

Major League System

Chapter 721 - 721: Social Media (1)

The next day after practice, Ken arrived back at his dorm and placed his bags down. It was getting a bit colder since it was now Autumn, but that didn't stop him from sweating profusely.

"Shower..."

Ken hated smelling bad, something he'd picked up since regressing. For some reason, his teenage body odor had been far worse than he remembered, causing him to have a complex.

As he opened the door to the bathroom, still kitted out in his Columbia baseball uniform, the other door opened.

"Oh hey, you're here. You ready to set up your Social Media account?" It was Tara. She had her hair tied up in a practical bun and wore make up, likely because she had just finished with the cheer team.

After yet another jump scare, Ken was beginning to think he might die of a heart attack if this persisted. .

"Yeah, I just need to shower first." He replied, trying to calm down his racing heart.

"No no, we need some photos for your profile. Come on through." She said, opening the door wide as if to usher him inside.

Ken shook his head. "I stink and I need to shower. Can't you just use the photos on the University website?"

Tara's face fell in the next moment, as if she thought of something disgusting. "I already looked at those photo's... Let me just say that they should not see the light of day."

Hearing this, Ken didn't know whether to feel offended or not. Just as he was about to refuse once more, Tara moved forward and grabbed his arm, pulling him into her room.

"Hurry up, the smell of sweat isn't something that I'm unaccustomed to." She stated.

Ken was easily strong enough to resist her pull, but he decided to give up thinking that Tara might change her mind when she actually smelled him.

Upon entering her room, the layout was similar to his own, but it was completely different. While his was sparsely decorated, Tara's room was colorful and smelled like lavender.

In the corner of the room, there was a light atop a stand with a white backdrop. It looked like she had set it up in order to take some professional photographs. This theory was backed up when he saw the expensive looking camera sitting on her desk.

"What's all this?" He asked, feeling incredulous.

"It's for a photo shoot obviously." She stated as if he was dumb.

"Well, I can see that... I mean, weren't we just setting up a Social Media account?"

Tara massaged her temples, clearly getting frustrated with his lack of knowledge in the subject. Ken thought that she was about to lose her temper, but she took a deep breath in and out.

"Okay let's try a new approach." She said, clapping her hands together once. "You know nothing about Social Media, whereas I am not only studying digital marketing, but I also have quite a following online."

Ken nodded, it seemed like a fair assessment.

"So, all you need to do is listen to what I say. If I'm going to be your Social Media Manager in the future, we need to be on the same page." She said matter-of-factly.

"Huh? Social Media Manager?" Since when had he asked her for this?

"Yup. Now go stand in front of the backdrop, we need a decent profile pic to start with. As for posts, I've already found some decent clips on your Perfect Game profile to use." Tara stated, all but pushing him towards the photo area.

Ken had no choice but to comply, but inwardly he was wondering what he'd gotten himself into. Not to mention he had to participate in his least favorite activity—taking photo's.

However, he was rather surprised when Tara didn't ask him to smile. In fact, she just spoke to him normally, merely dictating what poses he should be making every now and then.

A few of the poses left him feeling awkward, but the woman's professionalism made it not as unbearable as he had thought.

After around 20 minutes, she gave the nod of approval.

"Alright, go into your phone and download Instagram, Facebook and Twitter from the app store. Have a think about what you want your handle to be while I pick out a good photo and touch it up."

"O—Okay..."

Since Ken had only ever used LINE back in Japan, he had never heard of Instagram or Twitter before. Facebook was popular back home, but only for the old people.

He did as he was told, quickly downloading all of the apps. He wasn't sure what a handle was, but he also didn't want to interrupt Tara who was expertly moving and clicking her mouse in front of her laptop.

After a few minutes she let out a sound of triumph and turned around, "Alright, what handle did you come up with?"

"I'm sorry... I don't know what a handle is." Ken replied lamely.

Tara pinched the bridge of her nose briefly before letting out a sigh, "You're right, it's my fault for expecting you to know such a thing. It's basically a username, so it needs to be cool, but also easy enough for people to search for you."

"I see... Can't I just use my name?"

Tara shook her head, "Unless you have the most unique name in the world, someone probably has already used it. Apart from facebook, Twitter and Instagram require a unique handle."

"Okay... How about KenTakagiPitcher" He suggested.

"Alright, that's my fault once again... How about we brainstorm together." She said, trying to keep her composure.

She grabbed his phone and opened up Instagram and went through the prompts to create a new account. When it came time to choose the handle, she paused, thinking deeply.

"Is there any cool terminologies in baseball for a pitcher?"

"Umm, the best pitcher on the team is usually called an Ace." Ken replied.

"Oh, that might actually work." She said, typing into his phone.

"AceTakagi. What do you think?"

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

Chapter 722 - 722: Social Media (2)

Ken was a little torn. It didn't really have the ring that he was looking for, plus he wasn't exactly considered the Ace on the Columbia team just yet since the season hadn't started.

"How about HyakuMairuKen." His face brightened as he suggested this.

"Hiyaku Mayru? What does that mean?" Tara asked in confusion.

Disregarding the butchering of the pronunciation, Ken explained, "Hyaku mairu means 100 miles. Since my fastballs can get up to 100mph, I think it would be cool to have it."

However, Tara shook her head. "Your fan base will mostly be American. No one will know what it means and it will likely do you more harm than good."

Ken mumbled and grumbled a little, feeling that it was a waste. "Okay, we'll go with AceTakagi then. But I'm using the other one for LINE." He said, not backing down.

"LINE?"

"It's Japanese Social Media. I will create that account once we're done with the others."

"Okay... Let's just do that then."

With that, the two had decided on Ken's handle and began to create his accounts. Tara made him choose a password and wrote it down so that she could access the accounts and manage them.

Only after an hour was everything finally set up. Tara also followed a few key pages like Columbia Bobcats and New York Yanks before setting up Ken's profile picture.

As Ken retrieved his phone back, he saw the empty page and suddenly remembered something. "Ah, I need to post this picture I took with the Yanks, can you do that for me?"

When Tara saw the photo, her eyes sparkled. "This is great! When did you get these?" She asked with curiosity.

"They were before the game last night."

Snatching the phone back from Ken, she began to upload the image, putting on filters and the like before entering in a caption. Ken had no idea what she was doing, but it was already clear that she was a capable person so he didn't object.

When all was said and done Ken was exhausted. Seeing that the picture was posted to all 3 of his accounts, he could finally relax.

'That should be the mission completed. I'll accept the rewards later.' He thought.

"Thank you for all your help. What do I owe you?" Ken asked. He subconsciously backed away after remembering what had happened last night in the bathroom.

Tara saw this, but she merely grinned in response. "Don't worry about paying me for now. But when you reach the MLB, I want a job as your Social Media Manager okay?"

Ken was taken aback by the response. He had planned on paying her handsomely for setting up his accounts, especially after seeing how good of a job she'd done for him. However, hearing this, he realized just how shrewd this woman was.

Rather than receive a once off payment, she was using this as an opportunity to plan for the future. It was risk, especially since only 10% of all Senior college players were drafted into the MLB.

However, he wasn't upset by this. In fact, this move had solidified his impression of Tara even more.

"Heh, you've got yourself a deal." Ken said, holding out his hand.

"Pleasure doing business with you."

After everything was complete, Ken went back to the bathroom and locked the door behind him. Dealing with Tara had left him mentally exhausted, so he quickly jumped in the shower and let out a sigh of relief as the warm water washed over his body.

Once he felt human again, he left the bathroom and got changed, seeing Steve passed out on the floor.

"Go and shower, I'll treat you to a meal." He said, kicking the guy on the ground.

He heard a groan in reply before the guy got up and trudged into the bathroom. While off-season training was rather grueling, it was the addition of lectures and study that made it even worse.

Ken was okay because of his Academic trait, but he could understand why Steve was exhausted. Hopefully there would be a turning point where the guy would hit his stride.

College athletes generally struggled to balance their sporting commitments alongside their academics. However, there was no way out of this. Even if Ken was drafted after his 3rd year of College, he still intended to complete his degree.

Economics and sports science would help him possibly land a coaching job down the line when he finished with his Major League career. This was something that he had discussed in great lengths with his father who was already an assistant coach.

His body wouldn't hold up forever, even with the assistance of the . Which was why he needed to plan for the future.

When Steve finished showering, the two went to the cafeteria in the dorm to get some dinner.

"Did you get your social media up and running?" Steve probed in between mouthfuls.

"Mmm. Tara was really helpful." Ken replied smilingly.

"Oh good. Hurry up and follow me on Instagram." He beckoned, pointing to Ken's phone.

Ken agreed, opening up his phone. "What's your handle?"

"Stevielovemachine" Steve replied with a deadpan expression.

"..."

There was a stiff silence between the two as Ken stared at him, trying to figure out if he was being serious or not. "No really, what is your handle?"

"I already told you..."

Ken felt a headache coming on, but he typed the name in anyway. Lo and behold, Steve's profile came up, showing his 225 followers. This changed to 226 after Ken followed him.

BUZZ BUZZ

"Hehe, let's check out your profile." Steve said with a grin.

"Oh no~ you have no followers. Guess I'll help you out and be the first one." He said tauntingly.

Ken could only shake his head in exasperation.

BUZZ BUZZ

He didn't even bother to check his phone since he knew that the notification was from Steve following him.

The two chatted for a while about nothing in particular before Ken felt the phone in his pocket begin to go ballistic.

BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ BUZZ

"What the hell?"

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

Chapter 723 - 723: Holiday (1)

KNOCK KNOCK KNOCK

The sound of hurried banging on the door echoed through the hall as Ken knocked on his neighbors door. In his other hand, his phone was vibrating constantly without break, as if it was possessed.

"What's wrong!?" Tara swung open her door, seeing a frantic Ken standing in front of her.

"Something is wrong with my phone, it won't stop buzzing. What did you do?" He said holding it out in front of him. .

"Hmm? What are you talking about?" She queried, grabbing the phone from his hands. In an instant, she felt the phone in a constant state of vibration. For a moment she thought that something must have glitched in order to cause this.

But her face changed the moment she unlocked the phone. Notifications began pouring in like crazy, threatening to overwhelm the phone's processor.

"What the hell?" Tara muttered, opening up Instagram. She quickly turned the notifications off, but that wasn't enough. It wasn't until she did the same for both facebook and twitter that the phone was now silent.

Ken was already getting a ton of engagement on his new profiles, but she was unsure why. All she did was post the photo of Ken and a few of the Yanks players with the caption "Met some of my hero's yesterday. Thank you for the memories."

She had also tagged a few of the players, but hadn't expected anything else to come of it.

However, opening up the post, she saw that both Masaru Tanaka and Alex Cole had responded to the post, bringing with them a wave of fans from their own accounts.

"Did you figure out what was wrong?" Ken asked, relieved that his phone had stopped vibrating.

"Yeah... Masaru Tanaka and Alex Cole replied to your post." She said, handing him the phone once more.

Ken took his phone back, looking a little confused. Why would Ma-kun and Alex replying to his post cause his phone to act up? It made no sense.

alexcole45: @AceTakagi is the real deal. Number 1 draft pick of 2023 I'm calling it now.

masaru_tanaka.official: Youth baseball is truly promising. Next time I see you, I want an autograph @AceTakagi.

"What's this about?" Ken muttered. He felt a warm feeling after seeing what these professional pitchers had said about him.

"Look how many likes your post has." Tara said, pointing to the love heart in the bottom of the photo.

"21 thousand!? What the hell?" Ken almost dropped his phone seeing the absurd number.

