

Major League System

Chapter 501 - 501: Biomechanics (1)

The next day, Ken's father had already left the house by the time he woke up. As if trying not to make her son worried, Yuki made up an excuse that he had an early morning meeting.

Ken decided not to call her out on her lie since she looked like she was having a hard time. It would be best for all of them if he just kept his mouth shut for now.

Of course he planned to tell his parents the information that he'd learned, but that could wait a few days.

After doing his morning exercises, Ken attended school like usual. However, Shiro noticed that his mood was somber most of the day. No matter how much he spoke to his friend, the guy seemed out of it.

Any attempts to pry resulted in Ken dismissing him. Whatever it was, he clearly didn't want to talk about it.

When it came time for club practice, nothing had really changed. Ken still pushed himself in training though, going above and beyond what was required.

Even with the addition of the new training today, Ken never complained once, pushing through with a determined expression.

The other players however, had a rude awakening.

"W-What the hell is this training?" A first year exclaimed, gasping for air. His eyes were on the figures of Ken and Hiroki who were at the front of the pack, seemingly getting further away with each passing moment.

"They're not human..." Another stated, feeling his muscles screaming out in fatigue.

After another 20 minutes, the coach called an end to the training session. Since it was the first day of extra training, he wanted to ease the team into it.

Those new to the club might eventually quit if the training was too hard at the beginning.

"Ken, you got some time?" Coach Hanada asked as the team were headed towards the lockers.

"Hmm? Sure."

"I know it's only been about 6 weeks, but I can see your constitution has improved greatly. Your shoulders are practically bursting out of your uniform." Seiji said, seeming rather impressed.

Ken nodded. He had been taking the training seriously, basically working himself to the bone. That, in addition to his breakthrough were deciding factors as to why he was able to improve in such a short time.

"So, are you ready to work on your pitching form?" He asked, wearing a grin.

"Ah, y-yes."

Hearing the unexpected proposition, Ken felt elated almost instantly. Originally he'd thought he wouldn't be ready to pitch again in time for the Fall Tournament, but it seemed he'd lucked out.

"Okay good, follow me." Coach Hanada said, walking towards the equipment shed.

Ken nodded like a pecking chicken, feeling his excitement rise. If he could get one on one training with the Coach, it should only be a matter of time before he was back in form.

When they arrived, Seiji pulled out a camera and told Ken to grab a glove. They moved over to the mound and he set up the tripod, pointing directly at Ken.

"Alright, now pitch for me." The coach stated.

"But I don't have a ball?" Ken replied, looking at the coach weirdly.

Seiji shook his head, "No need for a ball right now."

Ken felt it was a little odd, but he did as he was told. He imagined that he had a ball in his hands and brought his glove to his chest before lifting his leg.

In the next moment he took a stride forward and proceeded to whip his arm out, completing the phantom throw. Without the weight in his hand, it felt a little odd.

"Ah, I forgot to turn the camera on... Please do it again."

Ken blinked a few times before swallowing whatever he was going to say. He then repeated the process again.

"Mmm good." Seiji nodded.

"What do you know about the biomechanics of pitching?"

"Uhhh... The what now?" Ken wasn't sure what the coach was getting at.

"Makes sense." The coach muttered, letting out a small sigh.

Quite often, pitchers would just throw intuitively, at least before they reached the professional stage. A lot of kids would just imitate their favorite pitchers, without understanding the reasons for the actions.

"Biomechanics focuses on the structure, function and motion of the mechanical aspects of biological systems. In this case, human movement."

"In pitching, we break it down into 6 phases: Wind-up, Stride, Arm Cocking, Arm acceleration, Arm deceleration and follow-through."

As he was talking, Seiji motioned for Ken to get off the mound, collecting his glove in the process. He stepped up and put his back foot against the pitcher's plate and stood facing 3rd base.

"First we have the Wind-up, then the stride." He said, swinging his front leg up and leaning back slightly before taking a stride forward.

The movement was smooth and dynamic. At a glance, Ken could tell that the coach had built up a lot of momentum just from the few movements he did.

"Watch again." Seiji said, demonstrating the move once more.

"Just as I'm about to take my stride, I bend my back leg, using it like a spring to propel myself forward."

Ken nodded in response, taking in the information.

For a 3rd time, the coach performed the action, stopping as his lead foot planted.

"Notice how my hips are open and my shoulders are closed? Doing this properly will allow you to generate more torque when throwing."

With that, he moved off the mound and handed the glove to Ken, gesturing him to try it himself.

Ken did as he was told and took his position, going over the coach's actions in his head. He visualized the moves and tried it himself.

He lifted his leg and took a stride before planting his foot just like the coach.

Seiji shook his head, "Your shoulders are open. Make sure that you're almost facing 3rd base as you plant your foot. Try again." He said, crossing his arms.

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

Chapter 502 - 502: Biomechanics (2)

Ken tried again, trying to do as the coach said. Now that he had to think through every step of his pitching form, it made it a lot more difficult than he expected.

He was made to try time and time again until...

As he stepped forward, Ken felt as if his body was filled with power. Out of instinct, he leaned forward on his lead leg, his body almost spinning from the torque generated.

"Yes! Very good." Seiji exclaimed.

"Keep going, etch the feeling into your body."

Ken felt a wave of excitement as he quickly did as he was told. He tried a few more times, but he didn't get the same feeling as before.

He saw that the sun was beginning to set over the horizon and felt a little bad. Just as he was about to ask the coach if he needed to stop, he saw the expression on Seiji's face.

"Take your time, this is the most important step." He stated, watching on intently.

Ken felt a warm sensation flow through him at the coach's sacrifice. He wasn't sure that he would be able to be as patient as the man in front of him, but that only made him respect the guy more.

Only after another 10 minutes did he finally begin to catch the feeling he was looking for again.

"Mmm, very good. You did well Ken." Seiji said, pausing the camera.

"Thanks coach. Sorry for taking up more of your time."

With the extra training and now Ken's one on one, it was already past 6pm. The fact that his coach was willing to stay back for so long just showed what kind of person he was.

"Don't mention it. The sooner you get back into form, the better our team will be for it." He responded with a grin.

"Tomorrow we'll work on the next 3 steps. Until then, make sure you continue your shoulder exercises."

"Yes sir!"

Seiji shook his head and let out a chuckle. Ever since the guy had returned from the World Cup, he would often respond like this, making him feel like an army officer.

"Dismissed." He replied with a grin.

With that, Ken made his way home, not arriving until after 7pm.

"I'm home."

"Kenny, could you come here please."

His mother called out as he entered the door, not even greeting him like she usually would. It was at this moment that he knew his parents were prepared to fill him in on what was happening.

Originally he was a little taken aback. He thought that they would wait at least a week before getting him involved.

He peered his head around the corner and saw his mother and father both at the table, waiting for him. His father looked to be in a similar state as yesterday, though he seemed to have accepted his fate.

"Hey Ken, take a seat." Chris said, his features softening a little.

"Okay."

Ken took a seat across from them. If he didn't know any better, he might think that he was in trouble thanks to the atmosphere.

As if sensing this, Yuki spoke up. "Don't worry, you're not in trouble. We just need to tell you something."

Ken nodded in response, waiting for his father to speak.

"We originally weren't going to tell you anything, but you're part of this family and are almost an adult. I don't like keeping secrets, especially from the one's I love." Chris stated, his expression serious.

"We've run into some trouble with Daichi's biological mother. She threatened me a few weeks ago saying she was going to press charges for extortion and intimidation if we didn't annul the adoption of Daichi."

At this revelation, Ken's face morphed. While he had known that Daichi's mother spread rumors, he had not known this.

Seeing his son's reaction, Chris felt rather sad. He didn't want Ken thinking that it was his fault they were in this position, especially since it had nothing to do with him.

Before he could respond, Chris continued.

"Somehow, she managed to spread a rumor to the Yokohama Warriors sponsor. They in turn threatened to pull out their funding unless I was removed from my position in the organization." He paused, letting out a deep sigh.

"So they let me go yesterday..."

Ken nodded slowly, showing his father that he was following along. He wanted to wait until Chris was done before bringing to light the information that he knew.

Ken was silent for a while, though he felt a little guilty.

"I actually heard you guys talking last night..." Ken admitted, shrinking a little.

However, his parents didn't seem mad at all which was surprising to him. He thought they might admonish him, but they seemed too depressed to really care about it.

Seeing this, he continued. "Why did Daichi's mother go so far? Didn't she sign away her parental rights?" Ken asked, trying to gauge what his father knew.

Chris shook his head, "I don't know. Maybe she had a change of heart? Though I doubt it."

He looked towards his mother, but she seemed just as lost as his father. It seemed that they hadn't come up with a plan on the next steps to take.

"I did some research last night..." Ken stated, causing both his mother and father to look at him oddly.

Ken took a deep breath and began to explain what he had found the night before. He detailed the relationship between BeNA mobile games and Suzuki corporation before retelling his theory about Daichi's family.

Yuki's eyes widened as she tried to keep up with the words. She looked at her husband who just silently listened, his full focus on his sons words.

At the end, he frowned. He too had seen Tetsuhiro act weirdly towards Daichi at the World Cup closing ceremony. But something didn't seem to make sense.

"That's the bastard who's been messing with my family!?" Chris's expression darkened, his face taking on a scary light.

Ken shuddered. He'd never seen his father this angry before in his entire life.

It seemed his reverse scale had been touched.

Yet instead of losing control, Chris internalized his anger. There was no point in losing his cool in front of his family, they were on his side after all.

After a few moment's silence, Yuki spoke up.

"Why now though? Wouldn't the Suzuki family have taken in Daichi's mother after his fathers demise, especially if they knew she was pregnant."

"..."

"Unless... They didn't know she was pregnant?" He muttered.

Chris's eyes widened as he spoke the words aloud. The final puzzle piece seemed to slot into place, allowing them to see the full picture.

"So we can assume that Tetsuhiro only found out about Daichi at the World Cup and learned that we had adopted him. It sounds like he then used Sachiko as a pawn to deal with me..."

Ken frowned.

"But I don't understand... If he wanted a relationship with Daichi, why didn't he just reach out? Why was he targeting us when we were the one who saved him from Daichi's abusive mom?"

He felt it was unfair that such person could toy with their lives on their own whim.

"I don't know. Chances are he'll be the one to reach out to me soon and state his demands, likely using my career as leverage." Chris stated calmly, though his eyes still held repressed anger.

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

Chapter 503 - 503: Emotions (1)

Ken, Chris and Yuki sat around the dining table in silence, their minds still reeling from the scandal they had just uncovered. Never in their wildest dreams would they have thought Daichi's past was so crazy.

Not even Daichi was aware of his circumstances, yet all 3 of them knew.

"What do we do now?" Yuki asked, breaking the silence.

"We should tell Daichi." Ken said. He wasn't sure how his brother would react, but he didn't want to hide anything from him, not anymore.

Chris's expression changed a few times, as if he didn't agree with the idea.

"If we tell your brother what has happened, what do you think he'll do?" Chris asked seriously.

If Daichi found out that Chris had lost his job because he'd adopted him, there's no way he wouldn't feel responsible. It could also lead to him reaching out to Tetsuhiro and trying to sacrifice himself to save his family.

That's just the kind of person Daichi was.

Ken knew exactly what his father was insinuating and instinctively understood that he was right. Although it left a bad taste in his mouth, he could only agree right now.

"This is only temporary though. Daichi deserves to know what's happened, he's as much a part of this family as all of us." Ken stated, putting his foot down.

Both Chris and Yuki nodded, while the former felt a sense of pride welling from within. His son had truly matured and turned into an amazing big brother.

However, his expression changed once more as he let out a sigh.

"I'm going to have to work on my resume. I doubt I'll be able to get a job at a decent company, let alone a baseball club with the CEO of Suzuki Corporation breathing down my neck." Chris stated.

"It's okay honey, we'll work it out. I can pick up some work as well and share the load." Yuki said, placing her hand on his shoulder, comforting him.

Chris looked at her with slight sadness in his eyes. Since he'd been on a good wage for so many years, Yuki had not had to work once she'd had Ken. Her having to go back into the workforce made it feel like he'd failed his family.

Seeing his father's expression, Ken felt a lump in his throat.

"Ah, I forgot to mention..." Ken said, breaking up the atmosphere.

