tense up beside him, yet he tried his best to act natural. He nudged his brother with his elbow, trying to tell him to say good morning.

"Ow... Ah, good morning Miho." He said a moment later, trying to sound cheerful.

"Hmph."

Miho took one glance at Daichi before turning her head and ignoring him. She continued walking as if he was a piece of poop on the side of the road.

Daichi let out a short gasp, feeling as if his soul had left his body. The way he dramatically leaned on Ken while clutching his heart would have been funny if he hadn't needed to support his weight.

"Ahhhh damn. Looks like she's mad." Ken uttered, watching her figure leave towards the lobby.

He turned his attention to Daichi who seemed to be in a catatonic state of heartbreak and resisted the urge to slap some sense into him.

"Oi, snap out of it." Ken said, clicking his fingers in front of the guy's face.

"It's over... I messed up. Now she'll never like me." He said, sounding like a drunk old man out on the town.

Ken did his best to shift the dead weight of Daichi off of him and back to his feet. However, the bastard weighed far too much for him to move thanks to their height difference.

In the end, he decided to move out of the way and let the lunk fall to the floor, causing a thud to ring out in the empty hallway.

Yet Daichi didn't even react, merely staring up at the ceiling with heartbreak written across his face.

Ken got down on his haunches and stared him in the eyes.

"Alright man, let's think about this from another viewpoint." He said, trying to motivate his brother.

"It's two outs in the bottom of the 9th and we're down in the count. I need you to be sharpen up otherwise we're gonna lose the game okay?"

Daichi blinked a few times before staring at him.

"Who is pitching?" He asked, his face dead serious.

Ken frowned, feeling his irritation rise. "What the hell does that even matter? This is an analogy!"

"What? What do you mean? Am I batting?"

It was evident that his words were going nowhere, therefore he resorted to the next best thing.

"Alright bye."

Ken stood back up and walked off to go find a dorm room, leaving his brother like one would a toddler throwing a tantrum.

"Ah, wait for me!"

Daichi quickly got himself off the floor, abandoning his dramatic scene in order to not get left behind. He soon caught up, yet there were still some vestiges of sadness on his face.

Ken of course wasn't so heartless as to abandon his brother in hard times, so he nudged him with his shoulder gently.

"Don't worry man, you can make it up to her later. She'll be traveling with us to America after all."

"Yeah... I guess you're right."

With that, the two found a dorm that was close to the lobby entrance and entered, dropping their bags off.

On each of their beds was a National Team jacket.

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

- Chapter 336 - 336: Back to Tokyo University (2)

Chapter 336 - 336: Back to Tokyo University (2)

"Oh sweet!"

The two eagerly put their jacket's on, posing in front of the mirror excitedly. Ken felt his heartbeat race as he looked at himself in the colors of his Nation, feeling a sense of pride swell from within.

This was the kind of thing that he'd dream about while staring at spreadsheets in his cramped office before regressing. Yet now that it had come true, he didn't know how to react.

Thankfully, Daichi seemed oblivious to his melancholy. He reacted like a true teenager would in such a circumstance.

"Quick let's take a selfie!"

He grabbed out his phone and stood in front of the mirror, beckoning Ken to come into frame.

Thanks to his enthusiasm, Ken quickly felt his mood change for the better.

After taking a few photo's he turned to his brother and grinned.

"Pass me your phone, I'll take a photo of you so you can send it to Ai."

At the mention of Ai, Ken's face reddened a little, but he still quickly passed his phone to his brother.

Daichi got into position and almost laughed out loud at Ken's pose. The guy looked as if he had a stick up his bum with his hands placed flat by his side.

"Dude, try to look natural." He said with a hollow chuckle.

"I-I'm trying..." Ken replied, doing his best to loosen up. Yet that only served to elicit a peel of laughter from Daichi's mouth.

Seeing that he was being made fun of, Ken frowned.

"I don't know what to do with my hands..."

Ken was not good with photos. If one were to look through his family album, they would see the same dull expression on his face from the age of 5 upwards.