Steve who was beside Ken suddenly felt weak in the knees. He thought that he was popular with 226 followers, but Ken had blown him out of the water after only having an account for an hour.

"This is unfair..." He sulked.

"It looks like you made quite an impression on them if they're replying to you. Usually they ignore it when people tag them in posts." Tara replied, scratching her head. Even she didn't expect things to go this way.

"Tara... Please also be my Manager." Steve said. The guy was on one knee, holding up his phone as if he was proposing to her.

She completely ignored his antics, deep in thought. "How many followers do you have right now?"

"How do I check that?"

Instead of telling him, she grabbed the phone and went back to his profile to check.

"5400... That's pretty good for now."

Steve felt as if he'd been shot by a few arrows after hearing the meager assessment of "Pretty good". Tears began to stream down his face as he contemplated his whole world view in the next few moments.

"Let's aim to increase that by the end of the year. With any luck, we can ride this wave and get you verified. From then on, it will be a gradual process to grow your presence online."

The way Tara spoke sounded as if she knew what she was talking about. Ken could only nod every now and then, completely trusting her judgment, not that he had a choice in the matter.

"Oh, we should probably tell the University your social handles. As long as you perform well, they will probably tag you in some posts during the season. That should get you some more exposure and increase your follower count."

"Okay... I'll be in your care."

With everything now sorted, Ken and Steve returned to the cafeteria in silence. Ken was contemplating the timing of the system mission and just how much influence it had on the world around him.

'First it was Daichi being adamant to stay in Japan, and now this Social Media situation? Is it all just coincidence?'

Meanwhile, Steve was sulking. His earlier boasting seemed ridiculous and he was currently filled with jealousy. But he froze in the next moment, as if suddenly coming to a realization.

'Why do I care about such a thing?'

After a few moments, he let out a small laugh and threw it to the back of his mind. He wouldn't ever talk to so many people in his life time. Even the 256 friends he had, he only spoke to his family and Ken in addition to a couple of people from school.

After this revelation, he felt much lighter. In fact, looking at Ken who seemed rather depressed, he felt like he was much better off.

'I guess its tough being so popular.' He thought, giving Ken a nudge.

"You all good man?"

"Hmm? Yeah I'm fine, it was just a bit of a scare you know. After all, who wants to get so popular overnight?" He said in reply.

However, in the next moment he froze on the spot. There was a wisp of information that tugged at his mind, as if it was something important.

"Dude, what's wrong?"

Ken ignored him, closing his eyes as he accessed the memory recall feature of his Academic trait. He poured over distant memories from his previous life.

In the next moment his eyes snapped open in realization.

'The NIL deal...'

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

Chapter 724 - 724: Holiday (2)

At this current moment, student athletes were restricted from earning any money whilst competing in College. In fact, if a student was found to be receiving any goods or income from brands or otherwise, they would be sanctioned heavily by the NCAA.

The NIL deal brought in on 1st of July 2021 was revolutionary. Players could now use their name, image and likeness to profit from their personal brand. Endorsements, product promotion, and even monetizing social media were all allowed after this was implemented.

'Is this why the system made me create a social media account?' Ken thought in wonder.

"Earth to Ken..." Steve crooned, buzzing around Ken like an annoying fly. He tapped the side of his friend's head, as if to check if he was still in there.

Ken waved his hand as if he was shooing away an insect. "Has anyone ever told you how annoying you are?"

"Only once a day." Steve replied with a grin.

Letting out a sigh, Ken continued on the way to the cafeteria. After all the commotion he was hungrier than ever.

"I'll ask Tara if she can manage your Social Media accounts. But you'll probably have to change your handle..." Ken stated as they sat back down at the table.

"Nah man, I just realized I don't care about that kind of stuff." Steve replied nonchalantly. "I mean, it's not like I can make money out of it or anything."

"..."

Ken would have agreed with his statement, if he didn't remember about the NIL deal. In fact, getting a head start and building one's personal brand in the first year of college was ideal.

"I can't tell you the reason, but you need to build a proper social media presence." Ken said gravely. From his expression, it was as if it was a life and death scenario.

"What? It can't be that serious right?"

But upon closer inspection, Steve realized that Ken was truly serious. It wasn't often that the guy in front of him talked like this, so he was inclined to listen.

After a few moments, he finally agreed, letting out a sigh. "I don't understand why... But I guess it couldn't hurt to trust you this time."

"Good. You'll be thanking me in the future." Ken quipped, "Now let's eat, I'm starving."

Ken kept his word and asked Tara to manage Steve's social media accounts as well. It took some convincing, but he eventually got the woman to agree after giving some consolations.

Tara was a wily woman and knew how to manage favors. Ken already had a headache after thinking about how much he would be extorted in the future by this person.

Like this, Ken and Steve's days were filled with monotony. Eat, sleep, class, training and practice, only to spend their nights studying in their dorm room. Ken was such a stickler for studying that Steve was forced to join him or risk falling behind.

Thanks to his insistence, by the time his final exams arrived in December, he had confidently completed everything with time to spare.

Once winter break came, Ai, Steve and Ken returned to Texas. Rather than spending her time alone for Christmas, Yuki had invited Ai to stay for a couple of weeks over the break since she was far from home.

The Takagi household became lively once more, having many visitors at once.

It was just after Christmas that another 2 unexpected guests arrived.

"Hey Steph... Long time no see." Steve said, answering the door. However, his face changed when he saw that she was holding the hand of another woman.

"Hey... I brought my girlfriend, I hope you don't mind." She said, wearing a rather smug expression.

Steve paled, but he nodded and motioned for them to come inside. "Just take your shoes off before you come in." He added.

"Oh, we have more guests? Excellent." Yuki was beaming as she saw Steph and another woman enter the house. She had been told about Steph coming over, but not the mystery woman.

"Hi Yuki, thank you for inviting us." Steph said sweetly, taking a seat at the table.

"It's no problem at all. Aren't you going to introduce your friend?" She asked.

"Oh, sorry I thought you guys knew each other."

Ken's eyes narrowed as he evaluated the woman Steph had brought in. She had blond frizzy hair and sparkling white teeth. Her slender neck was exposed and only a small amount of makeup was applied to her pretty face, enhancing her features.

"This is Sarah, she was Ken's junior prom date." Steph said smilingly.

"PSHHHHH"

Chris who had been sipping silently on his tea suddenly sent a geyser towards the unfortunate Steve who was standing nearby, drenching him.

It wasn't just Chris, both Ken and Yuki looked completely shocked. Ai on the other hand, wore a passive smile, but Ken could already feel her murderous intent threatening to swallow him whole.

'WHAT THE F—'

Sarah seemed a little self conscious, but she smiled sweetly. "It's good to see you all."

While she had lost weight throughout their Senior year, it had not been as drastic as this. "Y—You too." Ken replied, trying to regulate his emotions. He could already feel he would have a lot to answer for after this all concluded.

"How...?" Steve asked, not even able to complete his question.

Sarah sent him a look, but decided to answer anyway. "Once I left for college, I was able to control my diet more. My parents are 'feeders' as I like to call them." She answered with a chuckle.

"Right... and you guy are dating?" Ken asked. His eyes flickered towards Steve who seemed to be crestfallen. He had never probed the guy any further about his relationship with Steph, but it seemed that things were a lot worse than he thought.

"Mmm, thanks to you." Sarah said to Ken with a brilliant smile.

Ken froze, feeling another pair of eyes burning into him. He didn't even need to turn to understand that it was Steve.

'Crap, why would she say that...'

With both Steve and Ai wanting to rip him apart with their eyes, Ken could only try to make the best out of the situation. "Ahem. I didn't do anything apart from giving you the exercise plan, you did the rest."

However, despite trying to clarify, Steve looked as if he wanted to punch Ken in the face. Thus began one of the most awkward dinners of his life.

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

Chapter 725 - 725: Steve's Past (1)

After dinner was all said and done, Steve stood up from the table and thanked Yuki and Chris for the meal before excusing himself. Without even acknowledging Ken and the others, he grabbed his keys and walked out of the front door.

Ken merely watched his retreating figure, too dumbstruck to register what was happening. It wasn't until he felt a stomp on each of his feet from both his mother and Ai that he finally snapped out of it.

'OUCH'

"Go after him." Yuki whispered, glaring at him.

"R—Right, I'll be right back." Ken said, leaving the table and heading out the door. He managed to catch up to Steve before he turned the car on and drove away.

"Dude, where are you going?" He called out.

Steve shot him a brief look before starting up the car. "For a drive." He said simply.

"Well I'm coming too."

But as Ken went to open the door, he found out that it was locked. Seeing this, Steve let out a small smile of triumph and put the car in gear slowly beginning to drive away.

For a fraction of a second, Ken contemplated letting him leave, but he quickly discarded the notion. With a feat of athleticism that would leave a squirrel jealous, Ken leaped head first into the open window as the pickup truck was rolling in first gear.

He'd managed to get most of his body in before Steve slammed on the brakes, causing him to hit his head on the dashboard.

Now stationary, Ken got his legs into the cab and took his seat before wordlessly buckling his seat belt. There was a short silence that stretched out between the two as Steve stared at the side of his friend's head.

"What? I thought we were going for a drive?"

"Y—You idiot! What if you got injured doing a stupid stunt like that?" Steve yelled, his shock evident.

Ken shrugged, "Should have unlocked the door."

"...You crazy bastard." He replied in defeat, kicking the truck back into gear. With that, he drove off without a destination in mind.

As they continued down the familiar roads past the school, the two had yet to speak another word to each other. Things felt a little strained, but Ken was a patient man when it came to things like this.

After all, this was the first time that Steve had shown true emotion, at least in front of him. Usually the guy would laugh things off and return to his usual ways of mischief, but this time it was different.

Ken moved his gaze, only to see the mask finally removed. Without his mischievous smile, Steve looked mature, almost a little cold. While it was a little shocking at first, Ken soon nodded in appreciation.

From his experience, bottling up one's emotions only led to more heartache in the future. Ken had a feeling that if he hadn't have chosen to jump in the window, he would have never seen this side of his friend.

The two continued in silence until they arrived at the Gladiators training ground. Since it was the holidays, the field was empty and the frigid wind ensured nobody would come out of the house without good reason.

Steve parked the pickup truck and got out, grabbing his equipment bag out of the tray. Ken followed, heading over to the empty field.

Upon arriving, Steve took out a glove and threw it to him before grabbing one himself and placing it on. He then grabbed a ball and sent it his way with some force.

Ken easily caught the ball and sent a lobbed throw back to the guy. At no point did they decide on playing catch, but somehow they had ended up here in the cold just after Christmas.

"So, you gonna tell me what's wrong?" Ken asked, sending the ball back to his friend.

Steve was silent for a few moments, save for throwing the ball again. His cold expression still remained, but Ken could tell that he was just sorting through his thoughts.

"Do you know why I decided to follow you to Columbia?" Steve asked.

"It can't be because you're in love with me right?"

Steve shook his head, not giving the response that Ken expected. He had tried to lighten the mood, but it seemed that now was not the time.

"You're the only person who believed in me." He stated simply.

These words brought a sour taste to Ken's mouth as he heard them. A pang of guilt washed through him as he asked himself a simple question: Would he have said that Steve had potential to go pro if he didn't have the system?

"I was never good at studying or baseball for that matter. Things never seemed to click and I began to lose motivation." He continued somberly.

"When I first started playing, I really wanted to be like Jeter... I told my parents I wanted to make it to the majors, but they would just laugh it off and tell me to keep studying."

