

Major League System

Chapter 541 - 541: Getaway (1)

The sound of dark laughter came from the two gangsters as they walked towards Ken and Katsuya who had just been roused from their sleep.

Katsuya's eyes were dull, almost as if he'd given up. Throughout his life he had never received such pain and torture, therefore it was clear this experience had changed him.

Ken on the other hand, looked at the two approaching gangsters with rage in his eyes. The hatred he felt towards Tetsuhiro was boundless, fueling his will to survive and take vengeance upon him.

"Dibs on the pretty boy first." The shorter one said, licking his lips as if savoring the moment.

"Alright, I'll take the tall one then."

He walked up to Ken and grabbed his chin, lifting his face and seeing the seething hatred staring back at him. However, that didn't seem to deter him, only making him more excited.

"I heard you're a National level pitcher... I wonder what sort of expression you'll make if I ruin your arm hehehe." He chuckled darkly.

A shudder ran down Ken's back as he saw the sadistic face of the gangster. He had no doubts that the man would do as he said.

'Damn you TETSUHIRO!' Ken shouted in his heart, feeling a sense of both helplessness and anger threatening to break him mentally.

Even if he survived, if he were to lose baseball again, would he really be able to live a happy life?

As he was in the midst of despair, he saw something quickly appear in the corner of his vision, flashing in the light.

THUD

A dull and sickening thud echoed into his ears, eliciting a gasp of shock from Ken's mouth. He turned to see the once haughty and sadistic gangster on the floor, blood beginning to pool from underneath his head.

"W—What the f—"

SHIING

Before he could finish his sentence, the shorter man's words were stuck in his throat, never to be released again.

The sound of something heavy rolling along the ground sounded out. Thankfully, the room was dark enough that it wasn't in plain view.

"Ken, let's get you outta here."

Ken was still in shock, but hearing the thick kansai accent brought him back to reality yet he was still filled with disbelief.

"T—Tetsu? Am I dreaming?" He muttered.

It wasn't that he didn't want to believe it, just that he was afraid it was all a hallucination. Lack of water and food in addition to the beatings had made him frail and delirious.

If this turned out to be an illusion, he would probably lose the final thread of hope he was hanging onto.

"This ain't no dream." He said simply.

Next to him, Katsuya raised his head, his dull eyes finally shifting.

"Uncle Shin? Is that you?" He said with a strained voice, tears already pooling at the corner of his eyes.

"Mmm. Your father is outside waiting for us, let's go." Shin replied, casually striking the chains with his Katana.

CLINK

The chains fell to the ground, echoing within the empty basement. He briefly left Katsuya in his chair before cutting through the metal chains that tied up Ken.

Feeling the pressure rescind, Ken almost let out an audible sigh of relief, however it was quickly replaced by a dull and persistent pain all over his body.

"Packages are secured, we'll be out soon." Shin said into the radio casually.

Tetsu turned to the guy, raising an eyebrow. However, he quickly shook his head, now was not the time to ask about the man's hobbies.

"Can ya walk?" Tetsu asked Ken. Things would only grow more difficult if he had to carry the guy up so many flights of stairs.

"Mmm, I think so." Ken replied in a hoarse voice.

He got up to his feet slowly, trying not to give into the dizziness. It took a few moments, but he finally gained some sense of balance, despite the throbbing from his entire body.

"Have some water."

With that, Tetsu handed Ken a water bottle and he greedily drank from it. Yet as if thinking of something, he stopped and held it out towards Katsuya.

"You have some too." He said.

"He's got his own." Shin said, producing another bottle.

Thankfully, Chris was thoughtful enough to prepare these in advance, thinking they would be both dehydrated and starved by the time both Shin and Tetsu arrived to save them.

Finally feeling some strength coming back to his body, Ken felt his mind work.

"What's the plan? Do we just try and escape unnoticed?" He asked, switching his gaze between both Tetsu and Katsuya's uncle.

As much as he appreciated Tetsu for saving him, he was aware that the man was more suited to physical tasks than strategy to put it nicely.

"Our main priority is to get you guys out of here in one piece. The rest can wait for later." Shin stated simply, helping Katsuya to his feet.

"He's right, let's go before the cavalry finds out we killed their men." Tetsu added, moving towards the door and beckoning Ken forward.

Ken didn't need to be told twice, willing his body forward to follow Tetsu.

Thankfully, both he and Katsuya could still walk, albeit a little shakily.

The group was silent as the door was opened, revealing the slightly brighter stairwell. Only after the two men had confirmed there was no noise did they begin their ascent.

Shin made a shushing gesture as they approached the first flight of stairs. This was the floor where the Hokori family were gathered, if they made noise now, things would quickly escalate into a blood bath.

The four crept past the door, slowly ascending up the stairs while controlling their breathing. They could hear the sounds of people talking, their voices filtering into the stairwell and echoing off the walls.

It felt like an eternity had passed as the group did their best to remain undetected. By the end, Ken felt as if his nerves were shot.

He couldn't help but breathe a sigh of relief, feeling as the worst part was over.

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

Chapter 542 - 542: Getaway (2)

They continued up the stairs, trying to keep a steady pace. Ken's muscles burned and his body still ached all over. But the further they traveled, the more hope shined in his heart.

'I'm getting out of here...!' He thought.

After being in the pits of despair for god knows how long, the prospect of returning back to his life filled him with joy.

All the problems he was having before seemed trivial in this moment, after experiencing what could only be described as hell. Who cared if he was being bashed by the media? At least he was still alive and not suffering.

He vowed inwardly to live his life properly, not caring about what such people thought in the future.

"We're almost there." Shin said, turning to the others.

However, in the next moment everyone froze after hearing the sound of a door open behind them.

"That damn bastard gave me a pack of menthol, he knows I hate that minty stuff." A voice complained, the sound of his footfalls growing quieter.

Both Tetsu and Shin looked at each other briefly, as if understanding their situation.

"The moment he opens the door, we run." Shin whispered.

It didn't take long for both Ken and Katsuya to understand. Once the figure saw the dead bodies of the two gangsters, the whole place would be swarming with enemies.

Ken felt his heart begin to beat loudly in his chest, worsening his throbbing pain. However, he could feel his body heat up as the adrenaline began to kick in.

Click~

A soft sound echoed through the stairwell, acting like a starting gun at a track and field event.

Instantly, the group made their break, ascending the last two sets of stairs and bursting through the door. They didn't bother checking if anything was on the other side since they had no time to do so.

Both Tetsu and Shin led the two teens into the lobby and to the door where Tetsu had entered before. No one stopped them as they filtered out the door in quick succession.

The moment Ken's lungs breathed in the fresh night air, he almost felt reborn. But there was no time to revel in the feeling as he tried to keep up with the two in front of him.

'Two?'

Ken turned his head, only to see Katsuya's figure splayed out on the ground as if he'd tripped.

"Damn it." He cursed under his breath.

Without hesitation, he turned on his heel and used all of his strength to hoist the teen up and back onto his feet. It sent shockwaves of pain through his body, but he grit his teeth and pushed through.

Katsuya was half-conscious, resulting in him putting majority of his bodyweight onto Ken. He tried to move forward, but it was too much weight to carry for his beaten up body.

All of a sudden, the weight lightened considerably, causing a bout of confusion. He turned his head only to see Shin staring back at him, wearing a grateful expression.

"Hurry up ya bastards." Tetsu urged, joining them a moment later.

With the added help from the two grown men, everyone was able to make it to the street where a black van awaited.

Ken saw his father get out of the van and felt his heart fill with warmth.

"Pineapple!"

"Crap."

BANG BANG BANG

The sound of gunfire rang out in the street, causing everyone to duck in response.

"GET IN THE VAN!" Tomoya roared out, producing an automatic rifle of his own.

BANG BANG BANG

The street was lit up with the flashes from the bullets being fired, creating a chaotic and dangerous atmosphere.

The group of Ken, Tetsu, Shin and Katsuya managed to make it into the van before it sped off wildly. Tomoya was still sending out bullets from the passenger seat, doing his best to keep the enemies at bay.

Only when they had traveled a significant distance away did they finally breathe a sigh of relief.

As soon as he was able, Tomoya crawled through the space in the front and into the back of the van. He laid his eyes onto his son and couldn't help but feel a sense of relief wash over him.

He moved forward and embraced his son, tears forming in his eyes.

"I was so worried..." He said, holding him tightly.

Meanwhile, Ken was also in the middle of his reunion with his own father. He seemed to be in better shape than Katsuya, at least for now.

With the adrenaline now fading, he finally lost the ability to stand.

"Ken!"

Seeing his son drop to the floor, Chris's anxiety peaked. He quickly got on his knees and checked on him, almost falling over thanks to being in the back of a moving van.

"I'm okay dad... Just very tired, and sore." He said, trying to smile.

"Mmm, get some rest. You're safe now." Chris said, breathing a sigh of relief.

However, in addition to his relief, Chris was also filled with a seething anger that threatened to overcome him. The man who had orchestrated all this was still at large.

'I will not rest while he's still alive.' He vowed inwardly.

There was no way that he could forgive someone who had toyed with his life like this. First it was his job, then Daichi's biological mother and now his own son.

Even a saint has a bottom line.

Chris turned to Tetsu, placing his hand on the man's shoulder.

"Thank you Tetsu... I don't know how I can repay you." Chris said, his voice filled with emotions.

Tetsu nodded, "Don't worry 'bout it. As long as he treats my girl right, it's payment enough."

With the captors rescued, the van returned to a street in Tokyo. It wasn't the same headquarters they were at before, but another base of operations to avoid retaliation from the Hokori family.

Chris was a little concerned since he hadn't been told, but upon seeing Daichi, Miho and Ai, he nodded in appreciation.

What seemed like a long night was not yet over, at least in Chris's mind.

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

Chapter 543 - 543: Head of the Snake (1)

Daichi's eyes widened in worry as he saw his father step out of the van, he looked behind him expectantly, hoping, praying to see that Ken was okay.

It was then that he saw the beaten up and frail figure of Ken unconscious in the van, leaning up against the walls.

In a flash, he ran forward grabbing his brother tightly and pulling him into his embrace. Tears began to stream down his face as relief washed over him.

"Ouch." Ken mumbled, rousing from his sleep.

Daichi flinched, realizing that he might be hugging him too tight.

"Ken... Are you okay?" He asked, moving back and checking him over. Daichi couldn't help but suck in a cold breath of air after seeing the extent of the bruises and lacerations on Ken's body.

"I'll survive." He muttered hoarsely, looking around briefly, almost like he was half asleep. "Where's Ai?"

At the mention of her name, Ai appeared in his vision, her face filled with fresh tears. .

Ken wanted to get up and go to her, but his limbs were too sore, not to mention he currently had someone attached to him.

"Little bro, wanna give me some space?" He said, letting out an amused chuckle.

"A—Ah, sure." Daichi responded, his gaze moving to Ai. He suddenly understood that he was preventing the two lovebirds from reuniting and couldn't help but smile.

Now that he knew his brother was safe, the tension had dissipated. He could always talk to him later, so he moved back and gave them some space.

Unlike Daichi, Ai moved forward slowly towards Ken, almost sobbing as she did so. When she was close enough, Ken moved her hair out of her face and pinned it behind her ear, revealing a large bruise on her cheek.

A flash of anger appeared on Ken's face, but he quickly controlled himself. With great effort, he got to his feet and pulled her into his chest, wrapping his arms around her.

This seemed to be the straw that broke the camel's back as Ai began crying her eyes out. She sobbed, nuzzling her head into his chest and not wanting to let go.

"It's okay. Everything will be alright." Ken soothed, rubbing her back gently.

At this scene, Miho also began to get emotional, hugging Daichi tightly.

After a few moments, Ai lifted her head as if she'd just remembered something, "Katsuya! Is he with you?"

Ken nodded, "He's fine as well." Ken said, turning his attention to the inside of the van where the guy was fast asleep.

Ai turned her head and saw his figure. She almost couldn't recognize him thanks to the severe bruising on his face and the blood matted through his hair.

In the next moment, a figure ran outside, almost looking out of breath by the time he arrived.

"Katsu!"

He looked at his father who was wearing a solemn yet terrifying expression and was standing above his unconscious brother. A shiver ran down his spine, feeling a pang of guilt in his heart.

"He's going to be okay Kiyo." Tomoya stated, his voice sounding weary. However, there was an edge to his tone, as if he was filled with rage.