...

"EH!? Your Grandpa is coming here?" Chris shouted, not believing his ears.

"Umm, yeah. I called him last night after I found out about Tatsuhiro. I was going to tell you this afternoon, but I got too caught up and forgot." Ken admitted, feeling a little embarrassed.

Chris massaged his temples, feeling a little helpless.

It wasn't that he didn't want to see his father, just that he didn't want the man to see him in such a state. Ever since his mother died, he had seen the light fade from his dad's eyes.

It was at that point that he vowed to never make trouble for him. That's why he would never accept any hand outs from his father, no matter what kind of state he was in at the time.

"You really shouldn't have done that." Chris muttered, feeling his emotions in turmoil.

These words made Ken frown in response.

Ken was about to speak up, however his mother placed her hand across the table onto his own, trying to calm him down.

He looked at his mother and shook his head. While he was fine with holding his tongue at other times, he wouldn't do it tonight.

"Dad... You're being a hypocrite." Ken said, his voice firm.

Yet upon seeing his father slowly raise his head and look at him sternly, Ken felt a shudder. But he quickly puffed out his chest and found his backbone.

"What did you just say?" The repressed rage in Chris's voice spoke volumes of how much self control he had.

"Honey, he didn't mea—"

"I said you're being a hypocrite." Ken said, interrupting his mother.

Yuki sent him a look of shock, not expecting him to double down. Before she could calm her husband, Ken had once again disrespected his father.

"Oho? Why don't you enlighten me."

The deep tone and menacing expression on Chris's face was enough to make anyone feel a sense of danger, yet Ken had already thrown the first stone.

"You chastise me for holding secrets, saying that I should rely on you when it all gets too much to handle. You preach and preach, but when you're in trouble you won't reach out to your own father."

His voice was calm and his tone even, lacking the usual respect that he would show his father. As his words washed over the room, it was met with silence.

Until...

SMACK!

"THAT'S BECAUSE YOU ARE A CHILD! You are MY responsibility." Chris yelled, slamming the table and getting to his feet.

Ken managed to stay composed at the outburst. This was the first time that he'd heard his father raise his voice, displaying his anger for all to see.

But he didn't back down.

"So are you saying that I shouldn't reach out to you when I'm an adult? As soon as I turn 18 will you no longer support me?" Ken asked, his volume remaining the same.

The red hot anger that erupted from Chris quickly receded. He looked at his son who was calmly responding to him without an iota of fear in his expression.

He suddenly felt a wave of exhaustion wash over him, forcing him to slowly sit back down into his chair.

"You're right... I am a hypocrite." Chris admitted, his earlier anger nowhere to be seen. All that was left was helplessness.

At this point, Ken felt that his victory was not important. Without a word, he got up from his chair and walked over to his father, standing in front of him.

Yuki watched on nervously, not knowing what was about to happen.

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

Chapter 504 - 504: Emotions (2)

Yet in the next moment, Ken leaned forward and wrapped his arms around his father tightly. Instantly, Yuki's hand moved up to her mouth as tears began to well up in her eyes.

Chris was full of shock as he felt his son's strong arms wrap around him. He stood up and hugged him back, feeling his emotions bubbling to the surface.

He just wanted to be a good father to his kids and a good husband to his wife.

"It's okay to ask for help Dad... We all look out for each other okay?" Ken said, patting his father on the back.

Hearing these words from his son seemed to spark something within Chris, causing him to get choked up. He was embarrassed, but he was also filled with pride for the son that he had raised.

"Mmm."

"Morning..." Yuki said, seeing him come down the stairs.

She was clutching her coffee with both hands and taking sips, part of her morning ritual. They often met like this in the mornings before Ken's workout.

Ken let out a long yawn, before responding with a few grunts.

Ever since this whole situation happened, he'd been having a hard time falling asleep at night. This in addition to not having Mika's sleep protocol made everything even worse.

'Just 5 more months...' He thought, heading towards the door.

"Run..." Ken mumbled, receiving an acknowledgment from his mother.

He returned over an hour later, dripping with sweat, yet he felt invigorated. Ken had continued to push his new limits, trying to make a breakthrough once again, though he knew it would take more than just a few days to complete.

His mother was already in the kitchen, returning to her chirpy self.

"How was your run Kenny?" She chimed, flashing him a smile.

"Good thanks. I'm gonna go shower." He replied, heading towards the bathroom.

Yuki scrunched her nose as Ken walked past, smelling the scent of his hard work.

Ken returned to the kitchen after getting ready, only to see his mother pointing back up the stairs.

"Put some deodorant on..." She ordered.

"But I already did."

However, she wouldn't take such an answer, forcing him back upstairs.

It wasn't that Ken smelled bad, just that he would sweat a lot. Things were a little better in winter, but it was currently the start of Autumn, meaning the heat had yet to fully dissipate.

"Where's Dad?" Ken asked, looking around the place.

"He's still sleeping. It seems like the last few days have really taken a toll on him."

His mother's face showed a trace of worry, but she quickly snapped out of it and sent him a soft smile.

"Have some breakfast and don't forget your lunch." She stated, gesturing towards the dining table full of food.

"Thanks Mom."

After a filling meal, Ken sat back in his chair and massaged his stomach. He hoped they would still be able to afford to feed him with the amount of calories he needed to consume with all the extra training.

He quickly threw the thought out of his mind and grabbed the lunch his Mom handed him before heading out the door.

"I'm off."

"Take care."

With that, Ken made his way to the train station on his way to school. His thoughts were preoccupied with last night's discussion.

It truly was an emotional night for all of them, but he felt that they were stronger as a family because of it. Sometimes there needs to be discourse in order for everyone to come closer together.

The only thing that he was still unhappy with was keeping everything a secret from Daichi. Part of him understood what his father was saying, but it just didn't sit right.

Ken let out a sigh, "I guess we'll see what Grandpa says..." He muttered.

Around an hour later, Chris woke up from his sleep in and tottered into the dining room. Last night was the longest sleep he'd had in many years, making his body quite stiff and sore.

"Hi honey, how are you feeling?"

Yuki's expression brightened as she saw her husband walk into the room. She walked forward and planted a kiss on his cheek.

"Mmm, I'm good." He responded before seeing the breakfast on the table.

He walked over and took a seat, only for Yuki to place a fresh coffee on the table in front of him.

"Thank you dear."

For a fraction of a moment, Chris felt like he could get used to this treatment staying at home everyday. However, he quickly let out a self deprecating laugh and shook his head.

If he didn't go out and work, they wouldn't be able to afford to live like this anyway.

Yuki joined her husband at the table and they ate together in silence for a while, enjoying each others company.

While they were in a bad predicament, there was a part of her that was looking forward to spending more time with her husband. For so many years Chris would work and travel, yet now she had him all to herself.

"Dad will be at the airport tonight." Chris said in the midst of eating.

"Mmm. Are you okay about it?" Yuki asked, her voice filled with concern.

Unlike Ken, she had more insight into her husband's reasons for not wanting to burden his father. Since they had been married for almost 16 years, it made sense that she would know such things.

"Heh..."

Chris couldn't help but let out a chuckle in response, his face turning up into a smile.

"He's really grown huh? Did you see him stand up to me last night?" He asked.

Yuki tilted her head in question, not expecting this kind of reaction from her husband. Usually men would not take such things lightly, yet Chris was able to do so and even accept his own flaws.

This was one of the many reasons that she fell in love with this man.

"Mmm. He's really turning into a great man... Just like his father." Yuki said with a bright smile.

Chris turned to his wife and couldn't help but grin.

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

Chapter 505 - 505: Old and Wise (1)

Ken once again stayed back after practice to work on his form with Coach Hanada. He was told to repeat the same actions as yesterday, until the coach was satisfied with his movements.

It took around 20 minutes until Ken was consistently able to perform the action, after which Seiji nodded in satisfaction.

"We'll now focus on the next aspects of your pitching form. Now that you're properly performing your wind up and stride, you need to work on arm acceleration, deceleration and follow through." He explained.

Ken nodded, stepping down since he expected the coach to take the mound.

"Nope, I want you to pitch like you normally would using your new wind up and stride." Seiji said with a grin, throwing him a baseball.

"Oh... Okay." Ken replied, not expecting the green light to pitch so soon.

There was a surge of excitement that swept through him as he gripped the ball tightly. These past 6 weeks of not pitching had started to wear on him, though he was a little nervous.

Was all of this training going to translate to results? Or would they all be for naught.

'There's only one way to find out...!' He thought

Ken got into position and swung his leg up before kicking off the pitchers plate and taking a large stride down the mound. His hips were open, yet his body was still facing towards 3rd base.

He felt his whole body filled with power as he cocked his arm and threw it out like a whip past his head.

As he threw, his body pivoted, placing all of his weight onto his front foot.

With the added swing of his arm, Ken didn't expect his body to rotate so much and was not expecting such a result. He quickly lost his balance and tumbled to the ground.

"Pfft."

Seiji quickly held back his laugh as he saw the teen fall into the dirt. He had to admit that just witnessing this scene was enough to make his overtime worth it at this point.

Yet his amusement didn't last long as he saw the number flash upon the speedometer.

'94mph!?'

The coach's mouth pried open as he stared at the number, almost not believing his eyes. Despite the obvious imbalance in Ken's form, he was still able to throw at such a speed.

Ken quickly got to his feet and brushed the dirt off of him, feeling slightly embarrassed.

He half expected to see his coach in a fit of laughter, yet as he glanced at the figure, he saw what resembled a pelican with its giant mouth wide open.

"What is it?" Ken asked, feeling a hint of trepidation.

He quickly looked over himself once more, making sure that he hadn't injured himself or anything. Only after checking thoroughly did he let out a sigh of relief.

"Ahem... Not bad, but you're obviously not used to the torque you can now generate. Do it again, but this time make sure you engage your core muscles and lift your back leg during your follow through."

Seiji listed off a bunch of feedback, his eyes dancing with interest.

"Just remember, from start to finish it needs to be one fluid motion."

Ken nodded in understanding before returning to his position. He believed that he could make the right modifications to pitch successfully this time.

After taking a deep breath, he moved into action.

WHOOOSH

Ken performed the steps well, planting his foot and lifting his back leg as he followed through. This time he didn't lose his balance, though everything still felt a little foreign to him.

The coach looked at the speed of the pitch and nodded in satisfaction.

He walked up to the mound and told Ken to pitch in slow motion.

"Hmm? Okay..."

Ken did as he was told, yet it was a lot harder than he expected.

After seeing the form, Seiji began to stroke the stubble on his chin in thought.

"Get into your stride for me." He stated.

As Ken did so, the coach moved forward and grabbed Ken's arm with his left hand and pointed to his shoulder.

"It's still closed off here." Seiji stated.

Without waiting for a response, he moved Ken's arm a little further away from his body.

"Try pitching here, just don't put too much arm strength into this next one."

With that he moved back and gestured for Ken to continue.

Ken took note of where the coach had placed his arm and did a few practice runs. Instantly he could tell that he was activating more of his shoulder with the throw, though it felt a little tighter than usual.

With his mind set, Ken began his pitch.

"Ah..."

He did as he was told, yet the ball was far from where he was aiming, causing him to redden a little from embarrassment.

However, Seiji didn't seem to mind.

"Again."

...

"Again."

...

"Again!"

A couple of hours later, Ken finally arrived home after a long training session with his coach. His entire arm was feeling fatigued, something that he wasn't used to after being the beneficiary of his skill "Fatigue Management" for so long.

However, he was wearing a smile on his face.

While his pitching still wasn't up to scratch, just the fact he was able to throw a 94mph fastball showed that the coach's methods were working.

Ken arrived at his house and opened the door. Just as he was about to call out to his mother, he saw an additional large pair of shoes at the threshold.

"Grandpa!?"

Instantly Ken's face lit up as he made the connection in his mind. He quickly took off his shoes and dropped his bag, running into the house and seeing everyone sitting at the dining table.

Everyone looked in Ken's direction and saw the sweat stains and dirt on his baseball uniform. While his mother turned her nose up at the sight, there was one pair of eyes that looked joyful.

"Welcome home Ken."

In one fluid motion not befitting his age, the old man stood up and wrapped his arms around Ken, not caring about how dirty he was.