"Eventually, I began to lose sight of my dream and began to believe them and the others. It hurt that they would dismiss me over and over, so I just stopped trying."

Ken listened silently, returning the ball back to his friend as he began to pour his heart out. There was a morose expression on Steve's once vibrant face, painting a desolate portrait.

"But then you came along..."

"You picked me up from the depths of despair and hoisted me along, kicking and screaming." This time a small smile crept onto the corner of his lips as if he were basking in the nostalgia.

Despite only knowing each other for 2 years, it had felt like a lifetime. Ken himself felt his spirits soar as he heard these words, unable to hide the smile from his own expression.

"Everything started to go right. Not only did my grades increase, but my body began to change, almost like it wasn't my own."

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

Chapter 726 - 726: Steve's Past (2)

"I finally got the girl and was working towards my dreams of joining the Majors despite a few hiccups along the way." Steve took his glove off and threw it back into the bag before approaching Ken.

"Which is why when Steph gave me that ultimatum, I chose you..." He said, placing his hand on Ken's left shoulder. There was pain behind his eyes, but his expression was resolute, like he didn't regret his decision.

Disregarding the implications of Steve's wording, Ken nodded. "No... You chose your own future."

Without another word, Ken pulled his friend into a hug. He could feel how tense the guys body was in the beginning, but it slowly relaxed.

"Thank you Ken. If it wasn't for you... I—"

"Don't say it man. Whatever happened in the past will remain there, serving only as a reminder of how far you've come." Ken said, surprising himself at the wise words he'd just spoken.

Before Steve could respond, Ken held him at arm's length and looked him right in the eyes. "From this moment on, we're brothers. We'll share our successes and failures, our heartaches and euphoria."

Steve's expression shifted, the weight of his raw emotions tearing away at his facade. Having endured so much for so long, his vulnerability was coming to the surface, threatening to wash away the barriers he'd placed to protect himself all this time.

"Mmm." He nodded, holding back tears.

Without a word, Ken brought him back into another hug. The two stood like that for a while as Steve let his emotions out to dry.

A cold breeze drifted between them, causing Ken to shiver. He quickly suggested they get back into the truck before one of them caught a cold.

Once in the warmth of the truck, the air seemed to be cleared. Steve was no longer wearing his cold expression, he seemed far more carefree, but not in the fake way that he used to show.

"So tell me more about this ultimatum that Steph hit you with." Ken asked, now that things had calmed down a little.

Steve let out a sigh, "When I told her that I applied for Columbia as well as Texas University, she was pretty pissed off. We almost broke up on the spot."

Ken frowned. He didn't think that she would have been so upset about such a thing. Of course, not everyone could be as accommodating as Ai who had let him move across the other side of the world without a word of complaint.

Suddenly, Daichi's words crept into his mind from that night.

'You might be fine leaving Ai in Japan while chasing your 'dream' but not everyone wants to make that kind of sacrifice.'

Only at this moment did he realize what kind of woman Ai was. This only further strengthened his resolve to marry his girl.

"I managed to patch things up by saying I doubted they would accept me. But when the acceptance letter came, I was over the moon." Steve spoke up, clenching his fist. "I knew I had to follow you if I wanted to chase my dream."

Ken smiled softly, feeling a warm sensation in his heart. If he was honest with himself, having Steve at Columbia with him was a blessing. But it was clear that the decision had its consequences and sacrifices.

"So Steph broke it off with you after that?" Ken asked.

Steve nodded, but he didn't seem too depressed anymore. "We just wanted different things I guess... I just didn't expect her to move on so fast, with Sarah of all people." He admitted.

"Yeah... Sorry about that." Ken said feeling a little guilty. .

This time, Steve turned to him with an accusatory expression. "What did Sarah mean when she said it was thanks to you?"

Ken let out a sigh and told him about the training plan that he'd done up for her because he felt sorry for ruining her date to prom with Steph. If he had have known this would be the result, he would have probably refrained from doing so.

"Ah, that's not as bad as I thought then." Steve replied.

"I think a better question is, why was she at my house? Did you invite her?"

This time, Steve's expression fell. "Yeah, I foolishly thought that we might be able to reconcile our differences. I'm sorry for not letting you know."

Ken waved his hand dismissively, "Don't worry about it. Why did she bring along Sarah to begin with? Did she do it to hurt you?"

"I guess so. Or maybe she just wanted to let me know that she's moved on."

This didn't exactly sit right with Ken. Not to mention that it had happened in his own house.

Without a word, he grabbed his phone and sent a message to his mother, giving a brief overview. He knew his mother would deal with the situation before they got back.

"Well, we are college students if you remember. I'm sure there will be plenty who would be interested in you..." Ken felt a little weird saying this, but he just wanted to cheer up his friend.

"Really!?" Steve was like an excited puppy at the prospect of women that might be interested in him. It was hard to think that he was just despairing over an ex girlfriend.

"I mean, sure. I'll be your wingman..."

Steve's eyes began to water, "You'll be my goose then?"

"Goose?" Ken raised his eyebrow, but Steve's face seemed incredibly pitiful in that moment so he could only agree. "Sure man, I'll be your goose."

"Thanks man!" He cried, no longer feeling depressed.

"Alright alright, let's head back home. Mom made some Cheesecake for dessert."

"YESSS Yuki's Cheesecake!"

Steve was like a new man as he reversed out of the parking lot and got back on the road. They returned around 30 minutes later and walked in the door to see Chris, Yuki and Ai were the only ones remaining.

Steve looked around as if expecting Steph to still be here, but he let out a sigh of relief when he saw that the two girls were gone.

"I'm home~"

"Welcome home you two." Yuki said with a bright smile.

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

Chapter 727 - 727: Hesitation (1)

By the time school resumed, Steve and Ken had already hit their stride. With the season fast approaching, everything started to feel way more real, particularly for Ken who had already been promised a spot in the main squad.

Steve had been performing well, however, Clinton who was in his Senior year was unshakable in his position as Catcher, at least for this season. Ken believed that with some improvements in his batting, Steve might be able to sneak in as a Designated Hitter.

After opening up over the holidays, the dynamic of Steve and Ken's relationship had shifted slightly. While outwardly it looked the same, there was a deep sense of trust and strong bond between the two.

Ken never believed that he would trust anyone more than Daichi, but Steve was quickly becoming a friend that he could rely on, one that could help push him to be a better person and baseball player.

THWACK!

Steve wiped the sweat from his brow as he smashed the final ball fired from the pitching machine, a satisfied smile creeping onto his face. "That's 10 from 10 with the 92mph fastballs." He stated, handing the bat to Ken.

Ken's face twisted into a mocking smile, "Talk to me when you can hit 10 home runs in a row."

Steve rolled his eyes, not even dignifying the remark with a response. He merely moved outside the cage and watched Ken step into the batters box.

THWACK!

WHACK!

THWACK!

...

The next 10 balls were smashed sky-high, causing Steve to let out an exasperated sigh. Seeing the smug grin on Ken's face made him want to punch it, but he couldn't deny that the guy had a talent for batting.

"How can you be so talented at pitching and batting... It makes no sense." He complained.

"Talent?" Ken raised his eyebrow, almost seeming offended. "Do you know how hard I had to work to get this good? My callouses have callouses." He said, taking off his glove and holding out his hand.

"Ew..."

Ken huffed, placing the glove in his pocket. "If you want to see any playing time this season, we need to work on your batting. As long as you improve, the coach might use you as a pinch hitter or even a designated hitter."

This time, Steve nodded seriously. Entering the team as a walk-on was enough of a disadvantage that he needed to work hard in order to secure some playing time. Any opportunity to prove himself would be enough, be it as a designated hitter, or a pinch hitter.

"Can you give me any tips to improve?" He asked, forsaking any of his pride.

Ken was a little hesitant. What worked for him would not necessarily work for Steve, especially since their heights and body types were quite different at the end of the day.

Ken also had the image training which allowed him to train his technique, mentally ingraining it into his whole being. This wasn't something that he could allow Steve access to. Or was it?

'Hey Mika, do you th—'

[Impossible.]

Hearing the flat and monotonous rejection, Ken could only smile wryly. He had expected as much, after all, giving another person access to his image training would essentially give away the existence of his system.

He eventually shook his head after contemplating for a while, "Best to ask Coach Johnson for tips, I'd be worried about giving you the wrong information."

Steve's expression soured a little, but he eventually nodded. "I'm not sure if I'll be able to get much one on one time with him since the season starts next week."

"Well, just try and get close to the guy. Offer to help him every now and then and make an impression. If he likes you, he might make some time for you." Ken suggested.

"Mmm. Or you could just hire me an instructor."

Ken promptly ignored him, leaving the cages. "Let's grab some dinner, I'm starved."

A couple of hours later, Ken laid in his bed and stared at the ceiling. Despite being in a different country, he often found himself in this position, just like back in school. He would spend hours staring at his status window, his eyes filled with wonder.

Reminiscing slightly, Ken couldn't help but let out a small chuckle. The kid he was back then would have accepted any reward he got the moment he received them, yet Ken still had an unclaimed reward awaiting him.

With practiced ease, he opened up the mission window and stared at the hidden mission like he'd done for the past couple of months.

#HIDDEN MISSION: Make an Impression

*Task 1: Leave a lasting impression in front of the New York Yanks players. [Complete]

*Task 2: Create a social media account. [Complete]

*Task 3: Post a picture from today. [Complete]

REWARDS:

>Increased Fame and recognition. [Claim Rewards]

>Upgrade Charismatic Air skill to Magnetic Charm. [Claim Rewards]

If he was honest, Ken didn't feel like claiming these rewards. He already suffered enough from the effects of Charismatic Air and was feeling trepidation towards what troubles the upgraded skills would bring.

The increased fame and recognition sounded fine initially, but he wasn't sure how it would change his daily life. If he turned into some kind of celebrity, he could kiss his tranquil life goodbye.

'I feel like this is just a lose-lose situation.' He thought glumly.

[Why aren't you accepting the rewards?]

Mika's monotonous voice appeared in his mind, startling him.

'You should already know my thoughts.' Ken replied. It wasn't lost on him that Mika had the ability to read his mind, therefore he didn't even bother explaining.

[The system's rewards will only bring benefits to the user. Otherwise they would not be called rewards.] She stated plainly.

Ken frowned. For some reason, he didn't exactly believe Mika's words. Perhaps from her perspective, there were no downsides to the rewards, but she wouldn't be the one to experience it first hand.

[You seem unconvinced.] She stated, though it seemed as if she had no intention on explaining further.

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

Chapter 728 - 728: Hesitation (2)

'Yeah, you could say that. I just want to have a normal college life, I don't need people staring at me all the time or treating me like a celebrity.'

[I understand.]

Ken felt a little better hearing this and let out a yawn, feeling his tired body ache slightly.

[Activating sleep protocol.]

'Hmm? Thanks Mika.'

As Ken's vision began to grow dark, the system window in front of him changed slightly. For a brief moment he thought he'd seen some words flash by, but he quickly lost consciousness.

The next morning, Ken woke up at 5am and stretched deeply, feeling refreshed. There was nothing more therapeutic than Mika's sleep protocol, something he would never take for granted again after losing it for 18 months.

Like usual, Ken eased himself out of bed and nudged Steve. "Wake up, time for our run."

Without waiting to see if he heard his words, Ken began to get dressed into his gear. It was still freezing outside since it was late January, but such weather would not stop him from exercising.

By the time he was ready, Steve was putting on his shoes, looking half asleep still.