"Thank goodness." Kiyoshi replied, breathing out a sigh of relief. As long as his brother was alive, he wouldn't have to live with the guilt of being an accessory to his capture.

After all, if he had have stopped Katsuya back then when he wanted to escape, none of this would have happened.

Tetsu watched on as the reunions happened, his eyes seeming sentimental. His gaze lowered to the brass knuckles on his fist, as if contemplating his decisions.

However, a resolute expression appeared once more, removing any doubt.

"Alright, let's get inside." Shin said, motioning for everyone to get moving.

No one rejected the notion, making their way into the building. Unlike the previous headquarters, this place was rather small and unassuming.

Instead of the grand back room, they were in something like a bar with round tables and booths scattered around.

"Well done everyone. We'll need to lay low for a while since we just poked the hornets nest, so make yourselves comfortable." Minoru spoke up, his tone sounding pleased.

Upon seeing Katsuya slung over Tomoya's shoulder, he let out a relieved smile and sat back in his chair.

Nobody objected, sitting down wherever was the most convenient. Daichi, Miho, Ai and Ken sat at one of the tables together, happy that everything was over for now.

Just as everyone was starting to relax, Chris spoke up, getting everyone's attention.

"I don't think now is the time to relax." He said.

A few of the gazes turned sharp, directed at him like daggers.

Minoru's expression stiffened a little before he responded, "Speak." He commanded.

Chris didn't take long to reply, his tone even, "None of us will be able to rest while the Hokori family remains in Tokyo. I think you know that better than me sir."

Minoru's held Chris's gaze, not faltering.

"So you're suggesting we strike while the iron is hot?" He asked, though by his body language, it was clear he was not happy with the suggestion.

The atmosphere seemed to grow heavy as the words were spoken.

"Going after the Hokori family when they're on high alert is foolish." Shin stated, his gaze dangerous.

Although Tomoya was hellbent on revenge, he also seemed to share the same sentiment as Shin. He wasn't so hot-headed that he would charge head on into the enemies at a time like this.

He had just recovered his son, there was no reason to risk it all in a knee-jerk reaction.

"Who said I was suggesting going after the Hokori Family directly?" Chris stated, his face serious.

"What are you suggesting then?" Minoru asked, his interest piqued.

"We cut off the head of the snake. Remove the Hokori family's backer, and they'll have no choice but to return to Hokkaido due to losing their foothold in Tokyo."

The room grew quiet.

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

Chapter 544 - 544: Head of the Snake (2)

It wasn't said outright, but everyone knew what this implied. The Hokori family's backer was the CEO of Suzuki Corporation, the mogul worth billions of US dollars.

No one spoke up for a while, but there were a few people who looked eager.

Daichi gripped his fists tightly, hoping and praying in his heart that they would receive the green light. He wouldn't be able to sleep at night knowing such a figure was still alive in this world.

Ken too yearned for the man's downfall. But the problem was, Tetsuhiro was unstable. Even if they stripped him of his status, he was a crazy man, who knew what lengths he would go through afterwards.

"Even if that's the case, we don't know where he is."

Chris shook his head, "I know where his estate is, we can start there."

Though not implicitly stated, the gangsters were clever and devious enough to understand his train of thought. As long as the guy's family was there, they could get him to appear at some point.

However, they all turned to the boss Minoru, as if humbly waiting for his decision. He looked thoughtful, though his expression was still stern.

After a few moments, he nodded. "It will be best if we can drive them out as soon as possible. We need to recoup our losses sooner rather than later."

At these words, Chris breathed a sigh of relief. He wasn't sure what he would have done if the boss hadn't agreed to his suggestion.

Chris stated the address he'd researched, which turned out to be around a 30 minute drive away.

"From what I've seen, there aren't any security guards at the place, only a few maids that live on site." Chris said, waiting for a response.

Ken on the other hand was shocked. He hadn't known that his father had been doing his own research into Tetsuhiro while not working. He didn't know whether to be worried or impressed with this.

"Mmm. This will be an easier operation than the last one." Minoru stated, feeling a little more confident after finding out some more details.

"I won't force anyone to go that doesn't want to go." He said, scanning the room, his eyes landing on Tomoya who was sitting next to his son.

However, it seemed that he underestimated the hatred his men had for such a figure.

One by one, all of his Lieutenants stood up. Tsukasa, Shin, Naoki and Tomoya each looked at him with fierce determination to put an end to everything.

"I'll go as well." Chris said, his expression stern.

"I'm out." Tetsu said, his eyes lingering on his daughter. As much as he wanted to get revenge, he believed that he'd already done enough.

A small smile crept onto Tsukasa's face in response. He knew that his friend had already crossed his bottom line, there was a reason why he didn't join the Tokuzo family back then.

"Mmm, then it's settled." Minoru stated, getting up from his chair.

"Tetsu and I will stay here and keep an eye on the kids. If things look dicey, pull back for now." He ordered.

"Yes Boss!"

The Lieutenants answered at once, bowing their heads.

Chris was about to leave the room when Ken stopped him, grabbing his arm.

"Dad what are you doing?" Ken asked, his face showing signs of worry.

"You'll understand someday when you have your own kids, Kenny." He said solemnly, patting his son's hand. His gaze drifted to Ai beside him, giving her a warm smile.

He then looked at Daichi who was also wearing a worried expression.

"I'll be back soon boys."

With that, he walked out of the room, not turning back.

The group then got into the van and hit the road. Since it was around 3 in the morning by this point, the roads were practically empty, making for a quick drive.

In almost 30 minutes, the group arrived on the street of the estate. They saw a grand looking house complete with a large gate and long driveway which led to the modern and dream-like building.

None of the men in the van were exactly wealthy, but they were comfortable. Only now after looking at the grand estate did they finally feel how poor they really were in comparison.

"Put your masks on, even if there's no security there will likely be cameras everywhere." Shin said in a low voice.

"I don't have a mask." Chris stated, watching the others put theirs on.

"That's because you're not coming with us." Naoki said simply, like it had already been decided.

Chris felt his anger rise, but he quickly quashed it. Even if he let it show, it wouldn't change his current situation.

"Alright, I'll stay on the lookout." He stated, gripping his fist tightly.

"Mmm. Let's go." Tsukasa spoke up, exiting the van.

Chris was forced to remain in the van, watching as the four figures moved towards the house in darkness. He let out a sigh, feeling helpless.

He had wanted to contribute something, anything at this point. Ever since Tetsuhiro had been messing with him and his family, he'd been forced to take a passive position.

When he lost his job all he could do was suffer. When Daichi's mother was killed, all he could do was comfort his son.

Even when Ken was captured, he was forced to let another man step forward and rescue him. Just when he thought he'd have the chance to strike back, he was made to stay behind once again.

Chris grit his teeth, feeling a sense of helplessness overcome him.

'Can I really do nothing?' He thought.

As he stirred in his own feeling of self-loathing, over 20 minutes had already passed. Seeing as how there had been no movements, he began to get a little worried.

He peaked out the window, only to see a figure scaling the fence, as if he was fleeing.

Chris's eyes narrowed, feeling his heart beat wildly in his chest.

After a moment's hesitation, he jumped into the driver seat and started the van, his eyes trained onto the fleeing figure as he ran towards the road.

In the next moment he began to drive, putting the lights on.

The figure seemed to hear the van and turned around, his face full of relief.

"H—Help! Please pull over!" He yelled, his face full of panic as he tried to wave down the car.

Yet instead of slowing down, the van's engine roared as it approached, causing his eyes to bulge in fright.

THUD

A sickening thud rang out as the van trampled him, throwing him onto the road in a pitiful state. Immense pain racked his body as he struggled to get fresh air into his lungs.

Just as his consciousness was beginning to fade, a face appeared in front of him.

"Y—You..."

Chris stood over the body of the man who had caused him and his family tremendous hardship and couldn't help but feel a cold sense of satisfaction wash over him. Seeing the guy struggling to gasp for air might have made him uncomfortable before, but not now.

"You brought this on yourself." Chris said, taking one last look at him before walking away.

Tetsuhiro continued to fight back the cold that was threatening to consume him, his mind desperately struggling.

'No... I can't die. Not yet.' He thought, staring up at the night sky.

He saw a shooting star flash across his vision, followed by a sense of calm. As he breathed out his last breath, he saw the face of his elder brother staring back at him.

"Tatsu..." Tetsuhiro muttered before drifting away to the afterlife.

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

Chapter 545 - 545: New Beginnings (1)

"It's been 4 months since the murder of billionaire Tetsuhiro Suzuki who was found dead in front of his family home. The Prime Minister of Japan has vowed to place additional resources on finding the one's involved in his death."

"The Police commissioner addressed the media today, hinting at the possibility of this being a gang-related attack, though nothing has been proven thus far. Despite heavy criticism, the police have been unable to narrow down any legitimate suspects. Stay tuned for more."

BZZT

A figure turned the TV off, placing the remote on his desk before straightening up his tie. He turned his attention to the computer in front of him, moving the mouse and clicking a few times.

RING RING

A man dressed in a navy blue sweater and a cowboy hat appeared on his screen, wearing a smile. He looked to be in his early 50's, though there was a certain charisma about him.

"Hiro my friend, thank you for taking my call." The figure said in English, the country twang evident in his voice.

"Jason, it's good to see you again." Hiro said sincerely.

"Mmm, how's the winter treatin' ya?"

"You know how it is, each winter that passes reminds me of my old age."

"Hahaha! Ain't that the truth." Jason replied, slapping his leg with amusement.

The two chatted for a while, catching up like old friends. It was only a few minutes, but soon the two turned serious.

"Well, ya know the reason I called right?" Jason asked, though it was more of a statement.

"Of course."

A small smile appeared on the corner of Jason's lips, "So what can ya tell me about this guy? I only met him briefly at one of the conferences, so I need your endorsement."

Hiro nodded, "Well as you know he was with us for over 15 years. Just from scouting alone, he's uncovered more talent than I can count."

"Well, scoutin' is one thing. What I really wanna know is if he can coach." Jason stated.

At this response Hiro shrugged, "He was only our assistant coach for about a year, but he also led our U18 boys to the World Cup and Asian Championship win. You tell me if he's got what it takes."

"Heh. Well he's got the accolades to back it up I guess." Jason said, as if mulling something over.

"What's he like?"

This time, Hiro let out a sigh. "He's a staunch family man, probably one of the most genuine and caring fellows I've had the pleasure of meeting. If I had a choice, I'd never let you steal him away."

Jason's eyes widened in surprise, not expecting the heavy praise from his friend. He didn't respond immediately, as if thinking over some things.

"Mmm. You're makin' it hard to refuse." He said, scratching his chin in thought.

Hiro shrugged once more, "If you don't take him, then he'll probably go to one of the other colleges who have called me already."

At these words, Jason's flinched, his eyes looking panicked. However, in the next moment he narrowed his eyes, looking at his friend suspiciously.

"You're bluffing."

A grin appeared on Hiro's face, but he did not reply directly.

"Argh, ya make a good point..."

"Alright, I gotta go. Thanks for chattin'" Jason said, ending the call promptly.

Hiro was left staring at the screen for a while before leaning back in his chair looking rather tired. He stared blankly at the opposite wall of his office for a few moments, his eyes unfocused.

"I did my best Chris. The rest is up to you." He muttered.

BUZZ BUZZ

"Hello?"

"Yes this is Chris Takagi."

"..."

"T—That's amazing, thank you so much!"

"O—Okay... I'll be there. Thank you again."

BEEP BEEP BEEP

Chris stared at his phone, his expression filled with shock. He didn't know whether to believe what he'd just heard, so he pinched himself.

"Ow~"

Only after feeling the pain did he realize that this wasn't a dream. He looked around before leaving his room and walking into the kitchen where his wife was busy.

"Honey... I got the call." He said in a soft tone.

Yuki spun around, her face already showing her boundless empathy. From the sound of his voice, she immediately assumed that it didn't go well.

She was about to walk forward and console her husband, however the next words from his mouth completely subverted her expectations.

"I got the job..." He said, still filled with disbelief.

Yuki froze, but then her expression blossomed into a beautiful smile.

"Congratulations honey!" She said lovingly, moving forward and hugging him tightly.

The two shared the intimate moment for a while, their emotions evident. Chris was filled with relief and expectation, not to mention excitement.

'I can finally move on...!' He thought.

After a few minutes of staying like this, Chris stepped back and grinned at his wife.