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

Chapter 506 - 506: Old and Wise (2)

Yuki began to clear the table after everyone had finished dinner. While the atmosphere had been harmonious and filled with laughter and cheer, there were a few undertones, making it feel like there was an elephant in the room.

Yet no one wanted to be the first person to address this, since they knew the whole dynamic would change afterwards.

There was nothing wrong with wanting to enjoy themselves before the illusion was shattered.

Now that dinner had ended, there was no excuse for what came next.

"So, Ken filled me in on some details on the phone the other night." Mark said, his tone turning serious.

Since his native language was English, everyone chose to speak as such.

"There's been some updates since then." Chris stated.

He began to explain the connection between Tetsuhiro and Daichi's mother, explaining their current theory to his father. He made sure to remind him that nothing was confirmed, not wanting to skew his opinions.

"Hmm..."

Mark was silent for a while, processing the information he just heard.

No one interrupted him, choosing to wait for him to get up to speed.

"I'd say your theory would be pretty close, based on the information that you have. It wouldn't make sense for that woman to be able to spread rumors through the sponsors without some help." He stated matter-of-factly.

"But, we can't be certain just yet." Mark added shortly after.

"If we assume that Tetsuhiro is indeed Daichi's uncle, then his goal should be to remove him from our family."

Both Ken and Chris's eyes widened, but they remained silent. S

"Chances are, he will reach out to you after enough time has passed." He said, looking towards Chris and continuing, "Once you've tried and failed to find work for long enough, he'll swoop in and make his intentions known."

"So he plans to make Dad desperate and force him to give up Daichi?" Ken added, his blood turning cold.

"Mmm."

The dining room was silent for a while as everyone pondered Mark's words.

Ken frowned, "But even if Daichi leaves the family, there's no way that he'll accept Tetsuhiro... Not if he knows what he did to Dad."

But after he said the words, Ken knew that it wouldn't play out like that.

"He'll just blackmail Chris into not telling Daichi." Mark stated.

His words caused the atmosphere to get heavy as everyone sat in silence.

Ken felt his heart ache at the prospect of his brother being driven out of the family without knowing why. Daichi's fake smiling expression from his past life appeared in his mind at that moment.

He grit his teeth and clenched his fists, feeling a sense of helplessness overcome him. Ken couldn't ask his father to make such a sacrifice, not when he had sacrificed so much for them already.

'Once again I'm useless...' Ken said in his heart.

SLAM

"Over my dead body!" Chris stated, his face turned up in anger.

Ken jumped in fright, looking at his father with shock.

Mark looked at his son with a grin on his face, feeling a wave of pride. If his son had chosen to give up on his family, he would have been quite upset.

"Good, very good. It seems like I raised you right after all." Mark said, sending a wink to Ken who was still in shock.

"So, the next step is to find a way to survive until Daichi turns 18. If I remember correctly, it's only about 5 months away right?"

"Mmm. Once he turns 18 he'll be an adult and all of this should stop." Chris affirmed, before sitting back in his chair.

As for how he would survive on no income for 5 months, even he didn't know how he would be able to make it work.

Although Ken was feeling happy that his father was willing to sacrifice himself for Daichi, this point threw cold water over that feeling.

"Well, lucky old Grandpa is here." Mark said with a grin. He was like a child as his leg began to bounce under the table.

"I've got a few investment properties back home that I can sell to liquefy some cash. It should be able to last you around 3 years as long as you don't go on any spending sprees."

CLANK

Yuki who was trying to make herself scarce by cleaning in the kitchen, suddenly dropped a pot in the sink after hearing her father-in-law's words. She turned around to face him, tears already forming in her eyes.

"Dad no, I can't accept such a thing." Chris said. While he sounded thankful, there was a stubborn pride behind his words that wouldn't allow him to receive such a hand out.

Mark seemed to expect such a thing since he was still grinning widely.

"That's alright, I'm not giving it to you." He stated, sending Ken another wink.

"What do you mean?" This time Yuki approached him from the Kitchen, not understanding his words. If perhaps he made it seem like a loan instead, her husband might be able to swallow his pride and take it.

"Well, I'll be sending it to Ken of course." Mark continued to smile, feeling very proud of himself.

"EH!?"

Everyone in the dining room suddenly exclaimed at the same time, not expecting such a response from the old man. All of a sudden, his parent's eyes were on Ken who was just as shocked as them.

"Grandpa... I don't even have a bank account." He admitted.

Since he'd never had to work in this life, Ken hadn't needed to open an account just yet. He would just receive cash from his parents if he needed to purchase anything.

This only elicited a laugh from the old man as he found this very amusing.

Chris only frowned, not able to retort to his father's words. He couldn't forbid Ken from receiving the money, if he did it would go against his values.

After everyone finally settled down, Mark sat back in his chair and let out a small sigh.

"Tell Daichi to come back home this weekend. We can't hide something like this from him." Mark said.

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

Chapter 507 - 507: Bad News (1)

"Good."

Tetsuhiro hung up his phone and placed it on the table, leaning back in his leather chair. He stared out the window, looking down at the Tokyo metropolis. From his vantage point, he could see the buildings stretch out into the distance.

His eyes were stern, yet he looked rather tired.

"I'm sorry Daichi, but you'll have to suffer for a while..." He muttered.

As he was deep in thought, he heard the sound of a knock on his office door.

"Mr. Suzuki, there's a Mrs. Koga here to see you. She says she has an appointment?"

The woman looked rather afraid to interrupt the man, however thankfully he seemed to be in a decent mood this time.

"Let her in." He stated.

A few moments later, Sachiko arrived into the office wearing a dress that made her stand out in an office environment. Her assets were on display, though the man seemed uninterested in her body.

Without waiting for an invitation, she took a seat in one of the comfy chairs in front of the desk before leaning back and crossing her legs.

"I did what you asked." She stated nonchalantly.

"Yes, I just got word. Very good." Tetsuhiro said simply, swinging his chair and facing her.

As Sachiko met his gaze, she couldn't help but feel a sense of oppression. She could feel the intense disdain behind the man's eyes as he looked at her with barely hidden disgust.

Sachiko could tell that he would discard her in an instant if it wasn't for her son. Her instinct built up from years of working within shady establishments warned her not to push the man in front of her.

"I... I just came along to collect your end of the bargain." She said, trying to remain calm.

A ferocious light flickered past Tetsuhiro's eyes for a moment, causing her to shiver subconsciously. For a moment, it felt like she was being stared at by a wild beast, capable of crushing her within an instant.

Thankfully, the feeling disappeared a moment later. Yet Sachiko trusted her instincts.

'This man is dangerous...'

Tetsuhiro slowly stood up from his desk without a word, moving towards one of the cupboards at the edge of his office.

Sachiko watched as he opened the door, hearing a few beeps from what she assumed was a safe.

A few moments later, Tetsuhiro returned with some large wads of cash. He sent a glance to the woman on the chair before throwing it onto his desk, as if it meant nothing to him.

"20 million yen. Take it and see yourself out."

With that, he sat back down on his chair and faced the window.

Feeling that the man's patience was wearing thin, Sachiko swiftly got up from her chair and grabbed the money spread out on the desk. In anticipation for this payday, she'd brought a large purse.

However, with the vast amount of money in front of her, she struggled to fit it all into the bag.

"Tch."

Sachiko almost jumped in fright as she heard the man click his tongue. She quickly grabbed the remaining money and stashed it in her bra before quickly leaving the office before the man changed his mind.

It wasn't until she got into the elevator that she breathed out a sigh of relief. Dealing with the powerful man had shaved a few years off her lifespan.

Back in the office, Tetsuhiro waited for a few minutes before reaching for his phone and dialing a number.

"She's just left."

Without waiting for a response, he ended the call and placed the phone back down on the table. He let out a small sigh before turning his attention back to his computer.

Ken spent the rest of the week completing his form training with Coach Hanada after club practice. He was really starting to see some results, giving him even more motivation to continue.

His Grandpa even commented on how much his form had improved after Ken had demonstrated for him. It was a given that Mark would be invested in Ken's progress, since he was the one who pointed out the flaws to begin with.

"When will Daichi be here?" Ken asked his parents as they once again sat around the dining table.

"He should be here at any moment." Yuki answered with a soft smile.

Knock Knock Knock

"Ah, that must be him!" Ken exclaimed, getting up from his seat swiftly and heading towards the door.

"Dai—"

However, as Ken opened the door, he saw two policeman, one male and one female waiting outside.

"Is this the Takagi residence?" The male officer asked, his tone serious.

"Y-Yes."

For some reason, Ken felt a pit of dread in his stomach. His thoughts moved to his brother who had yet to arrive home just yet, causing his anxiety levels to rise.

"Is this the current residence of Daichi Takagi?"

Ken felt his strength leave his body, fearing the worst.

"Hello? What is this about?" Chris asked, appearing behind his son with a concerned expression.

"Sir, is this the residence of Daichi Takagi?" The male officer repeated.

Chris was able to remain calm and answer affirmatively, though his nervousness was visible.

"Dad? What's going on? Why are their policeman here?" A voice called out from behind the officers, the breath coming out raggedly.

"Daichi!?"

Ken felt his spirits surge in that moment. If it weren't for the officers blocking him, he would have run out and embraced his brother in that instant.

At the mention of the person they were looking for, the officers turned their attention to Daichi who was behind them.

"Can I go inside?" Daichi asked, his face filled with confusion. He looked at Ken and his father, though they seemed just as confused as him.

"Are you Daichi? The son of Sachiko Koga?" The female officer queried him.

Daichi's face stiffened as he answered, "She's my biological mother yes..."

"We have some bad news I'm afraid. Your mother was the victim of a robbery and has tragically lost her life. I'm sorry."

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

Chapter 508 - 508: Bad News (2)

Daichi's stiff expression changed to one of shock as he heard the news. His bag which was slung over his shoulder suddenly dropped onto the ground before he fell to his knees.

Ken quickly ran forward and embraced his brother, getting down to his level and holding him tightly.

"I'm sorry bro..."

While the two brother embraced, Chris continued to speak to the officer's and got whatever details they had. After a few minutes they left the vicinity, leaving the house.

Daichi was in too much shock to realize what was happening in that moment. It took a lot of coaxing, but he eventually made his way into the house in a daze.

Mark and Yuki were filled in by Chris before the boys made it inside. Yuki took the news terribly, while Mark turned solemn. This was not something they were expecting at all.

When Ken brought Daichi in, Yuki came over and gave him a big hug, doing her best to comfort him. She didn't ask for a response, merely showing her love and support in whatever way she could.

"Ken, why don't you take Daichi to his room." Chris said, giving him a look.

Ken nodded, "Come on bro, let's take your stuff upstairs." He said coaxingly.

Daichi merely followed along silently into the room.

Once they arrived, Daichi listlessly sat down onto the floor and held his head in his hands. It was clear that he was out of sorts.

"Are you okay man?" Ken didn't want to put any pressure on his brother, but he felt like he needed to show his concern.

"I—I don't know." Daichi admitted, his thoughts in turmoil.

Ken slunk down to the ground next to Daichi and placed his arm around his shoulders, pulling him closer.

"I'm sorry man..."

There was a stretch of silence between the two, yet no one tried to fill it. Ken kept physical contact with his brother, reminding him that he was there for him.

After a while, Daichi began to speak up.

"She was a horrible mother, the complete opposite of our Mom... But she didn't deserve to die." He said softly, clenching his fists tightly.

Ken didn't respond. It wasn't his place to comment.

Daichi took a deep breath and lowered his head before continuing softly.

"I wanted to prove to her that I could be something..."

"But now I'll never get that chance."

After feeling the hurt in his voice, Ken couldn't help but pull him tighter. Daichi was probably dealing with a lot of mixed emotions right now, something that he couldn't imagine.

Almost 10 minutes of silence later, Daichi let out a big sigh and stood up, shrugging Ken's arm from his shoulder.

"I'm okay now." He stated, though he still seemed a bit emotional.

"Did you want some time alone? I can tell Mom, Dad and Grandpa that you're not feeling well." Ken offered, getting to his feet.

"Grandpa's here?" Daichi asked with surprise. He had been in such a daze that he didn't even see his Grandfather on his way past.

"Mmm..." Ken felt a little torn. The reason his Grandfather was here was not just for a mere visit. He wasn't sure if Daichi was in the right frame of mind to hear about what had happened.