But the moment they stepped outside, a chill ran down Ken's spine. Seeing the snow in action, he decided to change tactics. "How about we hit the treadmill again instead?"

Steve grunted in approval and followed Ken closely, using his body as a shield against the wind and snow.

The facilities were essentially empty, save for a few who were using the gym at this time of morning. Ken recognized a few familiar faces, but he had never spoken to them before. Usually they would just silently nod at each other from across the room upon entering or leaving.

Seeing one of the regulars, Ken nodded as usual, however he was surprised to see the guy gawking at him. Feeling a little uncomfortable, Ken averted his gaze and moved towards the treadmill.

Thinking it was weird, he sent another glance back, only to see the guy approaching.

'Ah damn it. Why is he coming over?'

"Hey man... The name is Archie, I've seen you a few times in the gym this past month." He said, holding out a hand.

The guy was muscular, but not over the top. He looked like one of those athletes who would burst with speed rather than power, his frame holding almost no body fat.

"I'm Ken, and this is Steve. We're on the baseball team." He stated lamely, grabbing the outstretched hand. He didn't care about his tone, in fact, if it would help him avoid a conversation, he was all for it.

"Oh cool. I'm the Captain of the track team, at least for now." He said with an impish grin. "Hey if you're not busy, we're holding a party at the Sigma Nu fraternity house at the end of the week. You should come."

"Eh?" Ken was taken aback. He had never been invited to a party, let alone a frat party since attending Columbia. Despite the many times he'd seen Archie in here, the two had yet to speak, let alone reach such terms as to deserve an invite to a party.

"Oh hell yes, we'll be there." Steve replied, pumping his fist.

Only now did Archie seem to notice that there was another person besides Ken in the gym. His eyes skimmed over the guy briefly before ignoring him, waiting for an answer from Ken.

Ken felt a little awkward. He could feel Steve's enthusiasm bursting from the seams next to him and could tell that if he declined, he wouldn't hear the end of it.

'I guess we could use a little change of scenery.' He thought inwardly.

"Alright, we can stop by for a bit." Ken agreed, seeing Steve once again pumping his fists from the corner of his eye.

"Excellent! I'll add you on Instagram and send through the details." Archie said before heading back to his spot in the gym and leaving the two.

Once he'd left, Steve just about jumped for joy. "Dude, it's a frat party... There's gonna be drinks and hot chicks. You can finally do your part and be my wingman."

At the mention of alcohol and women, Ken instantly regretted his choice. He had already sworn off alcohol and cigarettes in this life, choosing to pursue his athletic career instead. Added that he was already in a monogamous relationship, none of what Steve said was appealing.

Feeling a headache coming along, Ken let out a sigh.

"Just start the damn treadmill."

"Yessir!"

Ken started to feel better when he'd worked up a sweat. Whenever he was running, all of his worries seemed to melt into the back of his mind. It was as if there was nothing else but him and the path in front.

It was a little harder to gain the same immersion while on a treadmill, but Ken's willpower was one of his best assets.

After running 12 miles, Ken peaked over and saw that Steve still had just under a mile to go. This was one of the issues he had when using the treadmills.

Ken cranked it down to walking speed and began to cool down, his mind at peace. While Steve was finishing the last bit of the run, Ken looked around before opening up his system window.

To pass the time, he liked to look at his stats as well as skills.

'According to Mika's training plan, I should be able to catch up to the Elixir's buff in another 8 months. By then I should hopefully have some Elixirs from the inevitable College season mission.'

Ken licked his lips in anticipation, his eyes moving up to the Missions tab to see if it had arrived just yet. However, his face fell when he saw that there was no active missions currently.

'What the hell?'

Feeling slightly panicked, Ken opened up the mission window, only to let out a cry of shock.

#HIDDEN MISSION: Make an Impression

REWARDS:

>Increased Fame and recognition. [Claimed]

>Upgrade Charismatic Air skill to Magnetic Charm. [Claimed]

'No... no no no.'

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

Chapter 729 - 729: Magnetic Charm (1)

Seeing Ken's pale face, Steve was confused. He knew that Ken wasn't a great fan of social outings, but he had never reacted like this before. He tried calling out to his friend, but the guy wasn't responding.

"I'm going." He stated, jumping off the treadmill and heading out of the gym.

"Wait up!" Steve called, scrambling to turn his machine off. He picked up the hoodie that Ken had left and followed after him as fast as he could.

As they exited the building, a cold draft blew, sending a shiver down Ken's spine.

"You forgot this." Steve said, throwing the hoodie to him. Only now that he'd stopped did Ken pay attention to his friend.

"Do I look any different to you?" Ken asked seriously, turning his face to Steve with a serious expression.

Steve was silent for a little while, scrutinizing his features before his eyes widened.
"Holy crap! Have you always had brown eyes?"

"... Never mind."

"Hehehe~"

Steve's carefree laughter filled his ears as he turned and made his way back to the dorm room. He should have known that the guy would have taken this chance to pull a joke.

'I don't understand... How did the rewards get accepted?' Ken thought, his mind in disarray. He had not been planning on accepting them at all, hoping that the mission would expire and disappear eventually.

[I accepted the rewards on your behalf.]

Ken froze on the spot, causing Steve to bump into his back.

"O—Oi man, be careful." Steve complained.

However, Ken didn't even hear him. A flash of anger swept through him in that moment, tinged with a feeling of hurt and betrayal.

'Why? Why would you do such a thing?'

[As I said, the system rewards will only bring you benefits. It was foolish to not accept them in the first place.]

The monotonous and unfeeling words pricked his psyche, causing his anger to rise even further.

'What gives you the right to make such a decision on my behalf?'

[...It is in the user's best interest to accept these rewards.]

"SAYS WHO!?"

Ken yelled, not realizing that he had said this aloud. His emotions were in turmoil after suffering such a betrayal, affecting his judgment.

"W—Whoa man, what's gotten into you?" Steve said, placing his hand on the guy's shoulder.

Ken shrugged the hand off and stormed off, heading back to the dorm, leaving Steve completely mystified standing in the same spot.

[Ken, you forget that I am merely part of the system's will. It has judged that you will require these rewards in the future, therefore accepting them was only natural.]

He scoffed in reply, but his anger eased a little. Mika had almost never called him by his first name, merely referring to him as the "user".

However, this still didn't change the fact that his autonomy was compromised. How could he feel like he was in charge of his own destiny if the system was the one making decisions under the guise of it being for his own good.

Ken was already feeling as if the system was able to affect the world around him, and this overreach only added to this theory.

'You have betrayed my trust Mika. Regardless of the benefits, I should have the final say in such things.' He said seriously.

[Understood.]

The reply was monotonous, but Ken felt as if he could feel some remorse behind it.

Ken could only accept what had happened and try to move forward. By the time he had returned to the dorm, he went straight for the shower and ensured that both doors were locked before getting undressed.

With the warm water cascading down his body, Ken opened up the system and went to his skills. It was time to inspect the damage and prepare himself for what kind of troubles would arise.

Part of him didn't want to look, but he had no choice in the matter.

Magnetic Charm: A subtle yet compelling aura that draws others toward the user, making them inclined to follow his lead and trust his instincts.

"Hmm?"

Ken read the skill a few more times. "This isn't so bad, right?"

Unlike Charismatic Air which was vague in its description, Magnetic Charm outlined exactly what it did in comparison. Ken's face morphed a few times before agreeing that the skill was far less destructive than he'd thought.

'If it's like this, then it shouldn't be too bad.' He thought. If it was just like this morning where people like Archie would be compelled to talk to him, then it would only be a minor annoyance.

Suddenly, Ken felt a little guilty for going off at Mika earlier. If he had have known that the upgrade would be so tame, he wouldn't have hesitated accepting the rewards.

After washing himself and freshening up, Ken exited the shower and put on some clean underwear before staring at the mirror. He scanned his face and bare chest once more, looking for any visible changes.

In his eyes, nothing seemed to have changed since he looked yesterday. His jaw was still chiseled and his deep brown eyes still held a determined fire within them.

Knock Knock

"I'll be done in a moment." Ken replied, realizing that he was currently hogging the shared bathroom.

But before he could leave, the door handle clicked a few times before the door to Tara's room opened. Ken blinked a few times, seeing Tara's roommate Kate peak in, her eyes widening upon seeing his figure.

"Whoa! There's a hottie in our bathroom." She exclaimed, her head popping back into her own room for a brief moment.

Ken frowned, his annoyance evident. He had just told her that he would be done in a moment, yet she still had the gall to open the door.

"Where!?" Tara's head also poked in, feasting her eyes on the sight. However, her face changed, "That's my boss, don't be weird." She said, slapping her friend on the top of the head.

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

Chapter 730 - 730: Magnetic Charm (2)

"Sorry about that Ken." She said, finally able to raise her eyes up to his face. But when she locked gazes with him, her expression suddenly lost focus.

Things were silent for a while before she finally managed to pull herself together. "Damn it boss, why are you looking so damn hot today?" She asked, biting her bottom lip.

"Excuse me?" Ken quickly fished for his pants and put them on, not enjoying being ogled by these two women. Just as his mood had improved a little, his privacy was being encroached on.

Ken placed his button up shirt on and was about to do up the buttons before he was interrupted.

"Wait! I've got a good idea." Tara said, prising open the door and grabbing him by the arm. This time, Ken resisted. While he had been okay going into the girls dorm room before, that was only when he was fully dressed.

Tara felt the resistance and realized she wouldn't be able to move the stubborn mule.

"Alright, sorry I got carried away. The way you look right now is perfect for a photo shoot I was thinking of." She exclaimed, looking him up and down.

Hearing the word's photo shoot, Ken instantly felt like declining. However, this woman was his social media manager, and a damn good one at that. She was also professional... Or at least she usually was.

Seeing the way in which she ogled him made Ken rather uncomfortable.

"How long will it take? I've got things to do today."

"Just a few minutes, I promise."

Ken reluctantly agreed, allowing her to drag him into her room. He squeezed past Kate who had not made any attempt to move out of his way.

He was led to the makeshift studio where he was directed to do some poses sitting on a black stool. With his long pants and unbuttoned shirt, his abs were on full display.

The frigidness of the room was rather uncomfortable, giving him goosebumps and causing his nipples to be on full display. Thankfully, things were over in a few minutes.

"Alright, I'm going now." Ken said, once more squeezing past Kate who couldn't keep her eyes off him.

Once he left, Kate let out a sigh and fell back onto the bed, fanning her face. "Damn it Tara, he's so damn hot. I don't know how you put up with it."

However, upon not hearing her friend respond, she looked up only to see Tara drooling as she looked at the photo's she'd snapped on the camera.

"H—Hey, don't hog them to yourself!"

It was only now that Tara realized she had lost her professionalism. She cleared her throat and plugged in her camera to the laptop to upload the new snapshots. "I'm posting them to social media, you can look on there." She stated matter-of-factly.

Spending around 10 minutes touching up the photo, she logged into Ken's social's and posted the image. Tara pulled out a notebook and flipped the pages which had noted Ken's follower count and post engagement.

"How many followers do we have today~" She muttered in a sing-song voice, ignoring her ravenous roommate who had already pulled up Ken's instagram page to like the photo.

"Holy Cannoli!" She exclaimed in shock.

"What is it?" Kate almost dropped her phone on her face in fright.

"100k followers? What the hell happened?" She muttered, refreshing the page to make sure that she wasn't seeing things.

"Is that a lot?" Kate asked. She hadn't been keeping up with Ken's numbers like Tara.