"We'll need to tell the boys." He said, though there was a hint of worry that flashed across his face.

Yuki nodded, "Daichi will be here tonight, we can tell them both at dinner."

With that, she skipped back to the kitchen, humming a little tune while she prepped the food for dinner.

Meanwhile, Ken was just finishing up with club training, his body already covered in sweat. Since it was March, the breeze was still cool as winter transitioned into spring.

"Alright that's it for today you guys." Coach Hanada said, blowing his whistle.

The team breathed a sigh of relief, working to catch their breath after the hard work they'd put in. They began to gather towards the locker room, wanting to get changed before the cold breeze rattled their bones.

"Just remember, Senbatsu begins in just over a week. Make sure you cool down properly." The coach yelled out behind them, like a worried old man.

Shiro and Ken walked side by side on the way to the lockers, their height difference looking rather comical. No one would expect that these two were a battery, at least from first glance.

"Man, your pitching is getting better by the day." Shiro stated, looking at his hand which was bright red from catching said pitches.

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

Chapter 546 - 546: New Beginnings (2)

Ken looked over and couldn't help but chuckle.

"Mmm, it's still not where I want it to be, but it's close." Ken admitted, rolling his shoulders.

Shiro was silent for a while before opening his mouth, "Do you think you've recovered enough from..."

He didn't complete the sentence, but Ken knew what he was getting at.

After the situation with his kidnapping, Ken had been hospitalized for around 2 weeks with a few broken ribs and fractured bones. He was now sporting a few extra scars, but thankfully they weren't too noticeable.

Of course the story he told his friends was vastly different to what actually happened.

But due to the injuries, he wasn't able to pitch in the Jingu Tournament, leading to Yokohama being knocked out in the 2nd round.

Thankfully, they had qualified to be invited to Senbatsu, the Spring Koshien which was due to take place in a couple of weeks time. After a full 4 months recovery, Ken felt stronger than ever.

This would be the tournament he could prove to himself that he didn't need the system to succeed.

Or at least he hoped so.

Ken came straight home after practice since he knew his brother would be coming home for the weekend. Ever since the situation, he felt like they'd grown even closer.

"I'm home." Ken said, taking his shoes off.

"Welcome home."

Yuki almost sang out from the kitchen, causing Ken to raise his eyebrow in suspicion.

'Mom seems in a really good mood.' He thought.

"Welcome home son." Chris said, flashing him a grin as he entered the dining room.

Ken nodded, though his suspicions grew even further. Both his parents seemed to be in great moods, not that it was a bad thing. He knew them well enough to know that something must have happened.

However, he shook his head in the next moment. As long as they were happy it didn't matter.

"I'm going to shower." He said, slipping past the dining room and dropping his bag off.

Around an hour later, Daichi arrived home. It had only been a couple weeks since he was last home, but everyone celebrated nonetheless.

"We got Senbatsu soon, you looking forward to it?" Daichi asked, a defiant expression on his face.

"Heh. I always look forward to beating your team." Ken replied, wearing a haughty grin.

The two went back and forth, some light rivalry evident in their discussions. Like this, the family had a lively dinner, enjoying Yuki's fantastic cooking like usual.

"I've got some news." Chris said, placing down his chopsticks and looking towards both his sons.

'This is it.' Ken remarked inwardly. He knew that his father would likely make an announcement after dinner, so he perked up his ears and listened.

Daichi too seemed invested, leaning forward in anticipation.

"I've got a job." Chris stated, grinning widely.

Ken's eyes lit up, "Wow fantastic!" he exclaimed, feeling a sense of happiness.

"Nice work dad. What is it doing?" Daichi asked.

"Well, it's another Assistant Coach role."

"What!? That's awesome. Which Japanese team is it?" The fact that his father was able to secure another chance at his dream job after everything that happened felt like a miracle.

Chris shook his head, "It's not a Japanese team."

This time, both Ken and Daichi looked at each other in question.

"Just tell them honey." Yuki said, nudging her husband playfully.

Chris let out a chuckle, "You're looking at the new Assistant Coach for the Texas Shorthorns."

...

Both Ken and Daichi's jaws dropped. The news was just far too surprising for them to eek out a response right away.

"B—But that's in America?" Ken said, still wracked with confusion.

"Mmm. None of the professional clubs in Japan wanted to hire me, so I had to look elsewhere." Chris said matter-of-factly.

This only caused Ken to frown in response. He had tried to hard to get his father to stay at home, even vowing to win nationals so he would quit his job as the foreign adviser for the NPB.

Yet now he had taken a job in America, which means they likely wouldn't be able to see him for long stretches of time.

His gaze moved to his mother, expecting to see the sorrow in her eyes. However, he was surprised to see a glowing smile on her face, as if she was happy about the news.

This only served to confuse him further.

Daichi had been silent this whole time. Right now he only got to see his parents every 1 to 2 weeks. If Chris moved to America to work, how often would he get to see him.

"Mom... Why aren't you saying anything?" Ken said, his gaze still locked onto her.

She looked a little surprised, "What do you mean?"

"Well, won't you be lonely when Dad leaves? Why are you so calm?" He asked.

However the question made her chuckle in response.

Instead of Yuki replying, Chris cut in. "Well, we were thinking about moving the whole family over to Austin Texas. With everything that has happened here, I think it would be good to make a fresh start."

His words were like a bombshell, shattering the atmosphere.

'Leave Japan?' Ken's eyes widened as his mind began to furiously work. His first reaction was negative. He had his team in Yokohama as well as Ai in Tokyo.

Did he really want to leave everything behind now?

Of course he had considered doing so after finishing High School, but not right now.

Daichi stared blankly at his father, similar scenario's running through his head. He also had his team and girlfriend that he would be leaving behind if he decided to leave.

Before the boys could properly digest the information, Chris spoke up once more.

"I don't expect you to make a decision right away, but we'll be leaving on the 21st of March." He said.

At the mention of the date, both Ken and Daichi turned to each other. It was the start date of Spring Koshien.

'Is this really happening?' Ken thought, his mind in turmoil.

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

Chapter 547 - 547: Brothers (1)

Ken sat in his room later that night, his mind still reeling from the bomb his father had dropped over dinner. While he had spoken of moving to the US for college, it still felt so far away.

"It's happening too fast." He muttered, lifting his hand up and staring at it for a while.

He hadn't seen his mother and father this happy for quite some time, which likely meant they had already made up their minds. Ken didn't blame his father for his decision, especially since Tetsuhiro had made it almost impossible to find work in Japan for him.

'Even beyond the grave that bastard is still screwing with our lives...' Ken gripped his fist tightly, feeling a flash of anger.

But then he sighed deeply, feeling a bit lost.

"I should probably tell Ai the news..."

A few minutes later he put his phone down after sending a message, letting out another sigh.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ

Not even a few seconds later, his phone began to vibrate, causing him to flinch. Though he wasn't surprised when he saw Ai's name pop up on the screen.

"H—Hey." Ken answered the phone meekly.

"..."

"Don't you 'Hey' me... Don't you think you should have called instead of sent a message for news like this." Ai said, her annoyance evident.

"Sorry. I'm still a bit overwhelmed by the news, but I still wanted to let you know right away." Ken explained, his tone soft.

There was a few moments of silence on the other end before she answered, "You're right, sorry I was a little harsh." Ai admitted, her attitude changing.

The two then began to chat for a while as Ken filled her in on the details. Since Ai was involved in the Tetsuhiro incident, she knew everything that happened, so he didn't need to hide anything.

The problem was, even if she knew the reasons, it didn't make the information any easier to hear. On one hand, Ai wanted Ken to succeed no matter what, but on the other hand, she already missed him like crazy.

Sure they were in a long distance relationship right now, but it was only around an hour trip by train. If he were to move all the way to America, when would they be able to see each other again?

"Have you made your decision?" Ai asked, trying not to sound anxious.

Ken shook his head, "No. I only just found out tonight." He replied, feeling a little depressed.

"Where would you live if you stayed here?"

"I don't know... An apartment close to the school I assume."

Silence stretched out between them filled with various emotions.

"What do you think I should do?" Ken asked, but instantly he knew he was being selfish.

"Don't worry, you don't have to answer that." He quickly said, not wanting to put her in such a position.

"It's fine. I think it goes without saying that I want you to stay in Japan. But at the same time, I want you to chase your dreams. I want you to be that same person who worked so hard without complaining... The person I fell for." She stated, feeling a little embarrassed.

Ken's eyes widened briefly before a small smile reached his lips.

He still remembered her watching him back when Ai was a manager for Yokohama. Back when he still had his reservations about dating her, Ken would catch her staring for a little too long.

Just the thought made him happy for some reason.

But it quickly turned to sadness, as he imagined being so far away from her. Forgetting baseball for a moment, would he really be able to leave the country while Ai was still here?

He didn't know.

"Argh, I don't know what to do..." Ken stated, scratching his head in irritation.

"Just listen to your heart." Ai said softly.

"Hah! If I were to listen to my heart, I'd be on a train right now on my way to see you." Ken quipped a little cheekily.

"PFFT. Hahahaha" Ai's giggle rang out through the phone, infectious and cute as ever.

"Well I meant what I said..." Ai whispered, causing a shock to run through Ken's body.

"..."

He looked at the clock briefly, making some mental calculations in his mind.

"Gotta go, bye!"

BEEP BEEP BEEP

"Huh?" Ai looked at her phone with puzzlement for a moment before her cheeks puffed up in annoyance.

But a few minutes later, she received a message which made her heart swell.

Meanwhile, back in Yokohama, Ken ran down the stairs, the contents of his bag half hanging out.

"I'm off to Ai's place!" He shouted, blitzing out the door as if he was late for work.

Both Chris and Yuki looked at each other with confusion for a brief moment before their eyes widened in understanding. Without a word, Chris wrapped his arm around his wife and pulled her close.

"Our boy's are growing so fast." Chris said, letting out a small sigh.

"Mmm. Maybe we'll be grandparents soon." Yuki replied.

"KEURGH" Chris began to choke on his saliva, coughing loudly in response to the statement.

"Dad are you okay?" Daichi's voice rang out from the top of the stairs, concern in his tone.

Chris who was still violently coughing, turned to his son and gave a thumbs up.

"Oh, I'm gonna go see Miho tonight. I won't be back until tomorrow." Daichi added, heading back into his room.

"Ooo, two grandbabies." Yuki said under her breath, sounding excited.

Having just gotten his fit under control, Chris was once again sent coughing fit.

"Alright, I'm off mom and dad." Daichi said, waving as he went past.

"Oh Kenny just left too, if you hurry you might be able to catch up to him." Yuki said, waving to him.

"Oh cool, thanks."

With that, Daichi left the house and began jogging towards the train station. He managed to make it in time, seeing Ken waiting on the platform for the next train to Tokyo.

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

Chapter 548 - 548: Brothers (2)

'Daichi? What is he doing here?' Ken thought, however upon seeing the bag on his back, he had an idea.

"Let me guess, going to see Miho?" He asked, a knowing smile on his face.

"Mmm, I guess we really are brothers." Daichi replied, sending him a wink.

"Hahaha."

"Train arriving on platform 1 is the Tokyo train. Please stand behind the yellow line as the train arrives."

The announcement sounded, breaking up their laughter.

Thankfully, there weren't many people going towards Tokyo during the night, so the boys were able to find a seat. They sat opposite each other as the train took off.

A few minutes of silence passed as they looked out the window, taking in the sights.

"What did Miho say about the news?" Ken asked softly.

A wry smile appeared on Daichi's face, "Well she wasn't exactly thrilled with the prospect of me leaving the country." He replied.

"Mmm. Ai was the same."

"What are your thoughts?" Daichi asked curiously.

Ken let out a sigh, letting his true feelings show. "If I'm honest, I don't think I'm ready to move to America." He admitted.

Daichi was a little surprised, "Well you're fluent in English and wouldn't it be easier to be noticed by college scouts if you played in the US?"

Ken was thoughtful for a moment, "In theory yes. But I should have a decent shot even if I stay in Japan."

Daichi nodded, agreeing. "I think my decision might be a little easier than yours. After all, I already have a dorm on campus so I don't need to worry about things like food and rent."

"Ah..." Ken felt a sharp realization at these words.

He hadn't taken into account that he would need to buy and cook his own food every day, do his own laundry and the like. Ken paled, suddenly feeling like his option to stay had just gotten less appealing.