Daichi held back his laughter while trying to keep the phone steady.

"Just throw up the peace sign and try smiling." He directed.

After around 5 minutes, Daichi finally gave up. He looked at the results and found maybe 1 photo that was passable enough to show to others.

'Maybe I'll try getting a photo when he's not looking.' He thought, giving the phone back to Ken.

"Oh yeah, what did your coach say when you told him you made the National Team?" Daichi asked, changing the subject.

"Ah..."

Ken's face froze as he put his phone back in his pocket.

"You didn't tell him!?"

"Dad told the school I'll be away for the first couple of weeks of the semester, so I'm sure he'll find out eventually..." Ken said, as if trying reassure himself.

Yet after a few moments he quickly got out his phone and furiously typed a message.

He truly was terrible when it came to notifying people about things. Even in his previous life he rarely replied to messages, but this time around he didn't have any excuses.

Ken decided to send Ai a message while he was at it, otherwise he was sure that he'd forget to do so once training began. He was going to attach one of the photo's that Daichi took earlier, but they all looked terrible.

Letting out a sigh, he chose the best one and hit send.

"Alright, did you get a chance to make up my training plan last night?" Daichi asked, unable to hide his eagerness.

"Ahem, sure. Find me a pen and paper." Ken cleared his throat, not wanting to tell his brother that he'd forgotten to do so last night.

While Daichi was scrounging through his bag, he quickly used the Identify function on him.

NAME: Daichi Takagi

AGE: 16

TALENT ASSESSMENT: SS

POTENTIAL: ??

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: SS+

>Pitching: C

>Fielding: SS-

>Game Intelligence: S+

>Mental: S+

Ken's eyes almost bulged out of his head in the next moment, seeing just how much his brother had improved in a single year.

His potential had already surpassed SSS+ and jumped into the next realm. Not to mention his game intelligence, fielding and physical fitness had increased by leaps and bounds.

'If this was only after a year of proper training, just what kind of talent does this guy possess...'

Ken quickly shook his head, he needed to use his Training Plan function while his brother was distracted.

PLEASE SELECT A TRAINING PLAN FOR TARGET:

>Pitching Regime: Useful for increasing pitching speed and consistency. Will increase from 2-3 grades. [500 Major points] (not recommended)

>Catching Regime: Increase ball coordination and core strength. Will increase fielding from 1-2 grades. [5000 Major points] (recommended)

>Strength & Conditioning: Improve strength and stamina. Will increase from 1-3 grades. [5000 Major points] (recommended)

As the text appeared in front of him, Ken noticed that the cost had increased significantly from when he'd used it on Shiro.

'Maybe the cost has gone up because Daichi's skills are much higher?' Ken thought, running his eyes over the options.

While the Pitching Regime was cheap, it was entirely useless for Daichi. Therefore he had a choice between the catching and strength & conditioning options.

Without hesitation, Ken selected the latter before a new window popped up in front of him.

"Here it is." Daichi exclaimed, fishing out a pen and notepad from his bag and handing it to Ken.

Ken nodded and sat down at the study desk in front of him, copying down the training plan that was contained in the system window.

Yet as he was writing, his face started to pale. It wasn't just him either, Daichi was peaking over his shoulder as he continued to copy the words down.

By the time he'd finished, Ken already felt exhausted.

"W-What the hell is this training plan? Are you trying to kill me?"

His brother had almost fainted, not believing his eyes.

A grim expression appeared on Ken's face in the next moment. If this training plan was anything like the others, the first week would be the easiest.

Thanks to the advanced system, it accounted for progressive overloading, not allowing the muscles to get used to a training for long.

"D-Don't worry bro... I'm sure Hiroki will do the training plan with you too." Ken stated, feeling his body seize a little.

In the next moment a heavy hand landed on his left shoulder, causing him to flinch.

"Don't think you're getting out of this that easy. We'll be doing this together." Daichi replied, his tone grave.

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

Chapter 337 - 337: Training Plan (1)

As Miho walked past Ken and Daichi, she tried to reign in her temper a little. She happened to see the exaggerated reaction of the latter and felt her mood improve a little.