Daichi seemed to sense Ken's hesitation, even noting the odd expression on his face.

"You're hiding something." He said, though it was more of a statement rather than an accusation.

Ken didn't want to lie to Daichi, especially in his vulnerable state. The last thing he wanted was for him to feel isolated within his own family, especially after what just happened.

"You're right. We told you to come home so we can discuss it with you." Ken said, nodding slowly.

Daichi felt a hint of apprehension. He wanted to know, but part of him felt like he didn't want to hear what they had to say.

"Is it bad?" He asked softly.

Ken's expression faltered a little, but he answered truthfully.

"It's not great, but it's not something that we can't handle as a family." He stated.

Daichi nodded. He trusted his brother after all.

"Alright, let's go downstairs." He said, heading for the door.

Ken placed his hand on Daichi's shoulder, stopping him in place.

"Are you sure? We can always talk about this later."

"I'm fine." He said, brushing Ken's hand off.

With that, he left the room and descended the stairs, garnering everyone's attention.

"Daichi what are you doing? I was going to bring you dinner up in your room." Yuki spoke out with concern.

"I'm fine now." He responded, causing Chris to let out a frown.

"Daichi, I think you should g—"

"Don't worry Chris, he can handle it." Mark said, cutting his son off.

Daichi sent a thankful glance to his Grandfather and took a seat at the table, followed by Ken. There was a few moments of silence before Daichi got right to the point.

"Alright, what is it that you guys have to tell me?" He asked.

Both Yuki and Chris looked at each other, both filled with some worry and trepidation. This would be hard enough news without the untimely demise of Daichi's biological mother, yet it added a layer of complexity to it.

Though his mother and father were hesitating, Ken was resolute. He spoke up, going into detail of what had happened in the past few weeks, sparing no detail.

By the end of the explanation, Daichi sat in silence. His mind was almost numb by this point, though his heart ached.

'Why?'

That was the only question in his mind.

When he heard that his mother had wanted him back, he felt a part of him that was once dead, begin to show signs of life. It was only for a fleeting moment, but his emotions stirred.

Yet upon hearing that it was Tetsuhiro who orchestrated everything, anger filled him.

How could someone play with his life like that?

"There's also a good chance that this man is behind the murder of your mother." Mark said, causing both Ken and Daichi's eyes to widen in shock.

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

Chapter 509 - 509: Wake (1)

In the back room of a club, 4 individuals sat around a table in silence. Compared to the last time that they gathered, each man looked much wearier, sporting additional scars.

The atmosphere was tense, as if they were all waiting for something, or someone.

In the next moment, the door to the room opened, revealing an older figure dressed in a traditional Kimono. It was black and gray, sporting gold trimming which hinted at his status.

"Boss."

Everyone at the table got up from their chairs, bowing towards the older man as he made his way towards them.

"Sit..." His voice gave away his weariness, though no one took it as a sign of weakness.

As he sat at the head of the table, everybody waited patiently, not daring to speak.

"It's good to see you all again." He stated, some warmth returning to his tone.

"Tsukasa, Shin, Tomoya, Naoki. It's been a tough year for us all."

The four figures nodded, each wearing a complex expression. Each of the men had lost people, yet somehow they had all managed to survive until today.

There were no additional words that needed to be spoken, everyone present was familiar with the sacrifices that were made to keep their position in the underground.

"Boss, what has happened for you to gather us like this? Are we at risk once again?" Tsukasa asked, his body stiff.

"Mmm..."

At this acknowledgment, the 4 figures all reacted in a similar fashion. They had believed that the rival gang from Hokkaido had retreated after failing to integrate themselves into Tokyo.

Or perhaps they hoped this was the case.

Tomoya's face turned up in a frown. He'd bolstered the security watching over his family for the past 12 months, keeping both his sons and his wife under constant surveillance.

Just when he thought it was all over, he'd been summoned here.

"Have we been attacked?" Tomoya asked, his expression darkening.

"Not directly." The boss stated, letting out a sigh.

"Last night, the Hokori family carried out an assassination on our turf. They made no attempt to hide the body, even leaving evidence to lead the cops right to us." He said gravely.

SLAM

"Those bastards!" Naoki shouted, slamming his fist on the table.

If it weren't for the amazing craftsmanship of the table, it likely would have split from the force of the blow.

Everyone was seething in anger after hearing of the Hokori family's dirty tricks. It was bad enough that they'd been trying to take over their turf over the past 12 months, yet now they had broken the unwritten rule.

Since they failed in their hostile takeover, it seemed that they'd resorted to involving law enforcement, jeopardizing their entire livelihood.

The atmosphere in the back room plummeted as the 4 figures ruminated over the news. Being under investigation by law enforcement would hinder their current operations, causing their businesses to stagnate.

It could be considered a low blow.

"So what do we do now?" Tsukasa asked, running his hand through his balding hair.

Fresh scars were visible on his arms, depicting the struggles he'd been enduring over the past year.

"Well I assume we'll have to lay low." Shin answered, though his features were pulled into a frown. His hand gripped the handle of his katana, as if he was itching to draw it.

"Shin's right. However, by doing this, the Hokori family will also have to lay low with all this attention they've drummed up." Tomoya stated.

The boss nodded, satisfied that his lieutenants understood the impact of such a thing.

"Who did they assassinate?"

"Some 40 year old woman who was carrying a lot of cash. I think her name was Sachiko or something." The boss didn't seem too concerned about the woman's name.

Tomoya's face twitched for a moment before he let out a sigh.

"You knew her?" Shin asked curiously.

"Eh, she was a hostess who worked around the area. Honestly she was not worth the amount of trouble she brought." He stated, his face turning up in a wry smile.

"Even in death she only brought me more problems."

There was a few moments of silence before the boss spoke up, moving the conversation along.

"We'll need to cease some operations from this point forward. Use only our most loyal subjects for our larger businesses, we can't afford for anyone to become an informant."

"Yes Boss."

The 5 then began to go over the specifics, ensuring that everyone was on the same page.

Daichi was wearing a black suit as he stood in front of the mirror. His wide shoulders made his jacket look a little tight, yet it hugged his slim waist perfectly.

"You don't have to come." He said softly to the teen beside him.

"I already said I'm going with you. Plus, I already paid the rental fee for the suit." Ken chirped back, fixing his tie.

"How come you know how to tie a tie so well?" Daichi asked in wonder.

"Err... I just watched a youtube tutorial earlier, ha ha."

Ken felt that he almost gave away his biggest secret of being a regressor in that moment. Since he'd worked at an office job for a few years in his previous life, he wore a tie essentially every day for years.

Daichi had no reason to refute his words, since he wasn't that hung up on such a detail.

"Still, I never thought my first time wearing a suit would be for a wake." Daichi said, his tone a little vulnerable.

"Are we ready to go?" Chris asked, popping his head into the room.

Both boys turned around and saw their father in a perfectly fitted black suit and raised their eyes in surprise.

"You're coming too Dad?"

Daichi was shocked. He didn't expect his father would want to attend considering what she'd done to him before her untimely death.

"I may never forgive your biological mother for what she did to you, but she brought you into this world. For that, I'll be forever grateful." Chris said with a small smile.

Daichi felt a lump form in his throat, forcing his eyes to water up.

"Mmm." He nodded.

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

Chapter 510 - 510: Wake (2)

The trio left the house and arrived at the place, alighting from the car and heading towards the entrance of the building. It was a traditional Japanese home, mainly used for such events.

A man stood at the door bowed solemnly, handing the trio a set of prayer beads since it was a Buddhist ceremony.

"Please head around the side of the house." He said, gesturing with his hand.

Chris, Ken and Daichi did as they were told, heading in the direction he pointed. Soon enough they saw a gathering of a few people, all unfamiliar faces.

As they got closer, there was a modest flower arrangement inside the house, along with a portrait of Daichi's mother sitting atop it.

Seeing his mother's face, everything started to feel real for the first time. The young and vibrant woman in the portrait was nothing like the person he'd remembered throughout his life.

Perhaps at one point she was like this, yet after he was born, she became nothing more than a monster.

Daichi balled his fists and felt an intense hatred well up from within him. Without him noticing, he began to grind his teeth, seemingly about to burst.

"Hey, it's okay man. Dad and I are here." Ken said, wrapping his arm around his brother.

At his words, Daichi felt his anger diminish considerably. It was as if he was drenched with cold water all of a sudden, putting a stop to his bubbling emotions.

"Please take a seat for the ceremony." A woman said, gesturing for the guests to come inside.

Daichi, Ken and Chris were the only people who took a seat in the front row, a spot usually reserved for direct family members of the deceased. The 10 or so others sat in their own groups and waited for the ceremony to begin.

A Buddhist priest stood in front of the arrangement and began to chant a sutra.

Soon enough, Daichi was invited up to burn an incense for his deceased mother, something that he had been dreading. Initially he had refused, but after some support from both his father and brother, he decided to do so.

Since he was the only family member, Daichi was the only one who ended up burning incense in front of the arrangement.

The rest of the guests had another area where they offered incense, right behind the seats of the family members, or in this case, Daichi.

Once this had been completed, the guests moved forward and said their goodbyes. Many were carrying a black or silver envelope, handing it to the host before returning to their seats.

These were the opposite of the red envelopes which were used for celebrations.

Tap Tap Tap

The sound of expensive leather shoes stepping towards the altar sounded out. As the man walked past the front row, Daichi was only able to see the perfectly tailored suit and wide shoulders.

He leaned forward towards the wake and said something inaudible before putting his hands together in prayer.

The figure produced a thick black envelope and handed it to the host of the ceremony. As he turned around, he flashed a brief look to Daichi, his gaze lingering for a few moments before he walked away.

A sense of familiarity filled Daichi as he saw the man, yet his mind was blank.

He turned around and was about to call out to the figure, but the Buddhist priest began to chant his sutra once more, not giving him the opportunity.

"What's wrong?" Ken asked, seeing his brother so agitated.

Daichi was pale, yet his face quickly began to turn red.

"That was him..." He spat out between his teeth, barely controlling himself.

"What? Who!?"

"Tetsuhiro..."

At his words, Chris's face darkened. There was a large part of him that wanted to track the man down and teach him a lesson, but he knew that now was not the time.

Not only was it incredibly dangerous, they were currently at a wake. His actions could disturb the spirit and cause grave consequences for everyone present.

Although he may not believe in such things, he did not want to trample on the ceremony.

He placed a heavy hand on Daichi's shoulder in an attempt to calm him down.

"Not now son. There will be another time." He stated, his words containing his suppressed anger.

Only after hearing this from his father was Daichi able to collect himself and reign in his emotions. Seeing the likely mastermind behind the demise of his mother had almost caused him to lose his composure.

However, even though he had settled down outwardly, he was still seething on the inside.

'How dare you come to my mother's wake...'

The ceremony continued for a while longer until the Buddhist Priest finished chanting the remaining sutra. All of the guests were given gifts on their way out which was worth around half of what they had given as a condolence gift.

Once everyone else left, the host approached the trio who were still seated.

"Would you like to stay overnight and keep vigil with the deceased?" She asked, her tone respectful.

Both Ken and Chris looked at Daichi, awaiting his answer.

"No, it's fine." He stated simply.

"Very well."

She turned around and grabbed the black and silver envelopes from the table in front of the arrangement and handed it to Daichi directly.

He received them and bowed to the host before giving them to his father.

Since he was the one who paid for the wake and funeral arrangements, it made sense for him to receive the gifts. To do such a thing for him, even when he didn't have a job, it truly meant the world to Daichi.

Just as Chris was about to say he couldn't accept them, Ken sent him a stern look. This was not the time to reject such a thing, especially since doing so could make his brother feel worse.

Chris nodded, taking the envelopes from his son before leaving the venue with his boys.

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

Chapter 511 - 511: He's Back? (1)

Ken was one of the last to alight from the bus, wearing a stark expression. He'd been looking forward to this day ever since he'd embarked on his personal training with the coach.

Amongst the Yokohama team there were quite a few new faces since the 3rd years had already retired to focus on their entrance exams.

Tatsuya, Jun, Hiroki, Akira, none of them were present, making the team look completely different. This was a common occurrence in High School sporting clubs, requiring flexible coaching from the staff.