"We only had 50k when I checked yesterday... How the hell did it increase so much overnight?" Even Tara who had a wealth of experience with social media and digital marketing had no idea how such a thing could have happened.

A brief look through all the new followers was enough to determine that these weren't bot accounts, which meant that something must have happened to grant Ken some additional fame.

However, when she searched for Ken's name, there wasn't anything new that had come up.

"Weird..."

Meanwhile in Ken's room, he had already finished getting changed and was sitting on his bed. Steve was across the room seated at the desk, looking at him with concern.

"You gonna tell me about what happened earlier?" He asked seriously.

Ken let out a sigh. He was truly stumped as to what he could tell Steve, especially since nothing could justify his odd actions earlier. Search the * website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"Don't tell me you're nervous about the frat party?" Steve probed, his expression showing a little remorse. Since he'd essentially accepted on Ken's behalf and not given him a choice.

Ken froze, his mind working quickly. Out of all the explanations that he could give, the one Steve came up with on his own would be the most believable. So while he didn't want to lie to his friend, he was left with no choice.

He rubbed the back of his neck in embarrassment, "S—Sorry man, I had a bit of an anxiety attack." Ken said eventually.

"Ahh, I see. Look man, we don't have to go if you're feeling that worried about it." Steve replied with a hint of concern.

Ken's expression softened. He could feel his friend's sincerity, however his facial expression did not match his words. The guy was practically begging him with puppy dog eyes to still go to the party.

Ken held his laugh and smiled, "I'll be fine man, I'm sure we'll have fun."

"Oh thank god..." Steve let out a sigh of relief before an impish grin crept onto his features. He seemed quite happy that Ken had not canceled their invite.

Even Steve was not dense enough to recognize he was just the plus one invite to the frat party. Chances are if he arrived without Ken, he'd be refused entry.

"Well, we've still got plenty of training and studying left to do this week. If you slack off even a little, I won't go to the party." Ken added with a grin.

"Yessir!"

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

Chapter 731 - 731: Frat Party (1)

The night of the party finally arrived, much to Ken's dismay. Steve had marked it on his calendar, crossing out the days every morning as if he was counting down the days till Christmas.

After finishing practice, the guy practically skipped all the way back to the dorm room, leaving Ken feeling exasperated.

"If you've got that much energy, we should be able to fit in more training." Ken added, only to see Steve's face pale in the next moment.

"Don't be such a party pooper. Remember this will be a great time to network for the future..." Steve replied, though he was not really convincing.

"Yeah... You just want to 'network' with girls."

Steve tried to hide the grin that tugged at the corner of his lips but failed miserably. "Ken, tonight's operation will commence in 2 hours. I'll need your support as wingman, please don't let me down."

Ken rolled his eyes, "I honestly don't know what you expect of me..."

But Steve waved it off, "You'll do fine man, just be your usual charming self and send the girls my way." search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Ken flinched in response to the word, remembering his new skill Magnetic Charm. At first he had thought that it was not so bad, but this entire week he had been far more tiring than he'd expected.

People he did not know would randomly come up to him and start a conversation, either inviting him to an event or just wanting to get to know him. Cases like Archie's was frequent and he was invited to 3 more parties just this week alone.

Although Ken could not be called an introvert, he had a small social battery. Being forced to speak to so many people had left him drained, changing his initial perception of his new skill.

In fact, this situation had made him dread going to Archie's party even more. However, seeing how excited Steve was, Ken felt too bad to pull out this close to the date.

As they walked into their room, Ken laid down the law. "We're only staying for a couple of hours. If I see you drinking, I don't care who you're talking to, I'm dragging you out of there, kicking and screaming if I have to."

"Yes dad~" Steve quipped, rolling his eyes.

"I'm serious man." Ken's eyes narrowed as he spoke, "You told me that you wanted to chase your dreams with me here in Columbia. You sacrificed your relationship and left your family for this."

"Alright, gosh... I'll be on my best behavior okay?" But then he paused, an impish smile creeping onto his mouth, "But if I manage to get a girl, I need you to leave the dorm room for at least an hour."

Ken scoffed, "In the unlikely event that it happens, I think you're overestimating your abilities. 5 minutes should be long enough."

"Whatever man~"

Steve's mood couldn't be affected as he took the insult to his manhood in stride. He was already humming out a tune while picking out what clothes he was going to wear for the party.

Knock Knock

Ken's ears perked up as he looked towards the front door. He wasn't expecting any guests so he walked up to the peep hole to check who it was.

"Tara?" Ken opened the door, a little confused as to why she was here.

"Hey, I heard you guys are going to the Sigma Nu party tonight so I brought you some clothes to wear." She said, her eyes shining.

"What?" There were a lot of things wrong with what she said, confusing him even more. Firstly, how did she know they were going to the party and secondly, why would she be bringing him clothes?

"Anyway, take these and wear them tonight. Wear a black belt and some nice dress shoes along with it." She said, dumping the clothes into his arms.

Ken blinked a few times, not knowing what to say.

"I'll be coming along with my camera. We need some candid photos for your profile." She said with a grin, sending him a wink. Before Ken could reply she had already left, leaving him standing with the clothes in his arms.

Another girl walked by the room door and stopped in place, her eyes fixated on Ken for a moment. It looked as if she was going to come over and talk to him, so he quickly slammed the door and leaned his back against it, letting out a deep sigh.

'Is this what my life has become?' He thought bitterly.

"Let's see the clothes." Steve said, snatching them from his hands. He laid them out on the bed and let out a whistle of appreciation.

The shirt was a black long sleeve button up and the pants were charcoal. There was also a charcoal suit jacket which tied the whole look together nicely.

"Damn man, this is really stylish. How did she know your size though?"

Ken's eyebrow twitched, realizing that he indeed hadn't given out his size to Tara before. Inwardly, he hoped that the clothes didn't fit and he would be able to refuse wearing them. After all, he didn't want to stand out anymore than he had to at the party.

Unfortunately for Ken, the clothes fit as if they were tailor made for him.

After letting out some grumbles of annoyance, Ken decided it was time to eat. He and Steve went and got some food at the cafeteria before getting ready for the party.

Steve wore a smart white shirt and a gray blazer with long gray pants, making him look the part, however Ken's outfit was a show stopper. Although it was simple, the tailored fit suited his body tremendously, giving off a mysterious and dazzling look.

This paired with his deep brown eyes, handsome features and tall physique made him look like a model who was about to hit the runway.

"Alright, let's go~" Steve cried with excitement.

Around 20 minutes later, the duo arrived at the address they were given, only to see a three-story brick building. The architecture was classic and had four large white columns supporting a balcony which stood over the entrance.

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

Chapter 732 - 732: Frat Party (2)

The word's "SIGMA NU" was displayed prominently above the columns.

They had arrived on time, yet there were only a few people loitering around the outside of the house. As they ascended the simple concrete steps towards the house, Ken felt his heart beating loudly in his chest.

As they knocked on the door, A gentleman around Ken's height opened it, his narrow eyes scrutinizing both Ken and Steve. When his eyes fell upon Ken, they lost focus for a moment before returning to normal.

"You can come in, the other guy can't." He said in a deep tone.

"Eh? No way right..." Steve mumbled in shock.

Ken frowned, "We were invited by Archie." He stated. The only reason he was attending the party was to help his friend out, if he wasn't allowed in, then there was no point even attending.

The guy shook his head, "Sorry, ain't happening."

Ken shrugged, "Alright let's go."

With that, Ken turned around and left the building, not intending to stay any longer.

"You're going so soon?" A voice called out from inside, causing Ken to stop and turn around. He saw the fit Archie dressed smartly, descending the staircase in the lobby.

"My friend was not welcomed, so I decided to leave." Ken replied, his gaze shifting to the guy at the door.

"Nonsense. A friend of yours is a friend of mine." Archie said with a smile, beckoning them inside. He turned to the doorman and sent him a swift glare before taking the two further inside.

Steve's expression lit up once more as he was finally granted access to the party. Despite it being early in the night, he could already see quite a few beautiful women in the lobby, speaking amongst themselves.

"Come, I'll show you around the place." Archie said, placing his hand on Ken's back.

Ken felt a little odd, but he sucked it up. Once he was in the Majors, there was a chance he would have to mix with other high brow characters at these kind of events.

'Just think of it as practice...' He told himself.

They were then led around the house. It was rather old fashioned inside, but the place was still vibrant. There were certain activities taking place like beer pong and foosball, but everyone seemed to be rather well behaved, at least for now.

"Let me introduce you to some people." Archie said graciously.

By this time, Ken had already begun to lose interest, but he smiled outwardly, trying not to be rude. He turned to check on Steve, but he was no longer behind him.

'Where did he go?'

"This is Amelia, Erin and David. They're also part of the track team, in fact, Amelia will be competing in the Olympics this year."

"Nice to meet you, I'm Ken from the baseball team." He said, bowing slightly. The three in front of him looked dazzling, particularly Amelia who was wearing a black cocktail dress with a high slit, exposing her tanned leg.

Her eyes were a deep green, almost like that of an emerald as they sparkled in the light. She looked him up and down before placing a strand of hair behind her ear and smiling brilliantly.

"I've heard a lot about you around the campus Ken. It seems that the Bobcats are expecting great things from you." She said. Her voice was soft yet held an undertone of curiosity.

"Ah, thank you..." He replied awkwardly. Being stared at by the pretty girl in front of him was making him rather uncomfortable.

'I should have brought Ai.' He thought. But then he likely wouldn't have been able to bring Steve since he only had a plus one.

"I heard you passed 100 thousand followers on Instagram lately." Dave added, his tone a little curt, as if he was jealous. It only took Ken a moment to realize that this guy was likely pining for Amelia.

Seeing her showing an interest in him had likely got his guard up.

Ken resisted the urge to sigh, feeling stifled.

"Is that so? Sorry, my social media manager looks after all those things."

"Oho? You must have a very talented manager then." Amelia added, her red lips shifting into a smile.

Ken felt Dave's glare deepen, stoking his annoyance.

"Well it was nice meeting you all, I hope to see you around campus again soon." Ken stated, bowing slightly once more. Without waiting for his chaperon, he turned his heel and went looking for Steve.

He didn't need the ire of some random student just because he was receiving unwanted attention from a woman.

As Ken made his way through the first floor of the building, he caught the attention of a few party-goers. But before they could get his attention, he sped by, looking for Steve.

"Ken, why do you look so frantic?" A female voice called out to him, causing him to come to a stop.

"Tara... Have you seen Steve?" He asked.

"I think I saw him heading upstairs with a couple of people."

After hearing this, Ken felt a bad premonition coming over him. He said a brief thank you and then quickly made his way to the stairway in the lobby, leaving Tara with a confused expression.

"Damn it, I wanted some photos." However, she decided to wait for the guy to come back since he looked so worried.

Ken ascended the stairs in a hurry, his heart beating fast. He could already tell that Steve wasn't welcomed at the door for some reason, so hearing he'd been led away left him worried.

On the second floor was a hallway of rooms with the doors closed. He could only open each one at a time in hopes to find his friend.

After a couple of embarrassing interactions with people in the other rooms doing some naughty business, Ken finally found his friend.

THUD

Ken saw the doorman from earlier swing his large fist, hitting Steve's arm's which were guarding his face. Instantly, a fiery rage bubbled from within him as he stood in the doorway.

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

Chapter 733 - 733: Abort Mission (1)

Ken was about to pounce forward and tackle the behemoth, but was stopped dead in his tracks in the next moment. He had expected Steve to go down after the heavy punch to his guard, however something else happened entirely.