'Hmph, serves him right for not messaging me.' She thought inwardly.

In reality, she wasn't too mad though, maybe just a little disappointed.

Since she was the granddaughter of the legendary coach Hajime Takashi, boys were often intimidated around her. Of course there were others that acted normally, like Riku, but she detested him.

Just thinking about that guy's stupid grin brought her a sense of annoyance.

Miho had decided to take the initiative with Daichi, giving him her email address after seeing how he reacted around her. Yet the guy must have found out who her grandfather was during the past 2 days.

She let out a sigh, feeling a hint of depression creep up.

'Maybe I'll find a nice guy overseas.' She thought wistfully.

"Oh, Miho. Can you please hand these two jersey's over to Ken and Daichi in the dorms?"

Chris's voice rang out from in front of her, startling her out of her thoughts.

Since he was the assistant coach, she couldn't exactly tell him no.

"Ah sure, no problem." She said, grabbing the uniforms.

However, as she turned around one could tell that she was a little annoyed.

'Damn, it's going to be awkward when I show up after that last interaction.'

All she could do was sigh and grumble inwardly, already regretting her previous actions in the hallway.

As Miho neared the dorms, she happened to overhear some words.

"Don't think you're getting out of this that easy. We'll be doing this together."

Instantly her curiosity was piqued, causing her to poke her head in the door without announcing her presence. Miho saw the two standing over the desk, looking at a notepad, their expressions crestfallen.

"What are you guys looking at?"

Not expecting the sudden interruption, both Ken and Daichi almost jumped in fright, quickly spinning their heads towards the open door.

"M-Miho!?"

Daichi was shocked, not expecting such a visitor. It would have been more likely for a player to arrive rather than this girl.

Without waiting for an answer, she waltzed into the room and handed the two their uniforms. Yet instead of leaving, she picked up the notepad and began to read it.

"Ah..."

Ken was so baffled at her behavior that he did not even react in time. Daichi on the other hand was still staring at Miho as if she was a ghost.

Miho's eyes moved as she surveyed the training plan in front of her. Sometimes she would frown, but others she would show an understanding look, as if she was evaluating the contents of the notepad.

After a silent 60 seconds, Miho finally raised her gaze and looked at the two teens before her.

"Which one of you wrote this?"

There was a pause as the two tried to catch up with what had happened.

"I wrote it down, but the training plan wasn't made by me." Ken said, placing his hand on Daichi's shoulder.

Technically he wasn't lying. The system had created the training plan for him, and all he had done was copy the details down.

Sure, his actions might have insinuated that Daichi was the one who had created the training plan, but he didn't mind stretching the truth in this instance.

Daichi whose brain was still running at 10% efficiency, only stared at Miho in response, lost in her eyes.

However to Miho, his eyes seemed to be searching for her reaction.

Miho could feel her opinion of Daichi change as she looked at him in a different light. Instantly, her ego subsided slightly.

She had originally thought that the teen had been lying when he said that he was interested in sports science and nutrition. Yet the training plan in her hands spoke of someone who thoroughly understood its premise.

Suddenly it made sense as to why he might not have messaged her right away.

'Perhaps he's not the kind of person I thought he was.' She thought inwardly.

Miho let out a small sigh before sending a pleased smile his way.

"I must say, this training plan is rather brutal but it's tailored perfectly to athletes at your level." She admitted.

If the two knew her well, they would understand that such words were like the ultimate compliment. It was not often that Miho was humbled, especially when it came to her field of expertise.

Daichi blinked a few times, before he looked at Ken briefly.

To Ken, Daichi looked like a person who was struggling to stay afloat in the middle of the ocean, screaming for help. So he did as any self respecting wingman would, he hyped up his brother.

"You think so too? What can I say? My brother is a bit of a genius."

Once again, Ken towed the line of truths. He hadn't explicitly said that Daichi wrote the training plan, merely stating that he was a genius.