"Hahaha!" Seeing Ken's reaction, Daichi let out a peel of laughter. Unlike Ken who had been relying on their mother for all these things, he knew what it was like to take care of a house.

All those years where his biological mother would work every night, he was forced to cook, clean and do the laundry, otherwise face a beating.

Although it was a painful memory, the skills he'd learned had helped him now.

"Hah, real funny." Ken said, rolling his eyes.

"Ah, I forgot. I was meant to give you this." Ken exclaimed, reaching into his pocket and rummaging around.

"Hmm?" Daichi stopped his laughter, his curiosity getting the better of him.

"Here."

Yet upon seeing nothing but Ken holding up his middle finger, Daichi's face dropped.

"Hahahaha!" Ken burst into laughter already feeling a lot better than before.

The two bickered back and forth, but it was nothing too serious. They had successfully taken their minds off the recent news, enjoying each others company.

When things quieted down after a while, the atmosphere grew a little more serious.

"It sounds like you've already made up your mind." Ken stated, glancing at his brother.

"Mmm." Daichi nodded, looking out the window.

For some reason, Ken felt some sadness. It made sense why Daichi would choose to stay in Japan and finish out his High School career here, but that didn't mean Ken couldn't be disappointed.

The thought of both of them joining the same High School and taking over the varsity team was something that appealed to him greatly. However, it seemed like Daichi had already decided.

'Why am I even thinking like this?' Ken thought, feeling a bit puzzled.

His mind was operating as if he'd already made the decision to move along with his mother and father. But in truth, he had yet to decide what option to take.

'Have I already made the decision in my heart?' He thought.

Ken shook his head. He would need to ask his father more details about the move and discuss what High School looked like.

If he remembered correctly, the school year started in August/September in the states, whereas it was April in Japan. If he were to transfer, it was likely he'd need to complete another 5 months of his 2nd year in the states.

"You okay bro?" Daichi asked, seeing the range of emotions on his brothers face.

"Yeah, I'm fine."

Another 40 minutes went by before it was Ken's stop. He bumped fists with his brother before getting off the train and letting out a sigh.

He was thankful that he got this time with his brother since it allowed him to discuss the move without his parents present. It wasn't that he didn't want them involved in the conversations, just that there was less pressure without them around.

'This is a good thing for them.' Ken said inwardly.

He made his way up the stairs and out of the subway. As he was leaving the gates, he saw a cute figure waiting for him, rugged up in her winter clothes.

"Hey good lookin'" He said, sending her a wink.

Ai looked at him and pulled a disgusted face, "I have a boyfriend." She said, lifting up her hand as if to repel him.

Ken blinked a few times, seeing a few passers-by look in their direction.

"Pfft. Hahahaha" However, upon seeing Ai giggle, they went about their business.

Before Ken could respond, she got closer and stood on her tiptoes, giving him a deep kiss. "Sorry, I thought it would be funny." She said, smiling widely.

Ken chuckled, pulling her into his embrace. "I'll have to punish you later." He murmured.

"Oh, I'll be looking forward to it." She said, pinching his side gently.

With that, the two made the walk back to Ai's apartment.

Ken was ultra vigilant, checking behind corners and avoiding any alleyways that was on the way to her place. He would not let anything like what occurred before happen again.

Ai saw this, but she didn't complain. If anything, she couldn't blame him for acting like this.

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

Chapter 549 - 549: Graduation (1)

A week passed by like a flash and the start date for Spring Koshien approached. During this time, Chris and Yuki were busy packing their things, making their house look a little disorganized.

Seeing the packed bags and belongings, Ken finally felt that everything was real. It was one thing discussing the move, but another matter entirely seeing it in person.

Despite the deadline being so close, Ken had not yet made up his mind unlike his brother. It seemed like the decision for him was much easier, since he already had his own lodging in the Osaka Toin dorms.

"Morning Kenny." Yuki said from the kitchen, her mood still bubbly.

"Morning." Ken mumbled, his thoughts still in disarray. He headed towards the door, dressed in his school uniform.

"Oh, isn't it graduation today for the 3rd years?" .

Ken's eyes lit up, he had forgotten all about it. His thoughts moved to Hiroki whom he hadn't seen for a while since both of them were rather busy and he didn't attend club practice anymore.

"Yeah, I think so."

"Make sure you send your Senpai's off properly." Yuki stated, sending him a smile.

Ken nodded before moving towards the door.

"You're not going to have breakfast?"

"Nah, I'm not really feeling hungry. I'm gonna head to school a bit earlier today." Ken replied, waving.

"Oh... Okay, take care then."

Yuki watched with concern as Ken left the house, her eyes filled with worry.

A few moments later, Chris walked into the dining room carrying a box in his hands.

"The shipping container comes tomorrow, have you packed everything you need?"

However, his words apparently fell on deaf ears as Yuki blankly stared towards the front door, looking worried.

"Honey?"

"Hmm? What's up?" She replied distractedly.

Instead of repeating his words, Chris cautiously placed the box down and walked over to her, wrapping his arms around her figure.

"A penny for your thoughts?" He asked with a small grin.

Feeling his arms around her, Yuki subconsciously relaxed, hugging him back. She let out a sigh, one filled with emotion.

"Are we doing the right thing?"

Chris was a little shocked, but he quickly hid it. "Are you worried about the boys?" He asked, his voice filled with understanding.

"Mmm. Kenny didn't even have breakfast this morning, he must be so stressed." She said, her motherly instincts kicking in.

At first Chris was shocked, he'd never seen his son skip breakfast, especially since he started taking training seriously. However, it wouldn't be good to react, otherwise he might feed into his wife's worry.

"Honey, Kenny is 18 now. Although he can't drink yet, he's still an adult." Chris stated, trying to make her feel better.

"But he's still our baby..."

"I know. But sometimes we need to make decisions like this for our family." He replied, rubbing her back gently.

Yuki frowned, still not fully convinced.

Chris let out a sigh, knowing that he wouldn't be able to fully convince his wife.

"Did I tell you what my starting salary is?"

Yuki raised her head, sending him a stern glance. "You think that will change my mind? I never cared about money." She stated.

"It's around 900k." He said softly.

"900 thousand yen? A month?" Yuki seemed a little confused. Her husband was on much more money than that when he was working as a scout for the Yokohama Warriors.

Chris chuckled, shaking his head slowly.

"900 thousand US dollars a year."

Yuki frowned, her mind trying to calculate the monetary amount in Japanese Yen.

"That's 130 million yen a year..." She said, her eyes almost doubling in size.

"Mmm, almost 10 times the amount I was on for the Warriors. We should be able to live a comfortable life in Texas and even support the boys in Japan with ease."

Yuki was silent for a while, but a smile formed on her face shortly after.

"I want to replace the kitchen in the new house." She said, her tone not allowing any rebuttal.

"Hehe, as you wish."

Ken attended school and took part in the graduation ceremony for the 3rd years. All of the classes in the school were lined up in the auditorium as the students were given their documentation.

He was standing next to Shiro who seemed to be in a somber mood. Now that he thought about it, Kaori was graduating today and would be leaving to go to University in a few short weeks.

"Cheer up man." Ken said, nudging the short guy beside him.

Shiro turned to him slowly, revealing his ugly crying face.

"I—I'm gonna miss her..." He said, sniveling like a child.

Ken couldn't help but take a step back, bumping into one of his classmates by accident.

He then spent the rest of the ceremony trying to comfort his friend, patting him on the shoulder.

Once the ceremony was over, everybody left the auditorium and began to chat amongst each other. This was usually the part where the 3rd years all took photos with their friends and parents.

As soon as they made their way out, Shiro ran to Kaori. Thankfully he was no longer crying, at least regaining some of his dignity.

Ken looked around for a little bit and saw the Aoyama twins surrounded by girls. Though they were identical, he could easily pick out Jun since he was the only one who seemed to be uncomfortable in the situation.

"Hahaha! Don't worry ladies, you can all have my number." Tatsuya said, his voice loud enough for everyone in the vicinity to hear.

Ken shook his head, finding it rather amusing. But then his face turned solemn, as if remembering something.

If he decided to go to America, he wouldn't be able to graduate like this.

"Why the long face?" A voice called out from behind him.

Ken turned around, only to see Hiroki smiling at him.

"Congratulations man." Ken said, holding out his hand.

Hiroki shook his hand firmly, his face filled with a few unspoken emotions.

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

Chapter 550 - 550: Graduation (2)

"We haven't spoken in a while," Ken stated, looking a little uneasy. He wasn't sure if he should bring up Hiroki's future, since he didn't want to rub salt in the wounds if he didn't get the offer from any professional clubs.

"Mmm, I've been busy getting my fitness up to scratch." Hiroki grinned widely.

"You mean?"

"Yeah, the Cougars apparently drafted me back in October and told my parents but not me." At these words, Hiroki had a wry smile on his face.

"What!?! And they kept the secret for that long?" Ken was gobsmacked.

"Yeah. Maybe they were holding out hope that I would go to University instead."

Ken scoffed, "Parents am I right?"

"Hahaha. Yeah, but I don't blame them. They just wanted the best for me at the end of the day, there's nothing wrong with that." Hiroki said, looking rather melancholic.

"Mmm."

The two were silent for a while, as if they were both thinking deeply.

"What's up with you man? The Spring Koshien starts in a couple of days right? Are you excited?"

"...Well not exactly."

Ken then proceeded to tell his friend about what was happening with his father taking a new job in the states and all. He only told him the basic things, not including anything about the reason why his father couldn't find work in Japan.

"Wow, that's a lot." Hiroki said simply, still reeling from the shock.

"Yeah. I still haven't decided what to do yet, even though they're leaving in a few days." Ken admitted.

"Hmm, well as much as I think Yokohama will miss you... You probably have a better opportunity of going to college in America if you're already in one of their schools."

Hiroki was right. The college scouts were much more likely to offer a scholarship to players in America than overseas.

He had said to Daichi that he still had a good chance to apply for a scholarship while in Japan, but it wasn't entirely the truth. From what he'd researched, many baseball scouts were old school, only believing in what they saw in person against familiar competition.

While Japan's baseball program was arguably the same, if not better than the US, many college scouts wouldn't see it that way.

"You're right." Ken said simply, though it didn't make his decision much easier.

"Well, no one can make the decision for you bro. If I were to give one piece of advice, it would be to follow your heart." He said, shrugging slightly.

'Follow my heart...!' These words were also spoken by Ai.

Ken felt lucky to have such people in his life who didn't have another agenda, just wanting the best for him.

"Thanks Hiroki, it's been a pleasure." Ken said, holding his hand out once more.

"Hahaha, I should be thanking you man. There's no way I could have been a pro without your help, that's for sure." He said.

Instead of taking the offered hand, he knocked it away and took Ken into a brutal bear hug. Ken gasped for breath as he felt the ridiculous muscles constrict him like a python, threatening to turn him to mush.

It was clear just from this how much stronger Hiroki had gotten during his intense training.

Thankfully, he was released after a few moments, allowing him to fill his lungs with sweet oxygen.

"Hey, can you please take a photo." Hiroki said, handing his phone to a nearby student.

He then wrapped his arm around Ken, flashing a smile at the camera.

"You better smile properly. I'll be framing this on my wall and getting you to sign it after you enter the Major Leagues." Hiroki said with a grin.

Ken's eyes widened in surprise. He was touched that Hiroki had so much faith in him, but at the same time annoyed that he was basically extorting him for free.

"Haha, you're the one about to turn pro, I should get your autograph."

The two laughed just as the classmate took the photo. Before Hiroki could ask for a redo, the teen handed back the phone to him and quickly ran off.

"Hmm?" Hiroki looked at the photo and couldn't help but smile. He saw them both laughing naturally, seemingly without a care in the world.

"This will do." He said, putting it back into his pocket without showing Ken.

The two had a few more words before Hiroki left, mingling with his classmates and taking more photos for memorabilia.

Ken was left by himself, feeling a wave of melancholy and nostalgia. The scene reminded him of his own graduation ceremony in his previous life, but this time there was no Daichi.

Back then, he had isolated himself from everyone. Daichi was the only one who remained his friend, despite his gloomy and nasty personality.

Ken let out a sigh, beginning to walk out of the school gates.

His discussion with Hiroki had made him think about things from a different perspective. Though he and Ai had said similar things, his point about easier access to college was a decent one.