Steve weaved his head, keeping his guard up. He shuffled his feet and changed angles, sending a left hook to the body of the large guy. His technique was brilliant to watch, matching well with his speed. .

The big guy froze on the spot as if he was stunned by the blow. He swiftly fell to his knee and groaned in pain, struggling to breathe.

Instead of following up, Steve lowered his guard and shook his head. "You're far too amateur to challenge me to a fight." He said simply, walking past the guy.

"Oh hey man, you ready to go mingle?" Steve's expression lit up as he saw Ken, as if he wasn't just in a blood pumping fight earlier.

Ken stammered for a bit before he eventually just nodded, leaving the room. It seemed that Steve hadn't needed his help after all.

As they walked back down the stairs, Ken couldn't help his curiosity. "What happened man? When I turned around you were already gone."

Steve shrugged, "I saw this cute chick and started up some conversation with her. She led me upstairs and then the big guy came out of nowhere, asking me what I was doing with his girl."

"So I just gave him a quick liver blow. Pow!" Steve performed the move once more, showing off his quick movements.

"You know how to fight?" Ken asked. He had never learned how to fight before, though he had fought against Tetsu and the thugs that had captured him. Now that he thought about it, if he'd known some martial arts, things might have been different back then.

Steve shrugged, "A few years of boxing. The coach was too annoying so I ended up quitting."

"Anyway, enough of that. Let's go find some chicks!" He said, wrapping his arm around Ken's shoulder.

Ken could only sigh, though he felt a little relieved. A small tiff like this wouldn't get them into any trouble, unless the big guy decided to press charges or something.

But who would want to admit they were easily subdued by someone almost half their size. The guy would lose all credibility in the future.

As they made their way downstairs, the two saw a flash which almost blinded them. When they could finally see again, they saw Tara giving them a thumbs up with a wide grin.

"Nice shot! This looks great." She exclaimed, turning her attention to the digital camera in her hands.

The photo showed the two going down the stairs with Steve wearing his trademark grin and Ken with his hands in his pockets. The guy looked like a model, his tall frame even more exaggerated by the angle of the shot.

It truly was a great photo, one that Ken would look back on with a smile and nostalgia in the future.

"Why don't you come and mingle with us?" Ken asked Tara who was also in a cocktail dress. If it wasn't for the expensive camera around her neck, she would look right at home in this place.

Tara looked a little taken aback, but she smiled warmly in response. "Okay, let me put my camera away."

"I'll come with you." Ken said, shrugging Steve's hand off his shoulders. "You wait here, don't go getting into any fights."

"Ah, sure."

With that, Ken followed Tara to where she had left her camera bag. Just as she put it away, Ken grabbed it, eliciting a questioning expression from her.

"Do me a favor?"

Tara felt as if she wasn't going to like his next words, so she didn't agree right away. "Depends on what it is."

Ken smiled naturally, enhancing his already handsome features. Tara felt herself lost in his smile for a few moments, only for her expression to change after hearing his words.

"Look after Steve for me."

Before she even had a chance to answer, Ken had already left, carrying her camera bag with him. He didn't even turn back, making a beeline towards the front door.

It was only when he finally slipped out that he was able to breathe a sigh of relief. The cold night air washed away the suffocating feeling that he'd been experiencing inside of the house.

Despite only being there for only 30 or so minutes, he truly couldn't wait to leave.

"Leaving so soon?"

This was the second time he'd heard these words, yet this time it was the sultry voice of a woman. Ken didn't need to turn to realize that it was Amelia behind him.

'Man... I just want to go home in peace.' Ken thought, rolling his eyes.

However, he still turned and wore a polite smile. "The season starts in a couple of days, I need to stick to my sleep schedule." He replied.

Amelia grinned, "I admire your dedication. I'm also heading back, care to walk with me?" She asked.

'I'd rather not...' he admitted inwardly.

"Sure thing."

She had stopped at the top of the stairs, as if waiting for something. It was only then that he realized Amelia was wearing tall heels and wanted some help.

Being the gentleman that he was, Ken walked up a few steps and held out his arm, after which she placed her arm in and carefully made her way down the stairs.

She let out a small giggle and thanked him.

Only when she got to the bottom step did she sit down and begin to take off her heels. From Ken's vantage point, a flash of something black and lacy entered his vision, causing his face to redden before he averted his eyes.

Thankfully the woman hadn't noticed his actions.

When Amelia stood up once more, her height was much shorter than before. If earlier she came up to his shoulders, she was now level with his chest.

"I'm ready, let's go."

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

Chapter 734 - 734: Abort Mission (2)

With that, the two walked slowly towards the East Campus where Amelia resided. At first Ken felt a little awkward, but after chatting for a while it wasn't as bad as he thought.

"I heard you're from Japan?"

Ken nodded, "I was brought up about an hour from Tokyo and came here almost 2 years ago now."

"Wow, your English is amazing. Did you learn over there?" She asked with intrigue.

Ken let out a chuckle. "My dad was born in America, so we always spoke English and Japanese at home."

"Ohh, I see. I'll be going to Tokyo for the Olympics later this year, do you have any recommendations?"

Ken was slightly taken aback. He had forgotten that the Olympics were hosted in Tokyo this year, not that he actually followed them at all.

Like that, the two chatted back and forth and before Ken knew it, he had actually let his guard down. At some point, he was actually beginning to enjoy the conversation.

Not only was Amelia smart, she also had a cute laugh. She would lean into him when laughing, or just touch his arm every now and then when talking.

Since the East Campus was only 1/5th of a mile away, they had arrived in less than 10 minutes, even with their slow walking speed. Ken stopped in place and was about to say his goodbyes, but Amelia's hand brushed down his arm and grabbed his hand.

"Why don't you come up and I'll make us some tea." She suggested, batting her eyelids softly.

Instantly, Ken felt a sense of danger. The woman in front of him was gorgeous, that was no lie. But in addition to that, she'd lulled him into a false sense of security, easily leading him astray.

Ken shook his head, using his discipline forged by many years of hard work and effort to resist her charms. "I'm sorry, I have a fiance." He said, letting her hand go.

Amelia's face stiffened briefly before her carefree smile returned, "I see. I'm sorry for being so forward, I don't usually get along this well with someone."

Ken smiled, "It was nice talking to you, I'm sure we can be friends."

However, Amelia shook her head. "Let us remain as acquaintances. That way I won't have to put my already stretched restraint to the test. A girl can only resist for so long."

Before Ken could answer, Amelia placed her hand on Ken's firm chest and ran it down his abs, letting out a quiet sigh. "It was nice meeting you Ken." She said, turning around and mumbling something to herself.

"Such a pity..."

Ken was dumbfounded, even more so because her touch left him with a tingling sensation. His gaze lingered on Amelia's back for a few moments before he turned around and made his way back to his own dorm.

He fished his phone out of his pocket and dialed a number.

RING RING

"Hey... I miss you."

Ken quickly went over what had happened during the night, not sparing any detail. Ai was already aware of the frat party, but she grew silent when hearing about Ken walking Amelia home.

"Thank you for telling me. Just for that, I won't get mad." She replied, making Ken laugh a little in response.

"I trust you Ken, but you need to look out for these kinds of people. I've heard that college in America is filled with people having... You know what."

Ken nodded. He had heard similar things as well, even experienced it 2nd hand when walking the halls at night. The sound of two people rutting, with no concern for those around them.

The two talked for a while before Ken arrived at the dorms. He ended the call with Ai and disrobed before jumping into bed, staring at the ceiling like he usually did.

He was feeling a little restless and didn't want to sleep for some reason. So after only 5 minutes, he put on his workout gear and left the dorm once more, heading for the gym.

'I'll work up a sweat, that should sort me out.'

Ken ended up going through his full weight routine for the next 90 minutes before finishing off on the treadmill. By the time he was done, his muscles were screaming at him for rest, leaving him with a satisfied expression.

Thankfully no one was present in the gym which was rare. But when he went to leave, he saw a figure staring at him from the hallway, causing him to almost jump in fright.

"Coach? Is that you?"

Sure enough, it was Coach Brown. "Putting in some extra work before the season starts?" He said, wearing a satisfied smile.

"Y—Yeah, just feeling a little restless." Ken admitted, wiping away some sweat from his face.

"Mmm, your work ethic is definitely the best on the team, I'll give you that." The coach praised him. "Just try not to overwork yourself okay? We'll need you in top form."

"Don't worry coach, I know my body the best." He retorted with confidence.

"Very good. We've got 3 games back to back against Stetson University in Florida at the end of the week. Are you ready?"

Ken nodded, "I'm ready to do whatever you need me to do coach."

"I'm sure you are young man." Coach Brown said with a smile. "Now go get some rest, we've got a long season ahead."

"Yes sir."

Ken was feeling rather motivated after talking to the coach, remembering that the start of his college baseball season was getting much closer. He took a shower and used Mika's sleep protocol to get some much needed sleep.

When he woke up at 5 in the morning the next day, he noticed that Steve was not in his bed, causing him to frown.

"He's not going to skip out on our morning training is he?" Ken muttered, clearly dissatisfied.

He quickly got changed and opened the bathroom door in order to splash some cold water on his face. However, the moment he opened the door, he saw Steve's naked figure entering the bathroom from Tara's dorm room.

Steve's eyes locked onto Ken's, his face going through a myriad of emotions.

"Don't tell me..." Ken muttered in shock.

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

Chapter 735 - 735: Explain Yourself (1)

Ken's jaw had dropped, not believing his eyes. His usually quick thoughts were slowed to a crawl as he tried to put the pieces together.

"G—Good morning." Steve uttered, his expression lacking the usual mischief Ken was used to.

Only after hearing his friend's voice did Ken finally understand what had happened. His shock turned to disappointment and annoyance before he responded, "You have some explaining to do."

Instead of getting defensive, Steve nodded. He shuffled his way past Ken and went into their dorm, covering his exposed body with the clothes from last night.

Only after the door closed did Ken turn to the mirror. He saw the frown on his own face and could only shake his head. The expression reminded him of his father whenever Ken had messed up.

This thought brought a brief smile to his face. Why did it seem like he was the mature one in his and Steve's relationship?

Ken waited a couple of minutes before going back into his dorm room. Steve had already gotten dressed and was waiting for him, ready to have the next conversation.

"So? Care to explain what you were doing in Tara's room last night?" Ken said, his tone deeper than he expected.

Steve nodded, "When you left, Tara accompanied me around the party. At first things were a little awkward, but then she became an awesome wing man... Or I guess, wing girl?"

He tilted his head, as if trying to come up with the correct term. "Anyway, things were going well and I was rubbing shoulders with some really hot girls in no time. But things changed a couple of hours later..."

Ken listened patiently, taking a seat on the edge of his bed as he listened to Steve's tale. He could already imagine the extroverted guy talking up a storm, but his tone towards the end made him feel a sense of foreboding.

"It turned out that this one girl I was getting flirty with had a man who was interested in her. Of course they weren't dating or anything, but that didn't stop him from challenging me to a fight."

At the mention of the word fight, Ken's frown deepened. The last thing they needed was for Steve to get into any controversy, especially since he was only a walk-on. If the NCAA heard of his antics, he could be banned from playing.

"The guy was on the wrestling team, so he just tried to grab me the entire time." His face turned up into a grin, "It's too bad I'm lightning quick, he couldn't even touch me before I sent him on his ass."

Ken shook his head. Steve's boasting was making his mood worse, "I don't want to hear about that crap. Tell me why you slept with Tara, our Social Media manager." He said accusingly.