Thankfully, his antics had bought time for Daichi to catch up to where things were headed. Inwardly, he was thanking his brother from the bottom of his heart.

'I swear I'll never abandon you big bro!'

"Ahem. Yeah, as you said I think this is perfect for athletes at our level." Daichi stated after clearing his throat.

He still looked a little awkward, but the interaction seemed to be going well enough.

Miho nodded, placing the notepad close to her chest.

"I was supposed to submit a Strength and Conditioning regime to my grandfather for our training sessions, but I think this one is far better. Do you mind if I submit this instead?" She asked sweetly.

"Haha, of course!" Daichi half-shouted, feeling his heart race from Miho's cuteness.

Ken on the other hand almost fell over as his brother readily agreed.

'W-What the hell is he doing!?!'

It seemed that he was the only one who thought of the repercussions of such a thing.

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

Chapter 338 - 338: Training Plan (2)

"Great! I've got to go, but let's chat later Daisuke." She said, sending him a wink.

"O-Okay bye." Daichi said as he felt his heart flutter.

Once Miho had left, he floated over to his bed and collapsed, a giant grin on his face. He grabbed the nearby pillow and hugged it to his chest while staring at the ceiling.

He was so caught up in his emotions that he didn't even realize she'd called him by the wrong name.

Seeing the actions of what seemed like a typical teenage girl, Ken felt both amused and annoyed. However at the end of the day, he didn't mind suffering for his brother.

The problem was, would the team mind?

Almost 3 hours later, everyone had finally arrived on the baseball field at the Tokyo University campus.

Since school had technically resumed, it was not just the National Team present. There were plenty of young adults that were walking past or stopping to watch the team as they went through their warm ups.

However, because most of the players present had played at Koshien before, the small crowd of onlookers did not bother them at all.

"Alright everyone, gather up please."

Chris's voice rang out, getting the player's attention.

Sporting their new National Team jersey's, the 16 players made their way over. Everyone was full of enthusiasm for the upcoming training, all except Ken who was wearing a solemn expression.

Daichi had been on cloud nine ever since his interaction with Miho, yet Ken knew that once they began the system's training plan, he would soon see his mistake.

"Since you are all athletes, we'll be implementing a new Strength and Conditioning training plan which will focus on building your stamina and fitness."

Hearing this, most of the team nodded. They were expecting some changes since moving up to the International level so they came prepared.

Yet there was an additional person in the group who flinched when hearing this term, almost as if he had PTSD.

Hiroki stiffly turned his neck towards Ken, his gaze drilling into the side of his head.

As Ken turned, the two locked eyes. The former gave a questioning, almost pleading look towards Ken, as if to ask if this training plan was one of his own.

Ken let out an exaggerated sigh before nodding slowly.

Hiroki's face dropped as he felt his heart rate increase from the terrible news he'd just uncovered. Flashbacks of almost dying at their extra curricular training appeared in his mind, threatening to give him a panic attack.

"H-How bad is it?" He whispered.

"It's bad..." Ken responded

Hiroki paled in response, not even hearing the next words from the coach.

"Now I will warn you all beforehand that this training will be pretty grueling, but I can assure you that it will be very beneficial in the upcoming weeks." Chris said, his eyes roaming over the players.

They eventually stopped on Daichi as he gave a smile.

"I'll also let you know that this training plan was made by one of our players. Daichi well done, even the Head Coach gave his approval for this one."

At his words, the rest of the team looked his way curiously. Since they hadn't been together long, not everyone knew who he was.

However, to be acknowledged by the renowned Head Coach, his training plan must be rather good.

"Alright, let's head over to the training stations and I'll take you through the workouts."

Chris then led everyone to a part of the field where markers were set up and began to explain the different exercises that they would be taking part in. These include burpees, squats, push-ups, box jumps, side lunges, kettle bell swings and a few more calisthenic exercises that targeted the core muscles.

"We'll be doing some High Intensity Interval Training, also known as H.I.I.T to make sure your heart rate stays high. Each exercise will be done for 60 seconds, with a 30 second recovery time before moving to the next set."