He could hear the excited chatter from the first years as they looked forward to playing their first game.

Since his system was not online, it was difficult to assess the potential of the first years, though it was rather obvious who stood on top.

Mamoru Sugimoto, the first year who had taken over as the relief pitcher. While similar in build to Ken, he was a few inches shorter and viewed Ken as someone he looked up to.

At least, that was before he joined the team.

"Coach, who is the starting pitcher today?" The teen asked, his eyes showing a hint of excitement.

Coach Hanada looked at him briefly and answered, "Ken will be starting, but I'll need you on standby."

"Tch."

Mamoru clicked his tongue in displeasure, his gaze moving over to Ken. His eyes showed clear disdain, as if he believed that Ken was not fit to start this game over him.

Of course Ken could feel the gaze of the first year, but all he did was send him a smile in response. He was aware that he'd not lived up to expectation over the past year, so he did not blame the youth for his attitude.

However, now was the time for him to emerge from the shadows once again and reclaim his position as the top pitcher in High School.

"Hehe."

Just thinking about it now filled Ken with sense of expectation.

"What are you smiling about..." Shiro asked, his intuition tingling.

"Oh nothing, I'm just a little excited for the game." Ken replied, sending him a wink.

"Hey, you haven't caught my pitches in a while right?" He added.

"Not since Koshien... Why?" Shiro had a bad premonition. Why would he be stating such a thing before they went into a match? Was he trying to tell him something?

"Ah, no reason. Just be a little cautious, I've changed some things up over the past few weeks." Ken pat Shiro on the shoulder and made his way past, leaving the teen questioning his life decisions.

The team made their way to the field and placed their equipment in the dugout.

Since it was the early rounds for the Fall Tournament, there was only around 50 spectators, mostly family members of the players. When compared to Koshien and Rodgers stadium where Ken had played, it was a drop in the ocean.

However, Ken seemed to be more nervous today than he was at those times.

In fact, when he thought back to his first Koshien and the U18 World Cup, it felt like he wasn't the one that played in those games. It was as if he was merely a spectator, despite living out the moment himself.

Before they went onto the field to warm up, Coach Hanada addressed the team.

"Okay, this will be our first game with our new lineup. The 3rd years are gone, which means it will be up to all of us to carry on their legacy."

The players nodded in response. The 2nd years were more invested in the coach's words since they had played with the 3rd years more.

"Ken, I'll be appointing you as the new Captain since Hiroki is no longer in the team." Seiji said, looking right at him.

"Eh?"

Ken hadn't expected the coach to announce such a thing, especially right before the game. If he was completely honest, he'd been focusing on himself a lot lately, particularly in training.

At first he felt like declining, but that would just undermine the coach in front of the team. He respected the man too much to do such a thing, so he decided to accept, at least for now.

Seeing he had no objections, the coach continued.

"We've beat Yokosuka plenty of times before, this time will be no different." He stated matter-of-factly.

After saying so, he read out the starting line up. There were no real surprises since the players were aware of their own skill levels. Yet that didn't mean there wasn't any dissatisfaction in the ranks.

"Mamoru...Are you okay?" Katsumi, another first year asked his friend who was wearing his emotions on his face.

Mamoru grumbled in response, clearly in a bad mood.

"Ken has already begun to decline, why would the coach waste his time? Wouldn't it make more sense for him to start me since I can already throw over 90mph fastballs?" He complained.

From Mamoru's perspective, he had the most potential compared to Ken. What's worse was that he had joined Yokohama specifically to learn from the High School prodigy, wanting to seriously improve his pitching.

Coincidentally, after he had arrived Ken was already without the system and had entered his slump, essentially causing Mamoru to lose any respect he held for the guy.

"Mamoru, come and help the team warm up." The coach shouted from the field after noticing the guy had not joined them.

"Y-Yes coach!"

Thankfully, he still respected the Head Coach.

While Ken could deal with the disrespect from his Junior, should Mamoru cross that line and act in such a way towards the coach, he wouldn't allow it.

After around 20 minutes, both teams had finished their warm ups and gathered on the field facing each other.

"Bow."

Shortly after, Ken walked over to the umpire and stood in front of the opposing Captain. With his 6'3 height and bulkier frame, Ken was an intimidating figure to face.

"Heads. Yokohama win the toss." The umpire said, pointing to Ken.

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

Chapter 512 - 512: He's Back? (2)

"We'll take the field first." Ken stated with a grin.

A few minutes later, Yokohama had taken the field with Ken standing on the mound. From the outside he looked relaxed and carefree, yet inwardly Ken was feeling the nerves begin to arise.

On this small stage with only 50 or so spectators, he was close to having a panic attack.

The thought of failure weighed heavily on his mind, causing his breathing to be slightly uneven.

'What is going on with me?' He thought, adjusting the uniform which felt like it was pressing down on his neck.

The game had not started, yet he was already feeling off.

'Why are you even trying?'

'You can't pitch properly without the system.'

The dark voices spoke up in a harsh tone, battering his already fragile emotional state.

With the addition of his family situation, Ken's psyche was already threatening to fracture under the pressure.

"You can start your warm up pitches now." The plate umpire called out to Ken, startling him slightly.

"S-Sure thing."

Mamoru sat on the bench, letting out a groan. He could see Ken stumbling up on the mound and instantly felt his anger begin to rise.

'What kind of Captain looks scared on the mound?' He thought, his frustration mounting.

Pah

Ken began to warm up his arm, trying to shake off the negative feelings. He had been excited before the match, even exuding some level of confidence.

Yet standing upon the mound with his teammates behind him made him feel vulnerable and exposed.

After around 10 throws, he nodded to the plate umpire to begin the game.

"Play ball!"

At the umpire's words, a few spectators yelled out support to the first batter. He was rather short, but he looked agile.

Ken watched him slowly walk into the batter's box before taking a deep breath.

'Just think about your training...!' He said inwardly, trying to focus.

Ken closed his eyes, honing his focus and trying to drown out the voice of doubt echoing in his mind.

In the next moment, his eyes snapped open.

Ken's leg lifted as he clutched his glove towards his chest. In one swift and fluid movement, he bent his back leg and strode forward with power.

Dirt was kicked up as his foot planted, but the rest had yet to come.

Like a whirlwind, Ken twisted his body, forcing all of his weight on his lead leg as his arm whipped through the air.

PAH!

'W-What the hell!?'

The lead-off batter for Yokosuka exclaimed inwardly, not believing what he had just witnessed.

It wasn't just him.

Shiro felt pins and needles in his hand instantly, yet his wide eyes were staring at the figure on the mound in shock.

"S-Strike!"

Finally, the umpire made the call after a short lapse.

"That's it!" Seiji exclaimed, pumping his fist in adulation.

Since this wasn't exactly a crucial match, there was no speed guns in attendance. However, instinctively the coach could tell that it was in the high 90's.

Mamoru blinked a few times, his earlier complaints now forcefully shoved down his throat. His eyes shined for a moment before he shook his head.

For a brief moment, it looked like he saw the prodigy that he looked up to.

"It had to be a fluke.' He thought, not wanting to get his hopes up.

"That felt good..." Ken muttered to himself.

Although he'd been training for 3-4 weeks on his new pitching form, there were times when he would fall a little flat. Thankfully, his first pitch seemed to have gone well.

Shiro crouched down once more, his hand still shaking from the earlier catch.

'He's back?'

Of course Shiro wasn't speaking figuratively since he'd played with the guy since the start of their 2nd year of High School.

However, this was the first time that he experienced the type of pitch that had been thrown on the world stage against the best teenagers the world had to offer.

Compared to the pitches he'd been catching this year, this was at least 2 levels higher.

A wave of excitement swept through Shiro as he called for the next pitch.

'Let me see it again... The fastball that took down the United States.'

Ken nodded after receiving the sign from Shiro. Once again he took a deep breath and lifted his leg.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

'Yes!' Shiro shouted in his heart.

This was the Ken that he knew, the one who would break through anything in his way.

"Phew... I'm feeling good." Ken mumbled.

His body suddenly felt lighter as if a weight had been lifted off his back. The pressure that was attacking him from the moment he stepped onto the mound had relinquished itself.

Even the voice that had been plaguing him all this time was silent, giving him great reprieve.

'I can do this.'

WHOOOSH

"Strikeout!"

...

"Strikeout!"

...

"Strikeout! 3 outs, changeover."

The next two batters fell just as quick as the first, causing Ken to let out a sigh of relief as he made his way back to the dugout.

"Looks like our Ace is on point today! Haha." Yusuke said, slapping Ken on the back on his way past.

"Nice pitching Captain!"

Many of his teammates gave him props on their way in. There seemed to be a shift in their attitudes as they welcomed their new Captain into his role.

Yusuke and Shiro were a given, but the other 2nd years and new 1st years were a surprise to Ken.

Ken arrived at the dugout to see Coach Hanada grinning at him like a proud father.

"Nice work so far" He said, slapping him on the shoulder.

Hearing such a compliment from his coach caused Ken to let out a genuine smile.

For the first time since losing the system over 12 months ago, he felt like he was moving forward.

If it wasn't for the man in front of him, who knew if he would have ever gotten out of the rut he was stuck in.

"Thanks Coach." He said sincerely.

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

Chapter 513 - 513: Ebb & Flow (1)

"Hey didn't you say that their Ace was washed up?" A short haired teen said to his teammate, his expression incredulous.

"I—I don't know..."

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strikeout! 3 outs, changeover."

The Yokosuka team felt suffocated from the pressure Ken exerted on them. Each pitch felt as if it was going to break the sound barrier.

It was scary.

Ken wiped the sweat from his brow, a grin now planted on his expression. For the first time since losing his system, he felt that things were beginning to work out.

On his way back to the dugout, Ken massaged his shoulder, feeling the fatigue build up. He'd just finished pitching the 7th inning, yet his arm was already tired.

'I guess this is what its like without the fatigue management skill.' He thought wryly.

The score was currently 2-0 in favor of Yokohama despite Ken putting on a wonderful pitching performance. Without players like Hiroki, their batting prowess had taken a hit.

It didn't help that he had also regressed on offense.

'I really need to work on my batting as well.' Ken mused inwardly.

'Maybe I'll ask my Dad for help since he was the one who taught me to begin with?'

Ken nodded. It would be good to spend some bonding time with his father without thinking of their current predicament.

"How's your arm?" Coach Hanada asked, showing concern.

Ken grinned in response, he knew he couldn't hide anything from this sharp-eyed coach of his.

"I think I've had enough pitching for today." He stated, words he never thought that he'd utter in his lifetime.

The fact he could admit such a thing showed just how much he had grown as both a person and a professional.

Seiji pat Ken on the back on his way into the dugout, wearing a satisfied smile on his face. Even if the guy hadn't admitted it, he planned on taking Ken off the mound in the next inning.

Of course Ken didn't have to know that piece of information.

Ken walked further down the bench and saw Mamoru staring blankly at the field. The teen had been attached to him earlier in the year, shadowing him like a little brother.

Yet his attitude had changed as Ken fell into a slump. He would no longer speak to him respectfully, in fact, he ignored him most of the time.

However, Ken didn't blame him.

He took a seat next to Mamoru, startling the teen momentarily.

"Are you ready?" Ken asked.

"R-Ready? For what?"

Ken chuckled, seeing the nervous reaction from his teammate.

"The mound, it's yours for the next two innings." He said nonchalantly.

"Eh? Really?"

Mamoru was surprised. Ken had only pitched around 80 balls this game, yet he was relinquishing the mound to him? They were only up 2 runs, wouldn't it make sense to use the Ace in this situation?

"Of course. I need to rest my shoulder after all."

"..."

Mamoru felt complicated in that moment. He had finally seen the pitches he'd been enamored with after so long, yet now he was stepping down after only 7 innings?

"Senpai... Tell me the truth. Why has your pitching sucked until now?"

"KEUGH!"

Ken spluttered and began to choke on his saliva, leading to a coughing fit. He had not expected the teen to be so harsh and go right for his jugular from the start.

"Ahem... It's hard to explain." He said, clearing his throat.

However, seeing the sincere expression on Mamoru's face, he decided to elaborate slightly.

"After the World Cup, I seemed to have some hidden injuries that had built up over both Koshien and the 2 weeks of games. Because of that, my pitching form deteriorated instinctively to protect my body."