Before Steve could respond, Ken got off the bed and approached him, "I sent her to be your wingman, not for you to go home with her... Mixing business and pleasure is a surefire way to get yourself into serious trouble."

"You might have jeopardized our working relationship with this woman, and for what?"

Ken was like a father lecturing his son, not even giving the guy a chance to defend himself. Steve's face went from slightly annoyed, to anger.

"I didn't sleep with Tara." He said, shooting him a glare.

"So what? You just cuddled, while naked?" Ken replied condescendingly.

"Did you forget that Tara has a roommate?" Steve shot back.

"Ah..." Ken paused, feeling his rising anger suddenly smothered. He had made the assumption that Steve had slept with Tara, forgetting such a crucial piece of information.

Perhaps he didn't forget it, but the logical conclusion was it had to have been Tara since she had accompanied Steve to the party after he left.

Instead of getting angry, Steve got up and pat him on the shoulder, "Don't worry bro, I'm not that stupid that I would ruin our relationship with Tara just for a single amazing night."

Ken was silent for a few moments before letting out a sigh. "Sorry man, I should have found out all the details first before accusing you."

"Don't sweat it. We're in this together alright?"

"Yeah, you're right. Now let's go get some work in before class."

With that, the two easily patched up the misunderstanding. Of course, Steve had left out some crucial parts of the narrative, but the ending remained the same.

The week went by quickly following the same routine the guys had gotten used to. There were a few changes, particularly for Ken who had unceremoniously been thrust into popularity thanks to his Magnetic Charm skill.

Like he feared, the gawking had gotten worse. It was not only the other students who would outright stare at him, even some of his professors treated him differently.

It was as if he had a giant target painted on his face.

Not only was he picked more often when professor's asked questions, he was swamped when it came time for group projects. In fact, the only person seemingly unaffected by his Magnetic Charm was Steve, who hadn't changed a bit.

The only benefit that Ken felt came from this upgrade was his relationship with his teammates and coach's. They had all opened up to him, accepting him like he'd been there for years.

Even Ethan, the pitcher who he'd had friction with since day one had calmed down significantly. Of course there was still a sense of rivalry, but it was more bordering on the friendly competitive side rather than outright dislike.

Soon enough, the weekend approached and the team was set to travel to DeLand Florida to play a series against Stetson University. Ken was told that the start of the season would be played in the warmer states, since it was far too cold on the East Coast.

The team was shuttled to the airport and took a plane to Florida for the matches. The weather was vastly different, sitting at a nice 20°C or 68°F.

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

Chapter 736 - 736: Explain Yourself (2)

The flight was only around 3 hours, but Ken had always dreaded flying. Now that he was 6'5 and getting taller every day, he struggled with getting comfortable on flights.

Finally stretching his legs, he let out a sigh of relief.

Their bus was already waiting for them at the airport and took them straight to the hotel where Ken and Steve were given a room to share. By now, everyone knew that the two were inseparable, even the coaching staff.

The hotel rooms were nothing special, but Ken didn't mind. At least they were around the same size as their dorm room and had a private bathroom, unlike on campus.

After getting settled, the team went and had a late lunch together before gathering for a meeting. It was a regular film study session, but the coach also released the starting line up for tonight's game.

"Ethan, you'll be starting tonight's game. Ken, you're on the mound tomorrow." Coach Brown stated. "Julio, DeShaun, Blake, you'll be the relief pitchers and Sam, Dylan, you'll be closing."

"Infielders: Tristan, Zeke, Levi, Kaden. Outfielders: Ken, DJ, Ayden. Catcher: Clinton, backup catcher Stephen. Designated Hitter: Jackson, and we'll put Stephen and Karl down as pinch hitters."

The lineup was as Ken had expected. He was feeling rather excited after hearing his name in the lineup, even if it was in the outfield. Turning to Steve, Ken saw that the guy was wearing a smile.

It looked like the coach had seen how much he'd improved and was willing to use him as both a backup catcher and a potential pinch hitter.

"Good for you man." Ken whispered, giving his friend a nudge.

After studying some film and going over their game plan, it was already nearing 5pm. The team was then ushered out to a bus waiting out the front and taken to Melching Field at Conrad Park, the home ground for the Stetson Cappers.

The field was beautiful and looked to be able to host at least a couple thousand spectators. Since it was winter, the sun was already close to retreating over the horizon, painting a beautiful sky of orange and blue over the field.

As Ken got off the bus, he took in the sight. This would be his first official college game playing as a Bobcat. His inner child was screaming with joy, making it almost feel surreal.

DING

Ken froze before a smile crept onto his lips.

'So it's finally time huh?' He mused inwardly.

Ken didn't even have to check the system notification to know that a new mission had appeared. He had been waiting for this for months, but only now an hour before the first match did it decide to appear.

"Alright guys, follow me to the locker rooms. I want us on the field in 20 minutes." Coach Brown called out, rounding up the team members.

"Are you nervous?" Steve asked, though it was clear he was being cheeky.

Ken scoffed, "I've played on the world stage before, who do you think I am?" He replied in an over-the-top manner.

"Pfft..."

"Hahaha."

The two laughed jovially, dispersing any lingering nerves. If he was honest, Ken was a little nervous, but it was mixed with so much excitement that he couldn't tell what was causing his hands to shake.

"We finally made it huh?" Steve said, his eyes looking up at the large floodlights which would be turned on shortly.

"Mmm. It won't be long before you make the starting lineup man, I guarantee you." Ken replied with confidence. As long as Steve continued to take this seriously, he would make sure of it.

Steve smiled in response. It was obvious that he too was looking forward to the day where he would take the field as a starter.

The team made their way to the lockers and began to get dressed under the orders of the coach. Ken quickly got ready before taking a seat and placing his cleats on. He was far too eager to see the new mission he'd been given.

#NEW MISSION: NCAA Division I Tournament.

*Task 1: Hit 20 home runs [0/20]

*Task 2: Finish season with best ERA

*Task 3: Finish season with greater than 70 RBIs

*Task 4: Finish on top of Ivy League

*Task 5: Win Ivy league Championship

*Task 6: Qualify for NCAA Super Regionals

*Task 7: Qualify for College World Series

*Task 8: Win College World Series

*Task 9: Win MVP (Tiered rewards for each Tournament)

REWARDS:

>Task 1 rewards - 50,000 Major points

>Task 2 rewards - 50,000 Major points + Draft stock increase

>Task 3 rewards - 70,000 Major points + Draft stock increase

>Task 4 rewards - 100,000 Major points + Additional Mentee skill slot

>Task 5 rewards - 100,000 Major points + Trait selection

>Task 6 rewards - 150,000 Major points + EX-Grade Physical Elixir

>Task 7 rewards - 250,000 Major points + EX-Grade Mental Elixir

>Task 8 rewards - 250,000 Major points + Diamond Lottery Ticket

>Task 9 rewards - [Based on Performance]

Ken's eyes widened as he stared at the window in front of him. Not only was there more tasks in this mission, the rewards were also completely bonkers.

But before he could give them more than a cursory glance, the coach's booming voice got his attention.

"Let's go, we've got no time to lose."

Closing his system window, Ken vowed to give it a thorough once over when he returned to the hotel a bit later. There were a few terms he had heard before but didn't exactly know their meaning, like ERA and RBI.

It would be rather embarrassing if he admitted this to anyone, so he decided to keep it to himself and do his own research. After all, he had never focused on things like stats. All he cared about was winning.

When they arrived on the field, the lights were already on, illuminating the beautiful field. The synthetic turf gave it a pristine look and the dirt looked well-maintained.

"The outfield looks a little shorter than I expected." Ken muttered to himself. But that was fine, it meant that it would be easier to hit home runs.

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

Chapter 737 - 737: The Game Begins (1)

Coach Brown watched as the players began their warm-ups on the field, his expression unreadable. His eyes scanned over the team, paying attention to each and every movement, assessing them silently.

He felt the presence of someone stop beside him, he didn't need to look to know who it was. The dark and bulky figure in his peripherals was enough to recognize Coach Coleman.

"How is everyone's conditioning this year?" Coach Brown asked, his eyes not leaving the field.

"Great. I don't think I've ever seen a more capable squad, since I've been here at least." Coach Coleman stated, his deep voice full of praise.

"Mmm." The head coach nodded. Hearing such high praise from the man beside him was something that could be considered extremely rare.

"This years team seems to be different. Everyone seems a lot more focused..." He mused.

"I honestly don't think I've ever had such a productive off season." He added.

"What do you think is the main reason?" Coach Coleman asked, his lips turned up in a small smile.

"Obviously its because of my great coaching."

"..."

"Hahaha."

The two laughed together, showcasing what kind of close relationship they had.

"In all seriousness though, the dynamic of the team seemed to have shifted ever since we got our last batch of freshman. Perhaps securing the number 1 High School prospect has had an impact on our guys?" Coach Coleman stated.

The Head Coach didn't deny this, but he felt there was a little more to it than that. "In the past week or so, I've seen the players gravitate towards Ken. There's something about him that stands out and draws others in. I'm not sure if it's his desire to win or something else..."

This wasn't the first time Coach Brown had recognized Ken's impact on the team. During the intersquad game, he could feel that just a few words from the teen was enough to uplift the morale of the squad. It was as if he was a born leader.

"Mmm, that kid has a ridiculous work ethic. Even I couldn't break him." Coach Coleman admitted ruefully.

"Well, it's finally time to put it to the test in a real match."

With that, the Head Coach walked onto the field and inspected the drills closely, ensuring that everyone was doing as they were supposed. The more he walked around, the more he was satisfied with their conduct.

His eyes drifted to Ken who was in the middle of some outfield drills and nodded in satisfaction. He had been a little skeptical about putting the kid in the outfield, but it was undeniable that he had the skill and a canon of an arm.

Around 20 minutes later, the coach pulled everyone off the field and into the dugout. By now the stadium was already close to its 1500 spectator capacity and the floodlights had already been turned on.

The team waited as both Coaches met with the umpire, exchanging the lineup cards. Ken felt his heart beating loudly in his chest as he was filled with excitement. His earlier shaking had disappeared, replaced by a calm determination.

Once the coach returned, he reiterated his points from the previous meeting and led everyone into a chant.

"Win on 3!"

1

2

3

"WIN"

The whole team filtered out onto the field, wearing their trademark blue away uniforms and lined up for the national anthem. Ken's eyes peered over to the opposing team and saw a few key figures dressed in the white and green uniforms.

Devonte Miller and Jose Chavez, these were the two clean-up hitters that the coach had pointed out to them earlier in the day. Both were senior's and set to declare for the draft this year.

Ken's eyes sparkled with curiosity, quickly using his Identify function on them.

NAME: Jose Chavez

AGE: 21

TALENT ASSESSMENT: SS+

POTENTIAL: SSS+

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: SS+

>Pitching: D

>Fielding: SSS-

>Game Intelligence: S+

>Mental: SS

NAME: Devonte Miller

AGE: 21

TALENT ASSESSMENT: SSS-

POTENTIAL: EX-

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: SSS

>Pitching: B

>Fielding: SS

>Game Intelligence: A+

>Mental: SSS-

Ken perused the grades and nodded. These two were towards the top end of college players, at least from what he'd discovered using Identify on his own teammates.

However, at this point his expression froze, suddenly realizing he'd made a huge mistake.

'ARGH! Why didn't I use Identify on the Yanks players!?'

Ken resisted the urge to pull his hair out in frustration. He had the perfect opportunity to check out their ratings and would have even paid a huge sum of Major Points in order to get his hands on such information.