The players didn't seem too perturbed by the description of the workout, of course that was likely because they'd never done it before.

Coach Takashi stood on the side with his arms crossed, wearing a smug smile on his face. He noticed that out of the 16 players, only 2 or 3 seemed to grasp just how difficult the training would be.

"Break up into groups of two and go stand in an area that is free. Each zone will have a staff member who will demonstrate the exercise for you during your rest period."

Once everyone was in position, Chris looked around and grinned.

"Ready?"

FWHEE

The moment he blew the whistle, their first official workout for the National Team had begun.

Ken had taken Daichi as his partner and they were currently in the burpee zone. This happened to be one of his most hated exercises, but he grit his teeth and pushed through.

It would only get worse from here.

While the first couple of exercises were okay, by the time the players were onto their fourth, the sound of grunts and heavy breathing resounded on the field.

Though it had only been approximately 6 minutes, half of the team felt like they were dying.

FWHEE

As the whistle sounded for the rest period to begin, Ken could feel 14 pairs of eyes staring in his and Daichi's direction. There was no longer any curiosity, having been replaced with hatred and malice.

Yet they did not have enough time to convert these thoughts into action as they were ushered onto the next exercise after 30 seconds.

The cycle repeated itself until everyone had completed the same exercise 2 times.

FWHEE

"Alright well done guys." Chris said, clapping a few times.

The moment they heard those words, everyone collapsed onto the ground and began sucking in deep breaths. Even Ken with his SS+ ranked Stamina was feeling exhausted, showing just how brutal the mere 30 minute workout was.

No one currently had the energy to complain as they were fighting to get oxygen into their bodies.

"I'll give you guys another few minutes, then it's onto the next part."

Chris's words were barely audible above the gasps for air.

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

Chapter 339 - 339: Lunch (1)

Shortly after, they were thrown into the next part of the system's training plan which involved some brutal running and diving exercises.

Before long, the entire team was covered in dirt and sweat, their breathing uneven as they fought through the torturous work out.

While some were fairing better than others, all of them seemed to be glaring at Daichi with malice. If looks could kill, he'd be 6 feet underground by now.

Thankfully, the coaching staff let them have a decent break once they were done. Ken sucked down some water like a camel, not forgetting to pour some over his head.

Both Daichi and Hiroki stared at Ken as if he was the one sending them to the gallows. Out of the entire team, only they were aware that something this diabolical had come from him.

Yet Ken ignored them. It was Daichi's fault that they were in this mess anyway.

After getting around 10 minutes rest, the team began their drills which focused on more positional aspects of the game. The pitchers and catchers were separated from the rest of the team as they moved to the bullpen.

The group still hadn't recovered from the high intensity workout and could feel their muscles sore from fatigue. However, this seemed to be the goal of the coaching staff.

After a grueling 2 and a half hour session, the players were ushered into the cafeteria, forcing their weary bodies through the doors.

Unlike the last time that they were here, the large space was filled with University students.

Their arrival drew a lot of eyes onto them, however, most were too exhausted to care.

Ken felt his muscles twitch with every step he took as he regretted ever asking the system for assistance with the training plan.

Just as he was lining up for food, he could hear the grumblings of the other players. They stared directly at Daichi beside him, cursing him under their breaths.

"Bro please tell me, what did we do to offend you?"

Riku's face was filled with pain and discomfort as he addressed Daichi. His usual carefree smile was nowhere to be seen as he aired his grievances.

"I...I— Nothing" Daichi stammered in response, sending a look to Ken as if asking for help.

Ken raised his hands in response, wanting nothing to do with the affair.

While it was true that he had a part to play by insinuating Daichi wrote the training plan, it was the man himself who had agreed to let Miho show the coach.

'You reap what you sow' he thought inwardly.

However, by the looks of the rest of his teammates, it was clear that it wasn't just Riku who was feeling upset with Daichi.

'This could be bad...' Ken thought.

Yet in the next moment he shook his head. There was no way that the coach would allow discourse within the team, especially when it would directly affect team morale.