Ken spent the rest of his trip home deep in thought. The time seemed to fly by as he weighed up his options over and over, agonizing over the decision.

'What's my goal?' Ken thought.

If he thought properly about it, his goal was to become a professional baseball player, playing against the best competition in the world. While the NPB was at a high level, especially in recent years, it didn't meet that standard.

'The Majors...'

Hell, even his system was called the . Wouldn't it be a waste if he didn't live up to his potential?

The next question was, what would give him the best opportunity to join the Majors?

When he broke it down like this, there was only really one option that fit the criteria.

The moment his mind shifted to this direction, he felt a warm sensation enter his body, as if his heart and mind had finally come into sync.

All of the stress and worry seemed to disappear, slowly replaced by an unwavering confidence and determination.

"Guess I'm going to America..." Ken muttered, a smile breaching his lips.

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

Chapter 551 - 551: Departure (1)

A few days later, Ken walked out of his house and paused briefly just beyond the threshold. He placed down his suitcases and took a deep breath, feeling a range of emotions going through his mind.

He didn't want to turn around and look at his childhood home, fearing that he might change his mind again. But at the same time, he was feeling rather nostalgic.

"Is that everything?" Yuki asked.

"Mmm."

Seeing the mix of emotions on her sons face, Yuki's expression softened.

"Don't worry Kenny. I know it's hard now, but someday you'll look back and remember this moment fondly." She said, sending him a wonderful smile.

Ken nodded. He had a lot of memories in this house and would miss it. But inwardly he knew that in order to move forward, sometimes one needed to take a leap of faith.

He wasn't sure if this was the best decision for him, but it was one that his heart had chosen.

"Thanks mom."

"You guys ready? The cab is here." Chris said, getting their attention.

"Yep, let's go."

The trio then traveled to the airport along with their bags. The ride was quiet, apart from Chris and the taxi driver having some polite conversation every now and then.

After around 20 minutes, they arrived at Haneda airport.

Since Chris was a stickler for arriving early, they had to wait for some time. Ken had planned to do some light reading to pass the time, but was interrupted.

"Hey stranger." A female voice called, causing him to almost cry out in surprise.

He whipped his head around only to see Ai standing behind him, along with his mother and father who were wearing wide grins. It only took a few moments for him to realize that they had arranged for her to come say goodbye.

Ken felt his heart soar as he got up and pulled Ai into his arms. She didn't resist, hugging him back tightly for a long while.

"Thank you." He mumbled, feeling the emotion bubble up from within.

He had spent most of yesterday afternoon with Ai, but she had never mentioned coming to the airport to see him off. It was a great surprise that he hadn't been expecting.

"I just wanted to see you one more time before you go." She replied softly, her voice almost breaking.

"Mmm."

The two only separated after a long time, sitting down next to each other afterwards. Ken had his arm around her, greedily breathing in her scent as if he didn't want to forget it.

Both Yuki and Chris went and sat elsewhere, leaving the two teens with some privacy.

Before long, Ai and Ken were chatting away, almost forgetting about the fact he would be leaving for a long time.

"Rie told me Hiroki got drafted by the Cougars."

"Eh? How does she know?" Ken asked, feeling rather confused.

Ai chuckled, "She actually saw him at the most recent Comiket, he dressed up as Son Goku."

"EH!?"

Ken almost jumped to his feet in surprise. He remembered his conversation with Hiroki last year when he complained so much about his date with Rie, but it seemed that he actually liked it.

"If you don't believe me, I've got photos." Ai said, sending him a cheeky glare.

"Oh I gotta see this."

She pulled out her phone, showing the figure of a man with a blond wig and wearing torn orange pants. His muscles looked as if they were carved from marble, looking familiar.

"Haaah, who would have known that he'd take up cosplaying." Ken said aloud, sighing.

"This is another one of him and Rie." Ai swiped left on her phone showing the said photo.

Ken's face remained deadpan, giving a small nod, letting her know that he'd seen it. However, inwardly his blood pressure spiked.

Only when she put the phone back in her bag did Ken breathe a sigh of relief internally. The costume—if it could even be called so—was making good use of Rie's natural assets, so much so that it would be inappropriate to comment on it.

Seemingly unaware of his plight, Ai's next words made Ken almost choke on his own saliva.

"What did you think of Rie's outfit?" She asked, her gaze locked onto his face.

Ken panicked, wishing that he still had access to his godlike poker face skill. Yet thankfully, his instincts kicked in at the last moment.

"I think it was very intricate. Although I don't know the character, the design looks meticulous and intentional and the execution was even better..." Ken said, delivering the most politically correct statement of his life.

After all, he felt like his life was in danger.

"Yay, that makes me happy." Ai said, smiling widely. Her cheeks were a little red, almost embarrassed at the praise.

"Oh? Did you design that outfit?" Ken asked, his whole body perking up.

"Mmm. I designed it and both Rie and I sewed it together." Ai said, still wearing her sweet smile.

"Wow my girlfriend is a genius." He stated seriously.

"Stop it." She chided, but it seemed she still enjoyed the praise.

Before long, the two had been chatting away for over 2 hours, but it felt like no time had passed to them. It was only when Chris walked over that they paused.

"It's about time to board." He said, wearing a mixed expression.

At these words, he felt Ai's grip tighten on his hand, as if she didn't want to let go.

Ken felt his heart sink. He had thought that he was okay after saying his goodbyes yesterday, but it seemed that was not entirely true.

While he was rooted to the chair, Ai was actually the first person to stand up, helping him off the chair. Without warning she hugged him tightly, burying her face in his chest.

"I'll miss you..." She said, her voice wavering.

Ken felt his eyes begin to tear up, but he managed to stay strong. He lifted her chin and placed a deep kiss on her lips.

"I love you." This was the first time he'd uttered those words to Ai, but they were from the heart.

Tears began to flow down Ai's cheeks, a mixture of both sadness and happiness. She tried to wipe at them, but it was quickly replaced by more tears.

"I love you too."

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

Chapter 552 - 552: Departure (2)

After a long 15 hour trip, the Takagi's arrived at the international airport in Austin Texas. Ken had struggled to sleep much on the plane, meaning he was rather tired.

It wasn't that he didn't want to sleep, just that the economy class was hardly suited for a person of his height. With his almost 6'4 frame, he had felt like a sardine, locked into the seats.

Ken walked through the airport much like a zombie, responding with grunts and groans whenever talked to by his parents.

Eventually, they managed to get their bags and head out the front. There were a few odd displays like large colorful guitars and even a bronze statue of a woman he'd never heard of before.

Ken just took it in his stride, too tired to make sense of the new environment.

After jumping in a taxi, the trio had another 20 or so minute drive before arriving at their destination.

"We're here guys." Chris announced, his excitement evident.

Ken turned his head and took in the sight which would be home from now on. The first thing he saw was the large lawn out the front and the long driveway.

The house was a single story and painted red. It had a patio out the front and a car port which was just a steel frame and simple roof above.

Ken was feeling a little tentative, but he still dragged himself out of the car. Since he was so tired, he didn't care if he slept in a tent at this point.

However, seeing how excited his father was, he decided to play along as the guy gave them a tour of the house, just like a real estate agent would.

In all reality, Ken was running on fumes. He glanced at the kitchen and the lounge half-heartedly, wishing for nothing but the sweet embrace of a bed.

Thankfully, his father sensed that both his wife and son were lacking the enthusiasm required for such a situation and promptly sent them both to bed.

"Here is your room. You'll be free to customize it later, but for now just get some sleep." He said, patting Ken on the back.

Ken didn't need to be told twice, immediately dropping his suitcases onto the floor and marching to the bed. He dove face first, taking only a few minutes to fall asleep, his worries nothing but a distant memory.

After who knows how long, Ken roused from his deep sleep, his stomach growling in protest. Only now did he realize that he hadn't eaten since a few hours into the flight.

"I'm hungry..." He muttered, getting up from the bed.

He looked out the window, seeing the street lights and the night sky. The last day had been a blur, Ken hardly remembered it despite knowing it had been long and draining both physically and emotionally.

He walked out of the room and into the unfamiliar house, feeling odd. There was a note on the kitchen bench, grabbing his attention.

"Food is in the microwave, heat it up if you're hungry. Love Mom."

A small smile appeared on his face in response. His parents had already gone to sleep but still thought to leave him some food, making him feel warm inside.

He heated up the rice and went to town, filling his belly promptly and downing some water. Surprisingly, he soon began to yawn again, feeling sleepiness creep in.

Ken pat his stomach in satisfaction, heading back to the bed and laying down. Like a bear hibernating for the winter, he fell asleep quickly.

The next morning, he awoke to find both his parents sitting at the dining table eating breakfast already. Ken felt as if he'd been run over by a truck, likely from sleeping for far longer than he was used to.

"Morning Kenny" Both his mother and father called in unison.

"Mmm." He grunted in response, limping his way to the table.

Yuki placed a bowl in front of him, filling it with cereal and handing him the milk. They didn't often have cereal back in Japan, but he wasn't complaining.

"I hope you had a good sleep son, cos we've got a busy day ahead of us." Chris said smilingly.

Ken felt a headache coming on, but he still nodded, trying not to kill his father's fun.

"I need to move my body first." He said, trying to stretch out some soreness.

"Mmm that's fine, just don't get lost."

"Ah..." Ken exclaimed, almost forgetting that they were in a completely different country right now.

"There's a gym close by. Maybe you can join it?" Yuki suggested.

Eventually, Ken decided to brave the wild for today. If anything, he wanted to do a bit of exploring while he was at it and clear his head.

He dug his running shoes out of his bags and headed to the front door. It was a little odd not seeing the usual Japanese setup, but he quickly moved on.

"I'm off." Ken said, heading out the door.

"Be safe."

Ken hit the road, starting off slow. Every step he took, Ken discovered another pain in his muscles. This was the result of being cooped up in an economy seat for 15 hours with his long limbs.

Thankfully, around 10 minutes into the run the tight muscles began to ease as they warmed up.

By the time he was halfway through his run, a smile appeared on Ken's face. There was nothing more relaxing than exercising, at least for him.

Before he knew it, Ken was almost sprinting towards the end, ignoring the cars and people all around. It was just him and the road, nothing could stop him from pushing his limits.

As he neared the bridge, he began to slow down, feeling as if he was forgetting something important.

"Ah crap!" He exclaimed.

Ken looked around him, trying to gauge where he was. He had been so caught up in the feeling of running that he hadn't been paying attention to where he was going.

However, he shook his head, taking it all in stride, looking towards the future.

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

Chapter 553 - 553: First Day (1)

Ken exited the shower, enjoying the cool air hit his body. He looked in the mirror, focusing on the face staring back at him.

He couldn't help but notice that he'd grown older, particularly after the kidnapping event that took place in Tokyo. Ken had turned 18 a couple of months ago yet he had still yet to develop any facial hair.

Not that he minded, since shaving every morning would be a pain in the rear. It reminded him of his pitiful existence in his previous life, monotonously going to the job he hated ever day, with no goals in life.

But now, things were different.

He grinned in the mirror, quickly fixing his hair and heading out of the bathroom.

"Morning Kenny." Chris said, already sitting at the dining table.

"Morning."

He looked at his father who was dressed in a white polo, sporting the Texas Shorthorns logo on the front. It had been almost a month since they'd arrived in Austin, and he could already tell his dad was enjoying it.

"Did you decide what you're going to wear today honey?" Yuki asked.

"Ah..." Ken stood still for a moment, his mind going blank.

Yuki sent him a grin, "It's your first day of school today, you'll need to make a good impression." She crooned.

Unfortunately for Ken, he lacked any fashion sense. He had almost cried upon finding out that his school did not have a uniform, meaning he would have to dress himself every day.

"Don't worry, I'll pick something out for you if you like?" She added, excitement evident in her features.

"NO... Ahem. No thanks mom." Ken shouted out of reflex, before quickly adjusting his volume.

Chris stifled a chuckle in response, almost breaking out into laughter upon seeing Yuki's look of annoyance and puffed out cheeks.

Ken slowly backed away from the kitchen, maintaining eye contact with his mother. Only when he got close enough to his bedroom door did he turn around and escape.

"Hmph." Yuki harrumphed, feeling slightly offended.

"Now now honey, he's a teenager. Of course he wants to choose his own outfits." Chris said, taking a sip of his coffee.

Yuki grumbled, "I just pray our first grandchild is a girl, then we can do dress-ups without any complaints."