Ken chose to elaborate a little on the coach's theory. While it was not completely true, it at least created a believable notion.

Mamoru's eyes widened, not expecting this sort of explanation. Almost instantly he felt a deep sense of guilt for how he had treated Ken recently.

"I—I'm sorry Senpai!" Mamoru quickly stood to his feet and bowed his head at 90 degrees, showing deep respect.

"Huh? Why are you acting like that?" Ken raised his eyebrow in surprise.

"I treated you poorly when you were going through a tough time. I thought you'd just gotten cocky and let your talents go to waste. Please forgive me." He stated, keeping his head bowed.

Ken felt a little puzzled at what to do, but he soon let out a small laugh and helped the teen up. In truth he wasn't angry or anything, to him Mamoru's treatment of him was nowhere near as bad as the Japanese media.

If anything, at least Mamoru was nice to his face.

"Alright, enough of that. I accept your apology, so go and win the game for us okay?" Ken said, wearing a grin.

Mamoru's wide eyes stared at Ken, sparkling. He had to look up since the guy was so tall.

"T-Thank you Senpai! I'll never forget your kindness."

With that, the teen was filled to the brim with fighting spirit as he began to warm up his shoulder with vigor.

In the next inning, Coach Hanada called for the replacement of Ken on the mound, sending Mamoru up to pitch. As he got to his position, he flashed a brilliant smile to Ken in the dugout.

Ken couldn't help but chuckle, sending him a thumbs up.

Mamoru's situation had reminded him of another person who looked up to him. His gaze turned reminiscent as he thought about his number 1 fan in America, Michael.

'I hope that kid's doing well.' He thought.

PAH

"Nice pitch!"

Ken nodded in satisfaction. Despite his weird attitude towards him in the beginning of the year, Mamoru truly was talented.

He was 15 and could already pitch upwards of 90mph. Unlike Ken, his form was well polished, though he seemed to lack the stamina to throw for too long.

However, Ken felt a lot better knowing Yokohama had an upcoming pitcher like this.

'Looks like Mamoru will be able to carry the team after I graduate.'

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

Chapter 514 - 514: Ebb & Flow (2)

"Daichi! Look alive."

"Y-Yes coach!"

Daichi was in the middle of another grueling practice for Osaka, running laps around the field to finish their work out.

For some reason, it felt like the coach was singling him out, leading to some dissatisfaction inside.

'We just won Koshien, why is he being so harsh with me?' He thought, gritting his teeth.

Having just lost his biological mother, Daichi sensed a feeling of emptiness within him. It was like there was a void inside of him that devoured everything in sight.

His happiness, motivation and fighting spirit.

Daichi sucked in large gasps of air as he completed the final stretch of the running they'd been tasked with. Feeling his whole body scream out for oxygen, he did his best to accommodate.

Yet while he was recovering, his mind felt numb.

'This isn't fun.'

A small voice appeared in the back of his mind, stating the obvious. No sane person would enjoy running over 20 laps around the baseball field, not now, not ever.

'Why am I suffering like this?'

Daichi's face turned up in annoyance, yet he was too tired to complain outwardly. He focused on getting his breathing under control, looking forward to when he could shower and head back to the dorms.

"Daichi, come here." The coach said, motioning him over.

It took a lot of restraint not to roll his eyes, but he ended up complying.

Coach Narukami let out an exasperated sigh. He had been a coach long enough to know when something was not right with a player, yet he never thought he'd need to have such a conversation with Daichi of all people.

Usually the guy was always enthusiastic at training, even getting angry at other players if they were slacking.

Yet as he looked at the teen now, he hardly recognized him.

"Daichi... I know you're going through a tough time right now, but I need to see more from you." Coach Narukami said, trying his best to sound understanding.

Though it seemed to have the opposite effect.

"More from me!?" Daichi replied, feeling his body heat up.

"We just won Koshien only 2 months ago, not to mention I helped our National Team win the Asian Championships. What else could you possibly want from me?"

The Coach was clearly not expecting this sort of attitude from Daichi, causing a tense silence to stretch out between them. Thankfully the other players were already on their way to the dorms, otherwise it would have made it worse.

Daichi seemed to have realized he had misspoken, yet he didn't try to correct himself.

"It's true that you are talented Daichi. But just because you have talent, doesn't mean you can stop giving it your all in practice. Half the time it feels like you're not fully present, it's starting to effect the others."

Coach Narukami decided to ignore the disrespectful tone, trying to reach the teen in front of him. Daichi was one of their best players, if he began to slack in practice, it could cause some friction within the team.

Since Osaka Toin had a lot of competition for the starting line up, playing Daichi when he was under performing would undermine the coach's status within the team.

Not to mention the effect it could have on the younger players.

Daichi clicked his tongue in annoyance, feeling some bitterness in his heart.

"I'm completing the training just fine. Perhaps your inflated expectations of me is to blame for your dissatisfaction."

He locked eyes with the coach, not backing down.

Coach Narukami was silent for a few moments, processing his words.

"Mmm, okay fair enough." He said simply.

Hearing this, Daichi nodded, turning his back and heading towards the dorms.

"I'm taking you out of the starting line up. Starting tomorrow you'll train with the 2nd team."

The coach's words caused Daichi to freeze in place for a moment before he balled his hands into fists. Yet in the next moment he continued towards the dorms, not turning back.

The Coach let out a deep sigh, shaking his head in disappointment. It was clear that the teen was going through a lot at the moment, but unfortunately he was left with no choice thanks to Daichi's attitude.

It was one thing not giving 100% in practice, but an entirely different matter disrespecting the Coach. While he could have cut Daichi a break and let it slide, it was not how he operated.

He watched the teen's retreating figure and lamented.

"If he doesn't shape up soon, he might never recover..." The coach muttered.

Daichi returned to his dorm and grabbed his phone right away, sitting on the ground against the wall. Usually he would go shower as soon as he finished practice, but he didn't want to see any of the other players right now.

"Mom? I want to come home..."

"Daichi dear, what's wrong? Of course you can come home any time." She responded right away.

The concern in her voice did well to help his mood.

"Okay I'll be home for dinner." He said and was about to hang up.

"Okay sweetie, travel safe. We love you."

...

"Mmm, love you too."

Beep Beep Beep

Daichi fought back the tears as he gripped his phone tightly.

"Who was that?" Chris asked, poking his head into the dining room.

Yuki turned to her husband with a worried expression on her face. "Daichi called, he's heading back home tonight."

Chris frowned.

"But it's only Thursday today? Doesn't he have class tomorrow?"

However, Yuki didn't care about such things, not when her motherly instincts were letting her know something was wrong.

"I'm home!" A voice shouted from the door, causing both Chris and Yuki to look in the direction.

Ken stepped into the house and saw both his parents looking at him. He could tell that something was weird.

"Ah... What happened?" He asked suspiciously.

"Have you talked to your brother lately?" Yuki asked, her tone sounding a little like an interrogation.

"Um, no?" Ken replied, feeling a little guilty. This was exacerbated by the look his mother was giving him.

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

Chapter 515 - 515: Selfish (1)

"I'm home."

Upon arriving back at home, Daichi was met with the smiling faces of his mother and father. The grim mood he was in throughout the trip seemed to fade away as he saw the people who cared about him above all else.

"Dinners will be ready shortly Daichi dear, go take your bag to your room." Yuki said, a bright smile on her features.

"Mmm."

He made his way up the stairs and into his room, only to see the door slightly ajar.

Raising his eyebrow in question, Daichi peered his head in only to see Ken sitting on his bed and staring at the door.

"Come sit." Ken said, not even saying his greetings.

Daichi felt a rise of annoyance out of nowhere at his brother's actions. He had half a mind to just ignore him and head back down the stairs, but he stopped himself.

'Why am I reacting like this?' He thought, self reflecting.

Ken hadn't even done anything wrong, merely asking him to take a seat. There was a few moments of silence before he did as he was told, placing his bags on the ground and taking a seat.

"So? What's going on?"

Daichi paused, feeling incredulous. Was he so easy to see through that his brother knew something was wrong without so much as a word?

"Haaahhh." He let out a deep sigh.

"I got taken off the starting team today." Daichi said, his tone full of resignation.

Ken remained silent, waiting for his brother to continue on with the story. A coach of Narukami's caliber was not someone who would do such a thing without a reason.

Not hearing a response or even consolation from Ken, Daichi looked at him with question.

"What? You're not gonna try and comfort me?" He asked.

"Tell me what you did first." Ken replied succinctly.

Daichi felt his anger rise as he quickly stood up from the bed.

"What the hell man!? Are you here to nitpick and judge me as well?"

Ken was a little taken aback by the reaction, but he managed to keep a composed expression. It was clear that tensions were high, but he didn't want to show any weakness.

"Daichi, you're my brother and best friend. You know that I'd go to war for you if you were mistreated. All I'm asking is for you to tell me the full story." He stated calmly.

Daichi froze, realizing his mistake. He had automatically gone on the defensive, even though his brother hadn't attacked him or anything.

He felt rather embarrassed, but slowly went and sat back down on the bed. He explained what had happened at practice and told Ken what words he'd said and received from the coach.

Apart from leaving out a few minute details, it seemed rather believable.

Ken nodded, processing all of the information he'd been told. He understood that Daichi was going through a lot right now since it had only been around 2 weeks since the wake.

"Haaahh." Now it was Ken's turn to sigh.

Without warning he leaned back on the bed and laid his head down, staring at the ceiling.

"So? What do you think, pretty stupid right?" Daichi stated.

"Mmm, very stupid..."

"Right? So help me convince Mom and Dad to compla—"

"I was talking about you." Ken said, cutting him off abruptly.

"Eh!? Me?" Daichi's face morphed into one of annoyance, feeling a hint of betrayal inside.

In his mind, the coach was just picking on him for some stupid reason. The old man's pride was well known to be a problem, at least from what he'd heard around the school.

Yet it was this victim mentality that was holding Daichi back from the real issue.

Ken sat up, meeting his brother's annoyed gaze head on. He had never seen Daichi truly act like a moody teenager before now, but this just showed that he was still human.

"Do you consider yourself a role model?" Ken asked simply.

"Role model? No... Why would I think that?" Daichi almost balked as he replied instinctively.

"Mmm... Me neither."

"Huh?"

Daichi looked at Ken with confusion. Just what kind of point was his brother trying to make?

"Think about what you've accomplished. You said it yourself earlier. You just won Koshien and brought back the Asian Championship, not to mention the U18 World Cup the year before." Ken stated matter-of-factly.

"What's your point?"

Ken let out a sigh, placing his hand on Daichi's shoulder. "My point, little bro... Is that even if you don't see yourself as a role model, it doesn't mean that you aren't."

He knew firsthand what it was like to be held in such high regard by someone. The picture of the blond youth Michael over in America was the first person that came to mind.

Yet even more recent was Mamoru in his own team. Today he had realized just how much of an impact his actions had on his teammates.

Though Daichi may still be young, a lot of players looked up to him as the shining example of what to strive for. He was the embodiment of hard work begets success, yet he couldn't see it.

Daichi was quiet, busy contemplating his brother's words. Is this what the coach was trying to tell him?

He furrowed his brow before responding, "What if I don't want to be a role model..."

"What if I just don't want to play baseball anymore?"

Ken felt a shock run through his body at those words, almost not believing his ears. His initial instinct was to flip out, however he managed to reign it in. He had a feeling that reacting to such a statement would only have the opposite effect he wanted.

"Do you really mean that?"

Daichi didn't answer, choosing to lay back on the bed and face the ceiling in silence.

The two didn't speak for a couple of minutes, leading to a strained atmosphere.

"I don't know man... I just don't enjoy it anymore."

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

Chapter 516 - 516: Selfish (2)

"The 3 training sessions a day, the constant film study... It's so draining." Daichi admitted, his tone sounding tired.

Ken kept his mouth shut, letting his brother pour out all of his feelings. He had never heard Daichi complain about these things in his previous life, despite knowing the guy since High School.

He worked hard every day without a single complaint, all the way up to becoming a professional for the Hanshin Tigers. What was it that drove him to work so hard in his previous life? What was different now?

'Daichi's mother...' Ken thought.

"What's the point in playing baseball anymore?" He said finally, reaching towards the ceiling.