Unfortunately for Daichi, he would have to deal with this kind of treatment for a while still.

Ken moved down the cafeteria line and had to give his name to the lady behind the counter. She looked at the list before nodding, grabbing 2 bowls of rice and some fried chicken cutlet, along with various side dishes.

The rice bowls were stacked high, similar to when he was here for the tryouts.

He could already tell that Miho had given instructions to the staff.

However, it wasn't just him. Even Daichi who had only been allowed a single serving of rice was given 4, causing Ken's eyebrow to raise in question.

'Maybe they're increasing the amount of carbohydrates and protein for muscle recovery.' Ken thought.

The two made their way over to one of the few empty tables left open before sitting down gingerly. They were joined not long after by Hiroki whose jersey was covered in dirt.

He looked exhausted as he placed his tray down upon the table and sat across from them.

Out of the entire team, he was probably the only one who suspected that Ken had written the training plan. This was because he'd experienced the so-called strength and conditioning training before at Yokohama.

His eyes fell upon Ken before letting out a sigh.

"Dude, this is even harsher than our extra curricular training..." He said weakly.

Ken shrugged, trying to look on the bright side.

"At least it's lumped together with our other training... I was going to pull you into it regardless." He said with a wry smile.

Hiroki paled briefly before nodding like a pecking chicken.

He couldn't imagine doing that sort of training after practice. Though, if it really came down to it, he wouldn't be one to shy away from such a thing.

The reason he was able to surpass his limits was because of the teen in front of him. He trusted Ken completely when it came to this sort of thing.

The trio began to dig into their food, doing their best to keep everything down. Soon enough, they were joined by another two players since most of the other seats were taken.

"Do you mind if we sit here?"

Ken looked up to see the gloomy looking Kuro and clumsy Akimitsu, waiting patiently with their tray of food.

"Be my guest."

"Thank you Ken."

"Thanks man."

The two got comfortable, letting out a contented sigh after finally being allowed to sit down.

A few moments of silence drifted between them all, with only the sound of eating and the ambient of chattering students detectable.

That was until Aki spoke up, his shaved head obscured by his baseball cap.

"Daichi bro, your training plan sucks. I can already tell that I'll be sore tomorrow."

The guy didn't pull any punches, speaking his mind without any qualms and causing Daichi's cheeks to redden in embarrassment.

The words were so out of the blue that Ken had to force down a laugh.

'Man this guy is blunt...' He thought.

"Come on Aki, I'm sure that the training plan will be beneficial." Kuro said, his tone rather considerate.

However, Ken could see his legs shaking beneath the table, a sign that he had not taken the training all that well.

It was clear that despite his gloomy disposition, Kuro was a nice and considerate guy.

Aki seemed rather unconvinced, though he did not rebut.

Wanting to change the subject, Ken piped up.

"So, is this your first time being on the National Team?"

"Yes this is my first." Kuro said, nodding along.

Yet Aki shook his head. "I was part of the U15 squad for 2 years, but when I tried out for the U18 team I pissed off the Head Coach."

"Huh? What do you mean?" Ken felt that there must have been a bit more to the story.

After all, what kind of coach would not include a good player just because they were pissed off.

Aki thought for a little while before responding.

"I told him that his toupee was fooling nobody and that he should just shave his head like me." He said, lifting his hat off and showing his shaved head.

Silence...

'Yep, this guy is crazy...'

No one spoke, but they all had the same opinion of the guy.

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

Chapter 340 - 340: Lunch (2)

Finally, Kuro broke the silence, changing the subject.

"I heard we have film study this afternoon. It really feels like I'm back at school."

"Yeah you can say that again."

Both Daichi and Aki groaned, agreeing with the sentiment.

It was only Ken and Hiroki that seemed to be confused.

"What do you mean it feels like school again? Do you guys study film after practice?" Ken asked, mirroring Hiroki's thoughts.

This time it was everyone else's turn to look weirdly at Ken.

"Are you telling me the winning team of Koshien doesn't watch film?" Aki's mouth widened in shock.