"PSHHHH" At the mention of grandkids once again, Chris spat his mouthful of coffee and began coughing.

"Haaah. Boys are so gross." She stated in a defeated tone.

Meanwhile, Ken was already moving through the clothing items in his closet. He knew that if he didn't pick out something his mother approved of, he wouldn't have a choice but to wear what she wanted.

Eventually, he settled on a simple polo shirt and long pants. The shirt was white and the pants were black, similar to his summer uniform back in Japan.

"This will do." Ken nodded, happy enough with his choice. As for what he would wear tomorrow, he would think about that later.

Before he left the room, his eyes darted to the calendar on his dresser.

It was currently April 19th 2019. He looked greedily at the following day which was circled, practically salivating.

'The system comes back tomorrow...!' Ken thought, every fiber of his being looking forward to the moment.

"Kenny, you're going to be late." Chris called from the kitchen, snapping him out of his reverie.

"Ah... I better go." He mumbled, resisting the urge to kiss the calendar.

He walked out his bedroom door, swooping up a piece of toast on his way past the dining room.

"I'm off." Ken waved.

"Take care."

Both Yuki and Chris responded in turn, watching his figure leave the front door.

There were a few moments of silence between the two before Yuki spoke up with worry, "Is he going to be okay?" She asked.

"Mmm. He'll be fine, don't worry. Just remember I attended High School in the US as well." Chris stated, sending her a confident glance.

Meanwhile, Ken walked into the car port and grabbed his bicycle, jumping on it confidently. The school was about 18 minutes away by bike, making it the easiest way to get there.

Soon enough, Ken was flying down the road, enjoying the wind that flew by. He of course wore a helmet, not wanting to risk hurting himself for a quick thrill.

By now Ken had gotten used to the surroundings, since he went for a run every day.

"You off to school Ken?" A lady's voice called out, drawing his attention.

"Yes Mrs. Rogers, it's my first day." He said, slowing down and flashing her a grin.

"Well good luck with everything, try and make plenty of friends okay?" There was a hint of concern in her tone, causing Ken to smile.

He said his thanks and continued on his way. Mrs. Rogers was someone he would see most days during his runs, she was a lovely woman in her 50's who loved to chat. Too many times he'd been interrupted during his run, but he was too polite to ignore her.

Soon enough, Ken finally arrived at the school and hopped off his bike. The first thing that struck his attention was the mass of students walking towards the school.

'Holy crap...'

Back at Yokohama, there were only about 900 students, yet this school looked to have double that at least.

His eyes moved to the sign on the main building.

"McCallum High School..." Ken muttered.

He stood still for a few moments, but he quickly felt that there were many pairs of eyes on him so he got moving. There was a place to park his bike in a large cage which was starting to fill up quickly.

He parked his bike and triple checked the lock before nodding in satisfaction.

Ken's next stop was the administration office. He needed to be guided to his home room class by one of the faculty apparently.

He walked into the office, noticing that the facilities looked rather old.

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

Chapter 554 - 554: First Day (2)

"Hi there, can I help you?" A lady behind the counter asked, her words rather loud and slow.

Ken thought it was a rather odd way of speaking, but he moved to the counter and spoke up, "Hey, today is my first day of school, I was told to come here first. The name is Ken Takagi." He replied.

"Ah..." The woman looked a bit shocked for a moment before her demeanor changed.

She began accessing the computer and typing a few times before grabbing something from under the desk. The woman placed a few items on the counter which included a class schedule and a locker number.

"Mr. Jameson will be your homeroom teacher, he should be here at any moment." She said, her earlier loud and slow accent seemingly disappearing.

Before Ken could guess why, a man walked in the door sporting a salt and pepper beard that reached his chest. It was well kept, a sign that he cared for it deeply.

His hair was thinning on the top, though it was not easily seen. Only because Ken was a head taller than the man could he tell.

"Mr. Jameson, could you please escort this new student to your homeroom?" The lady asked politely.

The man took one glance at him and let out a small sigh. "Another foreign exchange student?" He asked, as if he had plenty of experience with them before.

Ken frowned, "I'm actually a citizen Mr. Jameson" he replied, not hiding the annoyance in his tone.

Mr. Jameson almost jumped in fright. He could have sworn the guy was Japanese or Chinese, just from his mannerisms.

It seemed that Ken's polite stance had given him away as someone foreign. Since Japanese people were taught to defer to those older than them, it had sunk into his everyday demeanor without realizing.

"Ah, my bad." He said, running his fingers through his beard. "Let's go, I'll take you to your locker and introduce you to the class."

With that, he quickly changed the subject, hoping to move past it.

Ken didn't make it difficult for him, following him into the halls. Like on many movies he'd seen, he was eventually greeted by a large hallway with lockers on either end, seemingly never ending.

Eventually he was able to locate his locker and got it opened. Thankfully it was empty, so he put a few things in like his helmet and other belongings.

But just before he was about to close the locker, he heard a noise go off in his head.

DING

Ken froze, his body not moving an inch. Suddenly, a window appeared in front of him with text appearing as if it was just being typed.

POPULATING USER INTERFACE...

UPDATING USER STATS...

UPDATING MISSIONS...

UI BOOTED

SYSTEM HAS SUCCESSFULLY UPGRADED TO LEVEL 5

A rising sense of excitement paired with relief filled his body, as his wide eyes read the information in front of him.

'No way... Wasn't it meant to be tomorrow?' He thought, but he quickly disregarded it.

If he had time to think, Ken would have realized that Japan is a day ahead of Austin, which meant that the 18 month time frame had already elapsed.

"Ken? What's wrong?" Mr. Jameson's concerned voice came from the other side of the open locker door, questioning him.

"Ah... Sorry, I thought I forgot something." Ken replied hastily.

As much as his burning curiosity willed for it, he had no time to look at the newly upgraded system. However, just the fact that it had returned eased a lot of his worries.

It had been so long that he wasn't even sure if the system would ever return. Part of him was worried that it no longer existed, which all seemed ridiculous now.

He let out a smile before closing the locker and turning to his homeroom teacher. "Sorry, ready to go now." Ken stated.

However, Mr. Jameson was looking at him as if he was a freak. He rubbed his eyes a couple of times, just to make sure that he wasn't seeing things.

"Is everything okay?" Ken asked, feeling a little odd.

"Erm... Sure. Let's go." He said finally, turning around and leading Ken to the class.

RING

A god awful ringing sound entered Ken's ears, causing him to turn up his face. He tracked it to a bell sitting on the wall.

At the sound of the bell, everyone quickly scattered, making their way to their classrooms like frantic bees.

They arrived at a room near the end of the hall a few moments later.

"Wait here." He said, opening the door into the classroom. Ken blinked a few times, his nervousness only now starting to kick in.

Now that he thought about it, he didn't know anyone here. Would people like him? Or would they just see him as a foreigner and disregard him.

While there was bullying in Japan, it always seemed tame in comparison to some of the western movies he'd watched.

Ken heard the teacher speaking to the class, telling them to sit down.

"We have a transfer student joining our class today, I expect you all to be kind and considerate. Ken, come in please."

Hearing his name, Ken took a deep breath and entered. What greeted him were almost 30 pairs of eyes staring at him, their curious gazes judging him.

He walked over to Mr. Jameson and faced the class, feeling rather awkward.

"Introduce yourself." The teacher said.

Ken nodded, remembering what his mother had said. He needed to make a good first impression.

"I'm Ken Takagi. I moved here with my family from Japan last month... I love playing baseball and going for runs. I hope we can work well together." He said, bowing slightly towards the class.

His introduction was met with stark silence, causing his nerves to teeter on the edge. He looked up, only to see everyone's gaze transfixed on him.

'W—What the hell is happening?' He cried inwardly.

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

Chapter 555 - 555: Charismatic Air (1)

Even after playing baseball in front of 20,000 people, Ken had never felt as awkward as he did now. The stares from the 30 or so teenagers in front of him made it feel like he was naked and exposed.

"Alright thank you Ken, please take a seat next to Stephen." Mr. Johnson said, pointing to a vacant chair at the back of the class.

Ken breathed out a sigh of relief, quickly making his way to the specified seat. Even as he passed, the teens turned their heads and stared at him.

Only when he finally took a seat did people stop looking at him, however they broke into hushed whispers. Unfortunately this was almost worse than being stared at blankly.

'What did I do wrong?' Ken thought, his mind racing.

"Is he a model or something?"

"He's so tall and handsome..."

Ken's ears perked up, his eyes widening in shock. He caught a few words of the nearby students, making him question his hearing.

Two girls in the front of the class turned around to sneak another look at him. However, when he looked at them, they quickly turned back, likely from embarrassment.

"Okay guys, I know we just came back from Easter break but please try and focus. We've got a lot to get through before SAT's at the end of the school year."

This was met with a colloquial groan from the class, who clearly didn't like being reminded about end of year exams.

The teacher continued speaking, but Ken was not paying attention. Still wrapped up in what happened earlier, he was trying to figure out what was going on.

However, it didn't take long before an answer was brought to the forefront of his mind.

'Charismatic Air...'

A self-deprecating smile appeared on his face as he remembered this double-edged skill. He had spent the past year and a half free from its effects, yet now it had reared its ugly head once more.

'Just when I thought I could blend in.' Ken sighed inwardly.

It wasn't long before Ken could feel a pair of eyes staring at him from beside him. He did his best to ignore it, but the guy seemed eager to speak to him.

Ken turned his gaze, looking at the teen with question. "What's up?" He asked, trying to sound informal.

"Hey man, the name's Stephen. But most call me Steve."

The guy was wearing a beanie, his brown straight hair visible on his fringe. He had intelligent brown eyes which held a hint of mischief, though it didn't seem to be malicious.

Steve was handsome, in an organic sense. His ethnicity likely hailed from Asia, though Ken didn't believe that he was Japanese like him.

"Ken, nice to meet you." He replied, offering his hand for a handshake.

Accepting the handshake, Steve leaned a little closer. "So you play baseball right? Are you gonna try out for the varsity team?"

Hearing the mention of baseball, Ken's features lit up noticeably. He nodded like a pecking chicken, wanting nothing more than to go to the field right away and play.

"Stephen... I know having a transfer student join is exciting and all, but please try and pay attention." Mr. Johnson said, his tone suggesting that this was not the first time he'd had to speak against the teen.

"Hehe, sorry sir." Steve replied, looking a little guilty.

All of a sudden, a voice came through the speakers at the front of the class, causing Ken to almost jump in fright.

"Please stand for the pledge of allegiance."

No one else in the class seemed surprised, quietly standing to their feet and directing their attention to the American flag at the front.

Ken was stunned, he hadn't expected such a thing. 'Pledge of what?' He thought in confusion.

However, not wanting to seem out of place, he also stood up, following what the other students did.

"I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

After saying this, everybody sat back down, with Ken quickly following suit. He did not know the words, nor did he understand the back story to them.

"Alright, I'll now be taking attendance." Mr. Johnson stated before picking up a notepad.

"Stephen Adams."

"Present."

"Carlie Bishop."

...

"Ken Takagi."

"Here."

Once he was completed with the roll call, a student went up and collected the notepad and left the class. Although it was a little different than what he was used to in Japan, it was good to know that there were similarities.

RIIING

The bell suddenly rang, causing everyone to get up from their desks promptly. Mr. Johnson didn't even flinch, going through some paperwork and ignoring the kids as they got up.

"Hey, what class do you have next?" A voice called from beside him.

Ken turned, seeing Steve already standing. He was only a couple of inches shorter than Ken and looked to be in good shape, surprising him a little.

"Ah..." Ken pulled out his schedule, "Gym class."

"Oh nice, me too. Let's go together, I'll show you the lockers." Steve said, walking by him.

"Sure."

"Did you bring some easier clothes to work out in?" He asked, briefly looking at Ken up and down.

Feeling a little odd, Ken nodded. He always brought spare clothes to change into after baseball practice if he needed to.

"Alright good, wouldn't want to wear your sweaty clothes all day after gym."

In a few minutes, Ken was led to the changing rooms for boys, equipped with benches and lockers. Ken had been in many locker rooms throughout his life, so even though it was a new place, he didn't feel too uncomfortable.

Placing his bag down, Ken took off his polo shirt, only to sense many pairs of eyes focused on him.

Feeling his face heat up, Ken quickly put his workout shirt on before turning his head from left to right.