Ken scoffed, feeling a wave of annoyance from those words. How could Daichi, the prodigy who entered the pro's only after 3 years of playing baseball utter such words.

To him who had fallen into such despair and depression after losing the ability to play baseball...

It was insulting.

"You're so selfish." Ken said, his tone scathing.

"Huh!?" Not expecting such words from his brother, Daichi quickly sat up from the bed, his burning gaze locked onto Ken.

"Let me guess, you don't see the point in playing baseball because you can no longer prove to your mother that you could make something out of yourself." Ken added, poking him in the chest.

Daichi's face morphed from one of shock, to intense anger. He felt his body heat up in response, causing him to curl his hands into fists.

"What the hell do you know?" He spat between his teeth.

"I know that you're being a selfish asshole. What does your mother have to do with you playing baseball? What, now that she's dead you suddenly lose all your motivation?"

THWACK

Out of nowhere, Daichi's fist came flying towards Ken's face, glancing off his jaw and sending him to the floor.

"Heh, your fists are light." Ken said, wiping the blood from his lip.

"You watch your damn mouth or I'll hit you again." Daichi threatened, breathing heavily.

Ken grinned, though it didn't reach his eyes.

"Are you really gonna give up your gift because of something so selfish? What happened to repaying Dad for taking you in? What happened to our pact? Or have you forgotten about all that now..."

"SHUT UP!"

THWACK

Daichi dove on top of Ken who was still lying on the ground and threw another punch. The sound of flesh colliding sent a dull echo in the room.

"YOU DON'T KNOW ANYTHING!"

THWACK

"How could you understand what I'm going through?"

Daichi continued to rain down punches, his vision blurring with every swing. His knuckles hurt, but the pain in his chest was even worse.

His final punch missed the target, landing on the carpet next to Ken's head and leaving a bloody mark. It was then that he lowered his head and began to cry on his brother's chest.

Ken didn't resist, putting both his arms around his brother and pulling him into his embrace. He smiled, splitting his lip even further in the process, but he didn't complain.

"What's happening!?"

The door swung open with a great sense of urgency, showing his father in a panicked state. His eyes moved to the two boys on the floor, only to see Ken showing a thumbs up.

Chris saw the beaten up face of his son and felt his anger rise. Yet after seeing Daichi crying his eyes out on Ken's chest, it quickly subsided.

He wasn't sure of what happened, but the situation seemed to have deescalated for now.

With reluctance, he closed the door and left the room, leaving his two boys to sort things out.

The two laid there for a while as Daichi's cries turned into sobs. Eventually he fell asleep, exhausted after everything was said and done.

This would have been fine, however Ken tried to move the big guy off him but failed. His head was a bit dizzy from taking a beating, not allowing him to use all of his strength.

He searched around for his phone in his pocket and was forced to ring his father.

"Help me..." He whispered.

Once again Chris ran up the stairs and saw the situation. He shook his head and let out a small laugh before helping Daichi up slowly and putting him on the bed.

"You've got some explaining to do." Chris said to Ken as they were leaving the room.

The whole left side of Ken's face was swollen and there was dried blood on his lips, yet he still grinned, reopening the split.

Yuki was horrified as Ken came down the stairs. She quickly ran forward and inspecting his wounds, snapping into concerned mother mode in an instant.

"Let's get you cleaned up dear." She said, grabbing out the first aid kit.

The trio sat down at the dining table a little while later and tucked in to dinner. While it was a bit sore to chew, Ken still seemed to be enjoying the meal.

Only after finishing did Chris speak up, his tone grave.

"Why don't you fill me in."

Ken then began to detail what had happened, leaving out no details. He spoke about what happened to Daichi and that he had known something was wrong when his brother decided to come home abruptly.

After saying everything, there was a silence over the dinner table.

Yuki's originally sympathetic expression turned stiff as she heard what Ken had said to Daichi.

"You deserved to get your ass kicked..." She said matter-of-factly.

Chris on the other hand was frowning, deep in thought. He peaced together what Ken's goal was and experienced a feeling of resignation come over him.

"Don't be so hard on him honey, sometimes us men need a wake up call. Plus, I bet he didn't even throw a punch back."

Yuki huffed in response, mumbling something about how barbaric men were.

Chris chuckled in response, turning to his son, "You did well Kenny. I just hope that he comes to his senses after a nice long rest."

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

Chapter 517 - 517: The Next Morning (1)

The sound of birdsong filtered in through the window, creating a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere. Daichi began to stir in his bed, a groggy feeling assaulting his senses.

He slowly sat up from the bed and looked around, surprise filling his features.

"My room?"

Daichi massaged his head, trying to remember what had happened last night.

"Ow..."

As he moved his hand, he felt a sting coming from his knuckles. After inspecting it, his eyes widened as memories began to flood into his mind.

A feeling of dread overcame Daichi as he remembered what he'd done last night. The scene of him laying into Ken over and over repeated in his mind.

'What have I done...'

Even if Ken had spoken all those words, it didn't justify the punishment he'd dealt out. What would his father and mother say when he went downstairs?

Daichi began to spiral into depression.

'Would they kick me out of the family for this?'

As his thoughts began to turn dark, he heard a knock on the door.

"Hey man, I'm going for a run. Are you coming?"

Daichi heard his brother's voice and almost didn't want to raise his head.

"Daichi?"

Hearing his name called, he slowly raised his gaze, looking upon the face of his brother. It was then that he saw the large black eye and bruises on the left side of his face.

He instantly felt sick.

"Ken... I'm so—"

"Hurry up man, otherwise I'm leaving without you." He said, cutting Daichi off.

Daichi's face morphed into one of sadness, but he slowly got out of bed. Since he was still in his clothes from yesterday, he decided not to change and followed Ken downstairs.

"Morning..." Yuki mumbled, sipping her morning coffee. Like usual she was in her zombified state.

However, to Daichi it seemed like she was being cold.

'They hate me...!' He thought, feeling a pain in his chest.

Even though it hurt, it made sense. He wasn't their real child, of course they would be upset if he assaulted their son.

He made his way out the front door along with Ken and began to jog behind him, his thoughts a mess.

'Maybe they don't want me anymore... All I've done is cause them trouble.'

'Dad can't work now because of me. Tetsuhiro is also a threat... Won't it all go away if I just disappear?'

As these thoughts began to swirl in his mind, Ken's voice sounded out in front of him.

"Hurry up, we're changing pace."

With that, Ken began to run faster, leaving Daichi in the dust.

Daichi sped up, trying to match his pace, only catching up a few minutes later. By the time he arrived, Ken kicked it up another gear without a word, extending the gap.

A look of frustration appeared on Daichi's face as he saw Ken's back.

'You might hate me... But at least treat me like I'm a human being.' He thought, gritting his teeth as he increased his speed once more.

The same thing played out again once he got close enough. Ken kicked it up another gear, slowly causing Daichi to lose ground.

'So that's how it is...'

Daichi began to lose heart as he saw Ken's figure increasing in distance from him.

A pained expression formed on his face as he began to slow down. Ken had clearly made his intentions known and he wasn't going to be toyed with anymore.

"Don't you dare slow down!" Ken shouted from ahead of him, sending him a glare.

'What? Is he trying to provoke me again?' Daichi thought, his eyes narrowing.

However, the taunt seemed to work, forcing him to increase his speed once more.

This time it took him nearly 5 minutes to make up the distance. By the time he arrived, his breathing had already begun to get ragged.

The two ran side by side wordlessly, not even acknowledging each other. They had run together many times in the past, but this was the first time that Daichi had felt things were strained.

After around 25 minutes of keeping the same pace, Ken glanced at him briefly.

"One last spurt." He said, breaking into a sprint in the next moment.

Seeing Ken's figure shoot off, Daichi was surprised, yet he grit his teeth and did the same, trying to push his body to the limits.

"Haaah Haah"

His breathing became ragged as he pushed his tired body as hard as he could. His muscles were screaming at him, telling him to stop. Yet the back of Ken in front of him spurred him on.

Daichi's lungs were burning, his body hurt and his vision began to swim. Every fiber of his being wanted to stop—give up and rest.

"PUSH!"

Ken yelled out at the top of his lungs.

"ARGHHHHH!"

Daichi let out a guttural roar, pushing through his limits as he tried to keep up with Ken.

Through his blurred vision, he could see that they were coming up to the park where they would usually cool down. A sense of urgency overcame him as he judged the distance between him and Ken.

'I can win!' He shouted in his heart.

Daichi began to gain on Ken, his eyes locked onto the park coming up. As it rapidly approached, he made it neck and neck with his brother.

He turned his head, expecting to see a desperate expression on Ken's face, yet what he saw made him shocked.

Ken was looking forward with a giant grin on his face, as if he was having the best time of his life. The pure joy and happiness was shining through even the bruises that he'd left on his face.

'What? Why is he smiling?'

"I win!" Ken shouted as he crossed the threshold of the park boundary and began to slow down.

However, his victory was short lived as he quickly bent down and began to suck in deep gasps of air.

Daichi also slowed down and placed his hands on his head, trying to recover his breathing.

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

Chapter 518 - 518: The Next Morning (2)

"Haah haah, don't worry bro. You did your best." Ken said, between his gasps for breath.

Daichi just looked at him weirdly, not knowing how to respond. His emotions were still in turmoil after both last night and his brother's actions this morning.

After a few minutes of recovery, Ken moved to the spot where they usually cooled down and began to stretch his muscles.

"Are you not going to stretch?" Ken queried, sending his brother a glance.

Daichi couldn't refuse since he also needed to stretch his muscles.

He went to the opposite side and began to stretch out his legs, avoiding eye contact with Ken, his emotions still in turmoil.

"Hey man, I'm sorry for what I said last night about your mother. I shouldn't have spoken like that to you, I deserved to be hit."

Daichi's eyes widened. The apology had come out of nowhere and he'd not been expecting it.

All of the unease within him seemed to shatter at once, turning into a distant memory. The sincere expression plastered on Ken's face told him that his brother was being genuine in that moment.

The fact that Ken had interrupted his apology this morning wasn't because he didn't want to hear it, but because he felt like he didn't deserve an apology.

Daichi lowered his head, tears pooling in his eyes.

"You bastard..." He said, emotionally.

'Huh!? He's cursing me?' Ken thought, his face throbbing in the next moment.

Daichi approached Ken slowly, his head still lowered, causing Ken to feel some fear.

'Is he gonna hit me again!?'

Yet once he was within striking distance, he flung his arms out and pulled Ken into an embrace, squeezing him tight.

Ken had already flinched, yet as he felt the hug his tense muscles relaxed and he embraced him back.

"I thought you hated me..." Daichi said, his voice muffled as he pressed his head into Ken's shoulder.

"Hate you? I could never hate you. You're my brother for life."

Ken let out a small chuckle, finding the situation a little absurd. He was more worried that his brother might hold a grudge against him for the horrible words that he'd said last night.

The two embraced for a while longer, however it wasn't too comfortable considering they were both covered in sweat. Though neither voiced their complaints.

"I'm sorry I hit you." Daichi's muffled voice sounded out, yet Ken could tell it was sincere.

Ken grabbed Daichi by the shoulders and held him at arm's length.

"It's fine man, brother's fight all the time. Next time I'll be hitting back though okay?" He said, sending Daichi a wink.

"Hahaha."

Daichi couldn't help but laugh, snot coming out of his nose in the process.

"Ah..." Ken looked at his brother and then at his shirt, noticing that some snot had been left on his shirt.

"Gross..."

"HAHAHA."

This only caused Daichi to laugh even louder, his mood improving significantly.

After stretching, the two slowly walked home, closer than ever. It seemed that working out had a cleansing affect on the two, apart from the exchange of snot.

"When are you gonna head back?" Ken asked, trying not to be pushy.

"I'll head back after lunch so I can attend afternoon training. I've got some apologies to make." Daichi stated solemnly.

"Mmm."

A silence stretched out between the two for a while before Daichi opened his mouth.

"You were right ya know..."

"About what?"

"I was being a selfish asshole." Daichi confirmed.

"Yup, I know."

Daichi flashed his brother a look, only to receive a wink in response.

Letting out a small chuckle, he continued, "I lost motivation to play baseball..."

"It all seemed pointless, and training was so hard. It didn't make sense to me why I should suffer so much for no reason."