Ken shifted a little uncomfortably. He felt as if his coach's abilities were being questioned, yet he eventually held firm.

"I mean, we watched film of the teams we were competing against in Koshien the night before and would have a meeting. But never prior to then." He replied.

Hiroki nodded in response.

The other 3 players were taken aback, yet that only lasted for a little while before Aki started complaining.

"Damn it, I'm gonna give it to my coach when I get back." Aki said with annoyance.

"There's no way I'll be studying film in the future, unless its for big games." He continued.

Kuro finally had a gloomy expression to match his features.

Studying film was probably the most boring aspect of playing for a High School baseball club, yet the top team of this year did not have to go through such things. Wasn't this a testament to how useless this was?

Once again everyone was silent at the table, yet this time the atmosphere was dull.

Only after everyone started eating for a while did things start to return to normal.

"Hey isn't that the guy who got two home runs at the Koshien finals?"

Suddenly, Ken's ears perked up as he heard the next table over chatting away. He turned his head to see a couple of university students pointing to their table, their eyes on Hiroki.

"Wow he looks even more cute in person."

"I really liked the one that batted first, he was really hot. Where is he?"

Hiroki happened to overhear some of the words describing him and instantly flushed red. He couldn't help but lower his head in embarrassment.

Just as Ken was about to give him a bit of a hard time, their next words caused him to freeze in place.

"Ah, there's that pitcher that got smashed in the head by that ball in the semi finals!"

While the earlier words were said a little softly, these were almost shouted, causing everyone in the vicinity to stare directly at their table.

Daichi who happened to be the catcher during that fateful play, quickly hid his face, not wanting to be recognized by the loud students.

A flash of annoyance crept onto Ken's face as he quickly stood up from his chair and approached the loud group of girls.

He leaned in closely with a stiff smile painted on his face.

"Hey, would you mind keeping it down a little. We're trying to eat here."

However, it seemed to have the opposite effect that he wanted. The girls in question didn't seem to like getting talked to in such a way by a mere freshman from high school.

The ironic thing was that the High Schooler had been more mature about the situation than them who were practically adults at this stage.

Just as the girls in question were going to make a ruckus, a girl appeared next to Ken and nudged him out of the way.

Upon seeing this new arrival, the group of girls suddenly paled.

"Film study starts soon, you guys should go and get ready."

Miho's voice sounded, causing Daichi to swivel his head in her direction.

Ken took a brief look at her before nodding. He could tell that if she hadn't intervened, he probably would have had all sorts of insults slung at him for no reason.

"Come on, let's go." Ken said, grabbing his food tray and heading back up to the front of the cafeteria.

Everyone quickly followed behind apart from Daichi who lingered for a few moments.

Miho watched them leave with a small smile on her face before turning her attention back to the trio who had been making a commotion.

"We'll be here for 4 days. If I hear another word of you causing a disturbance, I'll be sure to let the Dean know."

Without waiting for a response, she waltzed away, no longer paying attention to the group.

Ken had seen the small interaction which made him wonder what kind of connections Miho must have to pull off such a thing.

He had originally found it a little odd that the National Team would have access to the Tokyo University Campus, even if it was only for 4 days. Ken also didn't think that the Head Coach's name would be able to pull strings at such a prestigious college.

'There must be more to Miho than meets the eye.' Ken thought inwardly.

Ken and the others made their way back to the dorms before hitting the showers. Not long later they all made their way to the meeting room which was located not far from the cafeteria.

Upon entering, it looked like a typical university classroom with plenty of chairs that sloped upwards, rather similar to a theater.

With the white screen which had been lowered from the ceiling, it looked even more like they had arrived to watch a movie.

Ken had arrived with the same group that he'd had lunch with. They decided to head closer to the front since there was only 16 players in the team total.

Around 10 minutes later, most of the team had shown up.

Coach Takashi was the one to speak first, welcoming the players.

"Alright, before we start talking about the upcoming World Cup, I wanted to share with you our vision for the team." He said, his hands clasped together behind his back.

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