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

Chapter 556 - 556: Charismatic Air (2)

"Damn dude, you gotta tell me your workout regime." Steve said, seemingly admiring his physique.

The compliment made Ken feel a little weird, but he tried to shake it off, thinking the guy was just being nice.

Then Steve took his shirt off, showing a well built frame. He was lacking a bit of definition, but Ken could see that the guy was in good shape.

But he didn't comment on it, not wanting to seem weird.

Soon enough, they were changed and walked into the gym together.

"Yeah so as I was saying, you gonna try out for the varsity team?" Steve asked, seemingly having a vested interest in the subject.

"Mmm, we had to go through a lot of work with the UIL to ensure I could compete in the varsity team." Ken said.

Just remembering all of the waivers and documents he needed to sign was giving him a headache. There was talk about him having to wait a full year before being allowed to complete, but thankfully that was cleared up a few days ago.

"Oho? If you went through that process than you must be rather confident in your abilities." Steve said, a mischievous grin planted on his lips.

It might have seemed arrogant, but Ken nodded. "Yeah, I like my chances." He replied matter-of-factly.

"Well, you'll have to get through our Ace pitcher Alan Romero first. He was in the all-state team last year." Steve replied, doubt clearly written on his face.

'Alan Romero?' Ken tried to search his memories, but he never heard of this player now or in his previous life.

"How is he compared to Ryan Smith?" Ken replied, his expression sincere.

Steve's jaw dropped, not expecting such a question.

"R—Ryan Smith? You mean the U18 Ace Ryan Smith?"

"Mmm."

"I—Err. I guess you could say they aren't on the same level..."

Hearing this, Ken let out a confident smile, "Then I have full confidence in taking the top spot."

"Sure man..." Steve replied.

"Do you play on the varsity team?" Ken asked. Since the guy seemed pretty knowledgeable about the team and players, it would make sense if he was also a player.

"Yeah, I play catcher and bat 6th."

Ken's face lit up, "Wow no way. Did you want to catch some of my pitches later?" he asked excitedly.

"Oh... Sure."

They walked into the indoor gym and were met with Mr. Johnson of all people. He was wearing a whistle around his neck, almost completely hidden by his well structured beard.

"Alright gather around everyone." He said, gesturing for the class to come closer.

Only when everyone arrived did he begin, "We're gonna do some warm ups first then we'll break into teams of 6 for some volleyball."

At the mention of volleyball, a few people groaned in response. Ken however, didn't mind. Though he hadn't played much of volleyball, he still knew all of the rules.

"Let's jog around the gym for a while until I blow the whistle."

Another groan rang out, but Ken grew excited. He quickly got into position and began his jog, entering a rhythm shortly after.

Steve easily kept up, jogging shoulder to shoulder with him.

"So who did you play for in Japan?" He asked casually.

"Yokohama High School."

"Oh, cool cool cool. Did you guys win anything?"

Though it was obvious the guy had no idea who or what Yokohama High was, Ken decided to humor him a little.

"Yeah we won the National tournament the year before last."

"Huh? Really? Like out of all of Japan?" Steve seemed rather gobsmacked, almost falling behind Ken while they jogged.

"Mmm, it was great."

Steve was silent for a while as they continued to jog. Before long they began to pass the stragglers, lapping the other students who weren't taking things seriously.

"Did you ever play in the representative teams?" He asked cautiously.

"Representative team? Like National team?"

"Yeah that one."

"Mmm. I competed for the U18 at the world cup in 2018." Ken responded nonchalantly.

"HUH!?"

This time, Steve stopped in his tracks, his jaw wide open as he stared at Ken's jogging figure getting further and further away from him.

FWHEE

It just so happened the Mr. Johnson blew the whistle shortly after, causing everyone to also stop. Ken frowned a little, feeling like the warm up was a little too short, however he made his way back to where the teacher was without complaint.

All the while, Steve stared at him as if he'd grown another head.

"Alright, break into teams of 6. We'll be beginning soon."

At these words, Ken was almost bombarded with people who wanted to join his team.

"Hey new guy, let's make a team."

"Derrick! I saw him first."

Not only that, a group of girls approached him, their faces red with embarrassment.

"Hey Ken, would you like to join our team?" A girl asked.

Ken looked at the group of girls and instantly felt odd, even in Japan he wasn't this popular. However, someone came in and broke up the awkward situation.

Steve arrived, his face wearing a smile. "Ladies, don't worry. Ken and I will join your team happily."

The girl in the lead rolled her eyes, "No one wants to be on your team Steve... Come on girls." She said, walking away.

However, she was the only one who ended up walking away.

"That makes 6. I hope you boys can carry us to victory."

Stephanie who had just walked away blinked a few times, not believing what she was seeing. It looked like her posse had just committed mutiny, abandoning her for a pair of hot guys.

She grit her teeth, but quickly harrumphed and left.

Steve's eyes followed her figure for a while, an unknown look in his eyes.

"Alright, has everyone got a team? Let's get underway." Mr. Johnson said, wheeling over a bunch of volleyballs.

"We'll have 2 teams on this court, and another 2 on here." He said, pointing around and directing everyone.

Ken walked onto the court and saw his opponents. A few boys were wearing glasses and did not look athletic at all, it was likely this would be an easy game.

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

Chapter 557 - 557: Travel Team (1)

"Set!"

Steve got underneath the lofted ball and flashed a glance at Ken on the other side of the court. In one fluid motion, he set the ball into a perfect position above the net, ready for Ken to spike it.

Ken's eyes followed the ball as he prepared to jump. His nearly 6'4 frame and long limbs were a huge advantage when it came to height dependent sports like volleyball.

However, just as he was poised to jump, everything in the surroundings began to move in slow motion.

'WHAT!?'

Ken almost lost his balance as he experienced the sudden shift in the surroundings. He had felt this feeling before, but only on the baseball field.

'My crunch time skill is activating!?! But I'm not even playing baseball.'

It was true that he couldn't control the activation of the skill, but he didn't expect it to activate at such a time. Ken was forced to go with the flow, putting every ounce of power into his jump.

His head peaked over the net, but his eyes were on the ball, pinpointing the exact time and place to spike the volleyball with all of his might.

SMACK!

DOING

"Yamete Kudasai!"

Ken's hand whipped down, sending the innocent ball crashing into the ground and bouncing up with tremendous force. The sound was so loud that everyone in the gym turned in his direction.

"Nice set." Ken said, nodding towards Steve.

Steve just stared back at him blankly.

"K-Ken... What the hell was that?" Mr. Johnson happened to see the whole thing take place and he walked over with disbelief written all over his face.

"Eh? It was a spike I guess." Ken replied, feeling a little awkward. Did he perhaps break a rule or something?

"Well yeah..." The teacher said, before shaking his head, "Have you played volleyball before? Did you want to join our team?"

Mr. Johnson's eyes were eager, as if he was looking at their ticket to the state championships. Even if Ken wasn't aware earlier, it was clear now that the man was the coach for the school volleyball team.

"Err, I don't really play volleyball sir." He responded, trying to sound respectful as possible.

'Me? Volleyball? Not in a million years.' Ken scoffed inwardly.

He was a typical Japanese Yakyu-boy, with only baseball on his mind. There was no other sport or occupation that could change his mind, especially volleyball.

"Hey Mr. Johnson, Ken already said he's joining the baseball team." Steve sprung into action, trying to protect his new friend.

Inwardly, Steve scowled at the teacher, his fangs already bared. He had already figured out who Ken was after querying him during the warm up jog around the gym.

Although he had not heard about the guy for over a year, Ken left quite an impression on him when he led Japan to the U18 World Cup win against their US team. However, this was the first time he'd seen him up close.

At first, Steve had thought Ken was arrogant and conceited when he mentioned Ryan Smith. But as things would turn out, the guy had actually beaten him, on such a large stage.

Just thinking of catching pitches from a prodigy like Ryan Smith was enough to leave him salivating, let alone the guy who was arguably better.

"Huh? Baseball?" Mr. Johnson looked torn for a moment before he screwed up his face in annoyance. He made a few gestures and told the students to resume the game.

"Umm, Sir... We'd like to forfeit." One of the students wearing glasses spoke up before the teacher left, his face filled with fear.

It wasn't just him, all the other students looked as if they were about to wet themselves after seeing the vicious spike from Ken earlier.

Mr. Johnson let out a sigh in response.

A couple hours later, Ken was brought to the cafeteria with Steve who had seemingly made it his mission to chaperon him around the school. Ken thought the guy was being overly nice, but he didn't object to the treatment.

After all, it was better to have a friend rather than be a loner.

"So what made you move over here?" Steve asked, sitting across from him.

Ken couldn't help but look at the food in front of the guy and turn up his nose. Thankfully his mother had packed his lunch, otherwise he'd have to resort to eating the cafeteria food.

He pulled out his lunch box, filled with rice and various side dishes, feeling his mouth begin to water. Ken had been a little pressed for time this morning so was only surviving on a piece of toast.

"My Dad got a job at the University of Texas." Ken said simply, pulling out his chopsticks and praying silently before digging into his food. He easily shoved rice into his mouth one by one, showing just how hungry he was.

"Oh cool, is he a professor or something?"

"Assistant Coach." Ken responded between chewing.

"For what? Baseball?" Steve's eyes widened in surprise.

"Mmm."

The way Steve looked at him changed once more, his gaze filled with respect. It was clear that Ken's background was filled with baseball, which was likely a reason why he was at the level he was now.

Steve was silent for a while, digging into his food.

"You know the season has ended right? We were knocked out in the Bi-District round before Easter." He said, looking a little apologetic.

"Eh?" Ken was a little confused. Back in Japan, they had many tournaments throughout the year, Summer, Fall and in the Spring.

"Our season is February to April, only extending if we make it into the playoffs."

Ken paused, feeling the world around him freeze. He had just got the system back, yet now he had missed out on the High School season? What was the point in coming to America if that was the case.

'Wouldn't I have been better off staying in Japan?' Ken thought bitterly.

As if seeing the sadness in Ken's face, Steve smiled, "Well, if ya still wanna play, you can join a travel team. I play for the Texas Gladiators."

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

Chapter 558 - 558: Travel Team (2)

"Travel team?" This was the first time that Ken had heard about such a thing.

"Think of it as an Amateur baseball club. We mostly play on weekends in either tournaments or scrimmages."

Ken's eyes widened. At first he had been bummed that the school season was over, but hearing of this wonderful thing called travel teams, he regained his enthusiasm.

"So how do I join the team?" Ken asked eagerly.

"Hehe. Well you'd just need to tryout, as long as you're good enough they'll put you in the squad." Steve said with a grin, he seemed to be enjoying himself.

Ken disregarded the guys expression, focused on the matter at hand.

"Okay sounds easy enough. Can we go after school?"

"You want to go today? Damn, someones eager..." Though he said this, Steve didn't seem as surprised as he sounded, almost like he was expecting this kind of reaction.

"Well, there's a few things you need to know before you look at joining a travel team."

Steve then proceeded to outline the cons, ranging from having no free time on weekends, to the sometimes costly travels associated with playing all over Texas. There was also the fact that players weren't guaranteed playing time, unless they were really good.

Ken basically disregarded this fact. Even if his father wasn't on a lucrative salary at Texas University, he still had plenty of money leftover from his Grandpa.

"And the benefits?" Ken asked lazily.

"Hehe. Well if you want exposure to College scouts and to face the best competition in the state, a travel team is the right place to be."

This time, Steve really got Ken's attention.

'College scouts?' He thought, his eyes narrowing. There was no question, he needed to join a travel team, no matter what.

"Konichiwa."

Ken almost flinched at the horrible Japanese pronunciation from the voice behind him. He turned around, only to see a few of the nerdy guys he'd faced in volleyball earlier that day.

The guy at the front bowed slightly, which looked extremely awkward.

"Umm... Anime wa sukidesu ka?"

'Do I like Anime?' Ken's face was a direct reflection of his confusion. Who would come up to someone in the middle of a conversation and say this? And in such broken Japanese too.

Steve groaned lightly, feeling the awkwardness encompass him.

Since he was Japanese, Ken didn't like being rude, so he answered politely enough in Japanese.

"Sure I guess. My favorite Anime is Major, but I also like Hajime no Ippo. If I'm honest though, I prefer reading Manga over Anime."

The guy in front was stupified for a moment, as if he was doing his best to translate the words he heard into English. Therefore, almost an entire minute passed as he continued to think, causing the awkwardness to intensify.