Ken listened to his brother's words, keeping silent as he laid out his true feelings.

"But you made me realize that I was being selfish. I didn't start baseball just so I could get back at my mother..."

"Mmm." Ken nodded. He knew that Daichi wasn't so stupid to work so hard for a woman who had abused him all his life. There had to be another reason pushing him forward, one that wasn't so flippant.

"I started baseball because of you big bro... Originally I wanted to repay you for becoming my friend, but once I started, it became much more than that."

Daichi stopped in his tracks, turning to his brother.

"Baseball gave me a purpose in life, even before your family took me in. It became a place where I could be myself and work hard towards a brighter future."

Ken halted his footsteps and faced Daichi, a small grin forming on his face.

Daichi's words resonated with him deeply. Baseball was his whole life, even after he was injured in his previous life, he never forgot about it.

"You showed me that I can have fun and create a career for myself at the same time. All the sacrifices that you, Mom and Dad have made for me... I'll never be able to repay you in this lifetime."

As his words entered Ken's ears, a figure flashed in Ken's mind.

His only remaining friend who stayed by him after he was injured. Apart from his mother and father, no one else remained but Daichi.

Yet he took him for granted.

The fake smile that was forever adorned on his face, hiding all of the pain and abuse he'd received for all his life.

"Don't worry... You've paid me back far more than you realize." Ken said, his voice sounding a little husky.

Daichi raised his eyebrow in question. He couldn't understand why Ken was reacting this way.

"Daichi... Do you remember the pact we made on that day in the middle of the road?" He asked softly.

"Of course."

"You also said best friends don't lie to each other."

Daichi looked thoughtful for a moment, scanning the recesses of his memory.

"Mmm."

"So next time, let's skip all the fighting and just tell me the truth like you did just now." He said, a grin forming on his face.

Daichi couldn't help but grin, seeing the panda eye on his brother's face.

"But then I wouldn't get to punch you again." He said, letting out a hearty chuckle.

Ken gave him a serious look, holding out his hand.

"Promise me that you'll reach out if anything like this happens again okay?"

Seeing the tone shift, Daichi understood. He clasped Ken's hand and pulled him into a half-hug.

"I promise."

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

Chapter 519 - 519: Fall Tournament Final (1)

The Autumn leaves fell, bringing with it a chilly air.

Around a month had passed since the incident with Daichi at home and Ken was on his way to the school for the final game of the Fall Tournament.

Luck would have it that they'd be facing their old rival Shuei High School for a spot in the Jingu Tournament. Ever since the departure of Carlos, their team had struggled to score runs.

If it wasn't for the supreme pitching from Kazuhiro, their club would have fallen greatly.

"Good Morning Captain!"

A bunch of first years were already waiting at the designated spot in front of the school, bowing their heads in respect to Ken who'd just arrived.

Mamoru and Shingo. These were the first years who had made it to the 1st team, showing their skills throughout the year.

"Morning." Ken said, sending a wave their way.

It still felt odd to be called Captain, but he couldn't exactly tell them not to call him such.

He saw Shiro and Kaori holding hands and whispering sweet nothings to each other, causing an incredulous expression to form on Ken's face.

'Even though it's been a year, I still can't believe that Shiro was able to get a girlfriend...'
He said inwardly, shaking his head.

"How's our Ace feeling today?" Yusuke called out, slapping him on the back fondly.

Ken winced, feeling the sting of the slap in the middle of his back.

"I was better before you slapped me" He said, rolling his eyes.

"Hahaha, don't be like that. I'm just carrying on Captain Makoto's legacy... ORYAHHH!"

Yusuke seemed to be in a good mood. In fact, most of the team seemed to be in good spirits, especially the coach.

"Hehehehe" Seiji Hanada chuckled darkly, his face turned up in a domineering fashion.

"I can't wait to see that old man's face when we stomp his team yet again."

Remembering the conduct between his own Coach and Shuei's Coach Goto, Ken couldn't help but feel a sense of amusement. The two would act like children in each other's presence.

"Alright team, let's head out!" Coach Hanada announced, motioning for everyone to get on the bus.

As Ken went to walk up the stairs, he felt something blocking his way.

"Hmm?"

He looked down only to see what looked like an elementary schooler who was trying to get on the wrong bus.

"Um, are you lost little girl?" Ken asked.

The girl was really short and wore a black tracksuit with her hair sporting two pigtails. Her button nose, big brown eyes and rosy red cheeks were adorable, making anyone who saw it want to protect her.

Hearing his words, tears began to form at the corner of her eyes, as if she was going to bawl.

"Er, Coach... I think we have a missing child." He said, pointing to the girl in front of him.

"What?" Seiji poked his head around Ken's large body and saw the girl, yet his face turned stupefied in the next moment.

"Ken you idiot!" The girl wailed, pounding her fists on his chest like a kitten before running to the back of the line.

"Eh?"

Ken was mystified. Just who was this girl that even knew his name.

"PFFT"

Yusuke who was ahead of Ken noticed the whole thing and was doing his best to contain his laughter. Yet after seeing the slight change in Ken's eyes, he knew he was in danger.

Without a word he ran through the aisle of the bus and tried to hide.

Unfortunately for him, Ken was a patient man.

"Ahem... Care to tell me what's so funny?" He asked in a deep tone.

"Err..."

Ken sat patiently as Yusuke explained the situation to him, yet before long his jaw had already dropped.

"Manager!? That little girl?"

"Buddy... She's been on the team for most of this year." Yusuke stated, wondering if Ken had been dropped on his head as a child.

He let out a sigh, 'I guess this guy truly doesn't see any other woman but Ai.' Yusuke thought, shaking his head.

The little girl he'd been speaking of was none other than Yui Koba, a first year. Despite her stature, she was rather intelligent, often working on tactics with the coach.

Yui entered the bus, her face still red in embarrassment. She lowered her head, finding a seat quickly so she wouldn't be noticed.

However, even after being seated, she felt her eyes moisten.

Being treated like a stranger by Ken had made her feel horrible. Despite being a manager for the most of the year, it was as if he had only noticed her today.

"Is this seat taken?" A warm voice asked.

Yui raised her head, "Kaori Senpai?"

Meanwhile on the back of the bus, Ken was assaulted by a number of stares filled with discontent.

"What a jerk, I can't believe he said that to Yui-chan."

Ken shuddered in response, lowering his head. He did not remember ever seeing that girl in his life, how was it his fault?

Truth be told, he had been focusing on himself quite a lot lately, especially with the whole change of his pitching form.

'She's so short, it's no surprise if I never saw her before...' He said to himself.

However, he could already imagine the backlash from the team if he used that as an excuse.

"Haaahhh." He let out a deep sigh, cursing his position as Captain.

Around 40 minutes later, the bus arrived at a familiar place, Shuei High School.

As the team alighted from the bus, Ken was hit by a wave of memories. The friendly they played back in his first year was fresh in his mind.

'I wonder what that guy is doing now?' He thought to himself, thinking about the curly haired batter Carlos.

He hadn't seen him in the World Cup even though the Dominican Republic had been playing.

As they walked the familiar path to the baseball field, there was an old figure awaiting them, his smile reminiscent of a Buddha statue.

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

Chapter 520 - 520: Fall Tournament Final (2)

"Coach Goto~ It's so good to see you again!"

Seiji's overenthusiastic voice called out from the Yokohama squad before he moved ahead of the pack to greet the opposition coach.

Coach Goto's face remained in a smile, yet after hearing his nemesis speak, he couldn't hide the twitch in his eyebrow.

"Coach Hanada, welcome to our humble school." He said stiffly.

"Oh thank you so much, every time we come here I always leave feeling... satisfied."

With that, he clasped the offered hand, sending a devious grin to the older coach.

A flash of anger appeared in the older man's face at those words, yet he did well to keep his composure.

"Let's hope this time will be different then." He stated, gripping the hand tightly.

Ken couldn't help but chuckle, seeing the two coach's act like kids. Their rivalry seemed to be even deeper than the team's.

Ken led the team down to the field and already saw the opposing team warming up.

He raised his arm, waving to a familiar figure not far away.

Kazuhiro's expression lit up after seeing Ken waving at him. Despite the rivalry between the two teams, he had always looked up to him.

He waved back, yet there was a determined expression on his face.

"Alright you guys, put your stuff in the dugout and lets get a warm up going." Ken said, directing them like a Captain would.

He didn't know much about being a Captain, but he knew what to avoid thanks to Makoto.

Soon enough, the coach joined them in warm ups, sending grounders towards the infielders and barking out orders.

After 20 minutes or so, the teams were sent back to the dugout for a briefing before the official start of the game.

"Alright, the team will be roughly the same as usual: Outfielders, Tohi, Hideaki Shogo. Infielders, Yusuke, Shingo, Ryo, Yasuki. Ken on the mound and Shiro catching. Any objections?"

"No sir!"

Ken's catchphrase seemed to have caught onto the whole team, bringing a smile to Coach Hanada.

"Alright let's smash them into smithereens!" He said, raising his arm above his head.

"..."

However, he didn't get the spirited response that he expected, leading to an awkward silence.

'Oh crap, I let my true feelings come out...!' he chastised himself inwardly.

"Ahem... Let's all do our best!" He said, raising his arm once more.

"YEAH!"

With that, the team walked up onto the field and lined up in front of Shuei.

"Bow"

"Let's have a good match!"

After the ceremonial bow, Ken walked up to the umpire and awaited the coin toss. Across from him was Kazuhiro who also had inherited the Captaincy from his predecessor.

The two grinned at each other, no words needing to be spoken.

The umpire tossed the coin high into the air, spinning until it landed on the ground.

"Heads. Shuei, the choice is yours." The umpire directed.

"We'll take the field first." Kazuhiro said, his voice oozing with confidence.

"Shuei won the toss and has chosen to take the field!"

With that announcement, the Yokohama team retreated to the dugout where they began to get ready for the game.

With the new line up, the 1st year Toshi was the lead-off batter, followed by Yusuke, Shiro and then Ken at the clean up.

"Good luck Toshi! Hit it big!"

His fellow first years called out as he ascended the stairs, cheering him on.

"Don't worry about hitting big, just try and get onto base." Coach Hanada said, flashing him a smile.

Toshi nodded, though he was still a little nervous.

In their past few games he hadn't been able to make an impact on the game, despite being the lead-off hitter. Yet the Coach and his teammates were still cheering for him.

'I'm gonna do it this match...!' He said inwardly, determination creeping onto his features.

Kazuhiro began his warm up throws on the mound.

His form was beautiful to look at, seeming like one fluid motion.

Ken watched on in amazement. When he had first seen Kazuhiro, the guy still looked to be improving his pitching form, yet a year later it was fully polished.

Funnily enough, it was the exact form that he had seen many times on the TV before in his previous life when he played for the Chiba Falcons.

It was no wonder why Shuei had one of the best defenses in the Kanagawa prefecture, and it was all because of this teen.

"Play Ball!"

After the warm ups were done, Toshi stepped into the batters box and stared at the mound. Kazuhiro's eagle-like features were gazing at him, filling him with nervousness.

'I can do this...'

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

"Ah..."

Seeing the blistering speed of the fastball, Toshi began to lose confidence.

'How can I hit such a ball?'

WHOOOSH

PAH

"Strike."

He grit his teeth, gripping his bat tightly. He had only one more chance to hit it, he needed to make it count.

WHOOOSH

Ding

PAH

"Strikeout!"

Toshi blinked a few times before accepting the reality. He had been able to knick the ball, yet it wasn't enough contact to change the course of the ball.

In only 3 pitches he was sent back to the dugout.

"Sorry Senpai, I couldn't hit it."

"Don't mind, we've got at least 3 chances of facing him." Yusuke said, patting his junior on the shoulder and walking towards the plate.

"Nice try Toshi."

"Don't beat yourself up."

Toshi entered the dugout and heard his fellow teammates console him. Unfortunately, he was the hardest on himself in this kind of scenario.

"Nice work making contact." Ken said.

Toshi froze in place, his gaze moving to the tall figure of the Captain.

"But it wasn't enough..."

Ken shook his head, letting out a chuckle.

"Each at-bat, try to get a little closer. Just keep at it, you'll be able to read his pitches soon enough."

"Senpai..."

Toshi paused for a moment before nodding, a flash of determination appearing on his features.

"Mmm."

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