"Um... High School DxD ga daisuki desu." He responded after a while, a smile on his face.

Ken's face froze. He of course was aware of what High School DxD was, but the fact that this guy would openly admit to such a thing was what made him feel extremely uncomfortable.

In his mind, it was basically just a glorified Hentai.

"Ahem... If you'll excuse me, I was just finishing up." Ken said, quickly packing up his lunch and leaving the cafeteria. A shiver ran down his spine as he remembered the innocent smile on the kids face.

'Pervert...'

The rest of the day went rather peacefully for Ken, although a little boring. Steve was in 2 of his last 3 classes which was good, but the problem was, he had learned all the subjects and more.

Since he was basically repeating the final few months of his Junior year, Ken knew nearly everything that the teachers were teaching. In addition, it felt like the curriculum here was a little behind what he was used to in Japan.

Still, Ken vowed not to slack off. GPA scores were also a large factor in dictating what kind of college he could get into, even when sports scholarships were involved.

As the final bell rang, Ken stretched, feeling his muscles sing out in satisfaction.

"How far is the club?" Ken asked Steve as they walked to their lockers.

"It's about 25 minutes on the bus."

"Bus?" Ken was a little worried since he'd brought his bike to school.

"Don't worry, there's a bus that comes back to the school. My mom usually picks me up from here at around 6 or 7pm." Steve assured Ken after seeing his anxious expression.

"Ah that's good."

The two walked out of the school and waited for the bus which promptly left after around 10 minutes. Ken was thankful that he had Steve as a guide, since he was going into unmarked territory.

He quickly sent his mother a message, letting her know what he was up to. It was now a habit of his, since he had gotten lost more than once and needed her to pick him up.

After sending the message, Ken sat back in his seat, his eyes scanning the bus. It was rather full, which wasn't surprising since so many kids attended the school.

He saw a pair of eyes staring in their direction from up the front of the bus. The moment he locked gazes with the girl, she quickly turned back around.

Ken felt like she was familiar, but he'd met many new faces today so it took some time to put a name to the face.

'Is that the Stephanie girl?' He thought, thinking back to the gym situation.

He turned to Steve who seemed to be looking at her direction and instantly felt there was something going on.

"Alright spill. What's up with you and that Stephanie girl." Ken said, a small grin forming on his face.

Steve's eyes widened in surprise a little, but he smiled wryly soon after.

"Ah it's nothing. We grew up together and used to be real tight, but ever since we got to High School she's been weird with me." He admitted, feeling a little exasperated.

"Oho? Is that so?" Ken said, nudging the guy with his elbow. He felt like he knew where this story was going, but seeing the clueless expression on his new friends face just made everything a lot more interesting.

Just then, Ken had a realization. 'Damn it, have I become like my mother?'

Remembering his mom who loved to play matchmaker, he suddenly had a bout of self-reflection.

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

Chapter 559 - 559: Gladiators (1)

The trip went rather fast as the two chatted away. It was a rather odd feeling, getting along so well with someone after only 1 day of knowing them.

By the end of the bus ride, Ken felt as if he'd known Steve for many years already.

Apparently he had played baseball from a young age, but only outside of school since he was home schooled until recently. Ken was a little surprised since he thought that kids who were home schooled generally lacked social skills.

Disregarding his own generalization, he patiently listened to his new friends back story.

As they got up to leave the bus, Stephanie also got to her feet. It seemed it was also her stop. She once again completely ignored Steve, not even sending him a glance.

'Yikes, this could be worse than I thought.' Ken said inwardly, sending the unsuspecting Steve a pitiful glance.

Unaware of his plight, the guy walked forward, beckoning Ken to follow.

"The Gladiators club is this way, but we usually practice on the fields close by." He said, picking up the pace.

Before long, the two were jogging towards the fields.

Upon finally arriving, Ken hadn't even broken into a sweat. He glanced at Steve who also seemed to be fine and nodded his head inwardly. It was clear that the guy was in shape.

His gaze moved to the field which seemed to be in great condition. It was laid out in synthetic turf and there was enough capacity for around 100 spectators.

"Coach! I've brought someone to try out." Steve yelled out, his voice catching the attention of not only the coach, but a lot of the players who had already gathered.

Ken felt a little awkward suddenly receiving a whole bunch of stares, but he didn't back down. Now was not the time to appear meek and timid.

"Steve... Our next tournament is this weekend, we've already finalized the team." A man in his early forties with a killer mustache turned to him and spoke with exasperation.

However, when his eyes landed on Ken, he began to size him up. There was a hint of hesitation in his gaze, as if deciding if it was worth taking a look.

"Give him a shot Coach, I guarantee you won't regret it." He said, shining a smile at the man.

Just before the coach was about to refuse once more, Steve walked a bit closer to him and whispered something in his ear. There was a frown on his face for a few moments before his eyes suddenly lit up.

He looked at Ken in disbelief, then once again sized him up.

Whatever hesitation was in his gaze earlier seemingly disappeared as he walked closer to Ken. If anything, there was now a sparkle in his eyes.

"Ken was it? Is it true that you're the same guy who killed our U18 team at the World Cup?" The coach asked in a low voice. It seemed that he didn't want to alert the other players just yet.

"I wouldn't exactly put it like that, but yes I pitched for the U18 Japanese National team." Ken said, trying to remain a little humble.

"Hehe... I'm Coach Wyatt, its a pleasure to meet you." The mustachioed man said, his lips turned up in a grin.

"Ken Takagi, likewise." He replied, completing the handshake and introduction.

"Well, as I said we've got a tournament starting this weekend, so we've pretty much decided on the team. But I can't exactly let ya walk away empty handed now, can I?" Although he said this, his mouth was still grinning ear to ear.

Ken didn't exactly know what he was talking about, but decided to play along.

"Just tell me what I need to do." He said with conviction.

"Excellent!" Coach Wyatt said, patting Ken on his left shoulder with glee.

"Usually we'd hold open tryouts for a spot on the team, but we closed them last week. If you want a spot, you'll have to try out in front of the whole team." He added.

'Hmm? That sounds a little odd.' Ken thought.

However, his Academic trait quickly came to a conclusion. It was likely that if the coach put him in the team, it could sow discourse and negatively affect morale. The coach wanted the team to see his abilities and prove himself to them.

"Alright let's do it." There was no hesitation in his voice.

Both Coach Wyatt and Steve seemed rather pleased with his attitude, practically jumping in the air with glee.

"Go get padded up." Coach Wyatt told Steve, his eyes still sparkling.

"Ken, have you got your own equipment?"

"Mmm. I'm just missing a bat." Ken replied.

However, Coach Wyatt frowned in confusion. "You can hit as well?" He asked, sounding a little skeptical.

Ken looked at him weirdly. It was odd that the guy knew about his performance in the World Cup but did not know about his hitting abilities.

"I'm decent." He responded.

"Hmm okay. We'll have you bat as well then." The coach said, "Go follow Steve and meet us on the field in a few minutes."

Ken nodded, heading towards the locker room where Steve had just disappeared to.

The Coach made his way onto the field, seeing all of his players warming up. They were meant to be going through a regular practice, but something much more interesting was about to occur.

"Alright you lot, gather up." He said loudly.

The players stopped what they were doing almost instantaneously and headed over.

"I know I said we had finalized the starting line up for the tournament this weekend, but we've had a change of plans."

At these words some of the players looked a little annoyed, but no one spoke up. They respected their coach too much to speak back.

"We'll have a new guy trying out for the squad today. You're all welcome to watch."

A few whispers rang out, as the players talked amongst themselves.

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

- Chapter 560 - 560: Gladiators (2)

Chapter 560 - 560: Gladiators (2)

"What position is he trying out for?" A bulky teen with thick black hair spoke up, his expression not seeming too impressed.

"Pitcher." Coach Wyatt replied simply.

At these words, another teen in the crowd paled briefly.

"Coach, I think Brett is already a good pitcher. Why would we try to replace him?" The black-haired teen from earlier spoke up, placing his hand on his friend's shoulder.

"Max... I know you're the Captain and you need to look out for your guys, but this is not your decision. Remember, in both College and the Major League, only the best players will be played, your feelings don't matter." Coach Wyatt said, spreading his knowledge.

Though a bit harsh, his reasoning was sound. If they likened a baseball club to a business, it made sense to only hire the best employees, benching those who don't perform.

As if noticing his sharp tone, the coach let out a small sigh and spoke up once more, this time a little softer. "Look, we're gonna have this tryout today no matter what. How about I let you guys decide if he's worthy of joining the team?"

"What?"

"He's gonna let us choose?"

Instantly, the players began whispering amongst themselves. They looked at the Coach with a hint of suspicion, it seemed too good to be true.

If they wanted to keep Brett as their starting pitcher, they could all just turn around and make up some excuse that the guy wasn't good enough. After that, there was nothing that the coach could do to reverse the decision.

Brett's eyes lit up at this proposition, feeling that he had a shot. After all, he'd been part of the organization since he was 14 years of age.

"So? What do you say?" Coach Wyatt asked, his mustache curled into a small grin.

Of course he was aware of what the teens were thinking. But he bet that once they saw the new recruit in action, none of them would be able to reject him.

Everybody looked to Max, the Captain, as if telling him to accept.

Max felt that something was a little off, but he eventually nodded, "Alright Coach, we accept." He stated confidently.

"Excellent!" The Coach exclaimed before making a move towards the locker room.

However, he stopped in place and turned back around, "By the way, the better we do in the tournament, the more exposure we'll have to College Scouts." He stated off-handedly before continuing on his way.

These words seemed to stir a sense of excitement within the players. The words "College Scouts" was enough for them to endlessly dream about making it big in the future.

At their age, college was only a year or so away. The more exposure they had, the better their chances of entering a good college on a scholarship.

The only person who felt a sense of unease right now was Brett. At first he felt a strong camaraderie with his teammates. Though it was not said outright, he believed that the team would have his back and not let the new guy in regardless of his performance.

Yet with only a few words from the wily coach, he was not so sure anymore.

A few minutes later, Ken and Steve came out of the locker room. Steve was already wearing his chest protector and had his mask in hand.

Ken was wearing the same clothes, but now he sported a cap with the Gladiators logo on it. He had pitched all his life with a baseball cap on, so he felt really odd not wearing one.

Thankfully, Steve offered his own.

'Eh!?'

Ken almost froze as he felt an abundance of stares directed his way. If earlier they were curious gazes, now they seemed to be filled with something more, something he couldn't put his finger on.

"Alright, head up to the mound and get your arm warmed up." Coach Wyatt said, sending him a smile.

"Yes coach." Ken responded, jogging on his way to the mound.

Upon arriving, he went through his dynamic warm ups, rolling his shoulders back and forth and limbering them up.

To be honest, he was feeling a little nervous. It wasn't just because of the gazes directed his way, but because he had yet to pitch his new form with the system. Hell, he hadn't even had time to check his stats or anything just yet.

With so many eyes on him, watching his every move, Ken didn't feel comfortable bringing up his status window, fearing that people might think he was crazy with all the hand gestures needed.

'Wait! Mika, are you there?' Ken asked. He had completely forgotten about his AI friend who he hadn't spoken to in over a year.

[Hmph...]

'Oh crap, she's mad.' Ken thought, his face paling.

"He looks like a nervous wreck. You shouldn't have anything to worry about Brett." Max said to his friend after seeing Ken's actions.

However, Max's gaze moved to the coach who seemed to be so confident. He just couldn't understand why the coach had so much faith in this guy.

'Look Mika, I'm sorry I didn't call out to you right away...'

Ken tried to sweet talk her, but it was clear she wasn't having any of it.

[Activating Flatulence protocol...]

'NO!'

Ken almost jumped in fright, placing his glove behind his rear in hopes that it would at least muffle the sound.

[Just kidding...]

Hearing the monotonous voice say these words, Ken was dumbstruck. His AI was making jokes? Was this a new feature of the system upgrade?

If that was the case then he would rather not have it.

"Ken? Are you ready to warm up?" Steve asked, looking a little concerned.

"Ah, yes sorry." Ken replied, feeling flustered.

Ken began his warm up throws, easily sending the ball into Steve's outstretched glove. As usual, he took around 10 throws to warm up his muscles.

"Last one." He called out, holding the ball in his glove.

Ken's eyes narrowed as he brought his leg up and took a big stride off the mound.

PAH

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