"Please stand for the National Anthem." The announcer spoke over the speakers, causing everyone to stand up straight. Ken was forced to swallow his regret and turn his attention to remembering the words of the Anthem.

The Japanese National anthem was simple, particularly since it was quite short. But even after being in the States for almost 2 years, he was still not used to this one.

"Oh say, can you see. By the dawn's early light~"

Ken cringed, his eyes locking onto the horrible sound produced by one of his teammates singing. Those around him seemed to be immune to the foghorn-like tone produced from Tristan, one of the shortest on the team.

Ken resisted the urge to cover his ears, but it made it extremely difficult to remember the words and sing along to the anthem. He eventually decided to lip sync, doing his best to hold on until the end.

Only after the music stopped playing did Ken let out a sigh of relief. He shot the captain a glare who seemed utterly oblivious to his terrible vocals.

"Captains, to me." The umpire said, wielding a coin.

"Heads." Tristan called before the coin was tossed into the air. It bounced a few times on the ground before ultimately revealing that they won.

"We'll bat first." He said with a dazzling grin. He then ushered the team back to the dugout.

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

Chapter 738 - 738: The Game Begins (2)

Once back in the dugout, the opposing team took the field and their players were introduced. The small crowd were full of Stetson University supporters, but when Devonte and Jose were announced, the cheers were even louder.

It was clear that these two players were quite renowned.

"How confident are you?" Ayden asked, already placing his helmet and pads on.

"Who me?" Ken replied, looking left and right, noticing that it was only him and Tristan in the vicinity.

"Who else do you think?" Ayden scoffed, "I'm asking how confident you are in sending us home?"

Ayden gestured to himself and Tristan who was getting ready to bat himself. From the batting lineup, it was Ayden and Tristan as the lead-off hitters, followed by him and DJ at 3 and 4 respectively.

Ken didn't need to think too long before giving a thumbs up, "Just get on base, I'll send you home."

Ayden grinned, "I like your confidence rookie."

With that he made his way out onto the field in order to practice his swing while the pitcher took his warm up throws.

"Batting 1st for the Bobcats, Number 7, Ayden Carney."

The crowd didn't respond too much to the announcement, but Ayden didn't seem to mind. He stepped up to the batters box with pristine confidence and faced the opening pitcher for the Cappers.

The guy looked huge, particularly so for Ayden who was only 5'8. Not to mention he was standing on the mound, giving him some extra height.

However, Ayden did particularly well against taller players. This was because his strike zone was significantly lower than others, so unless the pitcher had great control, it was a nightmare to play against him.

With a confident grin, Ayden awaited the first pitch.

The tall guy on the mound nodded before striding forward and sending a fastball to the top of the strike zone. His form was a little unique in the sense where his wind up was short and almost non-existent.

Nevertheless, the ball was fast, reaching the early 90's in speed.

Ayden remained motionless, his eyes locked onto the ball as it went past him and straight into the glove of the catcher.

PAH

"Ball."

An outcry broke out from the crowd as they complained against the call, yet the umpire ignored them. It wasn't uncommon for a home crowd to protest a call against their team.

The next ball came fast once again, this time a little lower than the last ball.

WHOOOSH

WHACK!

Ayden swooped on it, sending a short yet power strike towards the gap between 1st and 2nd base. The first baseman dived towards the ball, doing his best to stop it from getting past, however he was only able to deviate its course slightly.

The tall pitcher was slow off the mark, almost forgetting that it was his job to cover 1st base. He meandered towards 1st base, but his foot speed was outmatched by Ayden by a large margin.

The second baseman scooped up the loose ball and intended to throw it to 1st base, however, with the first baseman still scrambling to his feet and the slow pitcher running towards the bag, there was no one to throw it to.

"Safe!"

Forced to hold onto the ball, the second baseman wore a sour expression. He walked over to the pitcher and had a few words with him, admonishing the guy for his mistakes.

Ayden on the other hand, sent a thumbs up towards the dugout.

It was a great play which took advantage of the slow rotational speed of the infield. This was something that Coach Brown had highlighted in their film study and Ayden had played it to perfection.

As Ken got his gear on, Steve pat him on the back. "It's your first game man, whatever you do, don't strike out or get a double play."

Ken rolled his eyes. He didn't even need to look at Steve to know he was wearing his trademark mischievous grin. He nudged the guy with the bat, sending him back onto the bench.

"You just watch while I send a sweet homer over the fence." He replied confidently.

"Haha! That's the spirit." Levi the large 3rd baseman gave Ken a slap on the back, grinning widely.

Ken flinched briefly, feeling the sting in the middle of his back. If he wasn't about to go onto the field, he might have smacked the guy on the knee with his bat to settle him down.

WHACK!

"Nice hit!"

Ken quickly turned his attention to the field as both Ayden and Tristan flew around the bases. The ball had sailed into right center field, right between the two defenders.

The right outfielder picked up the ball and threw it to 2nd base rather quickly, making Tristan have to stop at 1st.

'Ah crap, why did he have to do it on the first hit.' Ken complained. He hadn't even done any warm up swings yet and it was his turn to enter the batters box.

Ascending the stairs quickly, he did a couple of swings while walking out, at least trying to pump some blood into his muscles.

"Batting 3rd, Number 13, Ken Takagi."

Arriving at the batters box, he tapped the plate and the toe of his cleats as usual before entering his stance. Ever since changing his technique, his confidence with the bat had increased dramatically.

With the additional help of his Image Training and batting cage sessions, Ken had no doubt that as long as he timed everything correctly, he could easily send a ball over the fence.

Not only was the outfield shorter than he was used to, he was also far stronger than he was just 6 months ago. At least according to the system.

Ken gripped his bat tightly and directed his attention to the pitcher on the mound. The guy's fastballs hadn't looked too crazy, at least from the dugout, but he wasn't about to underestimate the guy.

As the pitcher stepped forward, Ken watched the ball sail from his fingertips with anticipation.

'An inside fastball!'

WHOOOOSH

CRAAAACK~

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

Chapter 739 - 739: Easy (1)

CRAAAACK~

Ken felt the bat almost disintegrate in his hands as he swung with full power. A shard of wood kicked up, grazing him on the side of the face and causing a sharp pain.

He ignored it, searching for the ball.

Somehow, the ball had rocketed into left field with force despite the breaking of the bat. Ken wasn't sure how far it would go and his right eye was watering from taking the blow from the wood shard.

He quickly threw aside the mangled remains of his bat and sped towards 1st base.

As he approached, his eyes moved towards the ball, trying to see where it was, only to see it clear both the fence and the outstretched arm of the outfielder.

Instantly, his body relaxed and he couldn't help but let out a grin. He slowed his run into a jog and idled his way towards 2nd base. It was there that he saw the barrel of his bat on the field, a few feet away from the pitcher.

Ken quickly glanced at the pitcher, only to see him gawking at Ken as if he was some kind of freak. Thankfully the guy didn't appear to have been hit by the debris, though he looked rattled.

Elsewhere on the field, Coach Brown's jaw was wide open. While it was true that the outfield was shorter in this stadium, that didn't make the home run any less spectacular.

He had never seen anyone get a home run with a broken bat before, at least in person. It took a tremendous amount of precision and power to pull off such a feat, something that one would not expect from a freshman of all people.

Even the home crowd for Stetson University were stumped. A round of applause broke out, though it was late since everyone had to recover from the shock of the play.

"I—It's a home run into left field by number 13... Ken Takagi."

The announcer was also slow to react, stammering his words when he finally made the announcement.

Ken arrived at home plate with both Ayden and Tristan waiting for him with jovial expressions.

"Hot damn Ken! I've never seen such a hit like that before." Ayden cried out jumping up to smack the guy on top of the helmet. There was no other way that he could reach otherwise. [search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.](#)

In fact, both Tristan and Ayden were of similar heights. Next to Ken who was almost a foot taller, it looked rather ridiculous.

Tristan on the other hand shot him a dazzling grin, exposing his pearly white teeth. Instead of saying a word of praise, he wound up and smacked Ken on the behind, causing Ken to almost let out a yelp.

Out of reflex, Ken lifted his elbow and performed a strike to the top of the guy's helmet, almost knocking the guy out from the force.

Ayden caught Tristan's wobbly figure and held him up. The guy didn't seem too worried, still wearing the same grin as before.

The trio made their way back to the dugout, only for Coach Brown to flag Ken down. "You crazy bastard! Where did you learn to hit like that?"

This was the first time he'd seen the coach so animated, but it brought a smile to his face. He didn't really know how to reply, but before he had a chance, the coach's expression changed.

"Go get that cut of yours checked out." He said, pointing to the side of Ken's face.

"Yes sir."

With that, Ken headed over to the dugout and received a lot of attention from his teammates. The whole team was buzzing after seeing such a rare display of strength and precision, especially from a freshman.

"Dude that was so cool!" Steve was practically jumping for joy as Ken returned. "How the hell did you still manage to send it over the fence after breaking the bat?"

Ken shrugged, "Just got lucky I guess." He responded casually.

"Yeah right... Well, I managed to record it and sent it to Tara already."

"Eh? Why were you recording?"

"Tara asked me to try and get some good footage." Steve replied simply, however his tone was a little odd. Ken felt like there was something that his friend wasn't telling him, but he suddenly remembered the coach's words.

He moved towards the back of the dugout and consulted with one of the medical staff who took a look at his cut. It was shallow and wouldn't require stitches, but it was close enough to his eye to seem dangerous.

"There's a few fragments of wood in there, I'll need to remove them." The woman said.

"Um... Would you mind taking a seat." She asked, her shoulders sore after having to reach his height.

"Oh, sure."

The wound was expertly attended to by the medical staff and promptly covered with a plaster. The woman asked Ken a series of questions and took him through some tests to determine whether he was fit to continue the game.

After getting the nod of approval, the staff went and notified that coach that he was in the clear.

Once free, Ken stood alongside Steve and watched the game from the dugout. With his earlier home run, they had taken a 3 run lead and it was only the first inning. Starts like this was something that every coach dreamed about.

DJ managed to continue the momentum, getting a hit into the outfield and securing his position on 2nd base. By the end of the inning, Columbia had 5 runs before Stetson was able to secure 3 outs.

Ken made his way out to the field, sporting his new plaster. Since this was their first time defending in the game, the announcer called out the names of all the starting players with little enthusiasm.

Ken received some cheers when his name was called, likely because of his amazing play 10 minutes earlier. Even now there seemed to be a buzz in the stadium, despite him being from the opposing team.

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

Chapter 740 - 740: Easy (2)

The game continued with Stetson unable to get back into it. Ethan gave up a home run against Jose Chavez in the 5th inning, but it was too little too late for them.

The game ended with the Bobcats 8 - Cappers 2.

Although not hitting another home run, Ken had a great showing in his debut match. In addition to his broken bat home run, he secured 2 doubles and a sacrifice bunt which resulted in Ayden scoring a run.

All in all, his performance was quite noteworthy, which was why at the conclusion of the game, he was requested for a post-match interview.

Ken had only done a couple of interviews before, one after Koshien and in the U18 World Cup. That still didn't stop him from being a little nervous when he was directed to a woman holding a microphone in front of an expensive camera.

"I'm here with the player of the match Ken Takagi who was part of the dominant Bobcats performance we just witnessed. Tell me Ken, how does it feel to secure a win in your debut college match?"

Ken was a little taken aback that the interview started so quickly. Usually the reporter would introduce themselves first and partake in some small talk before the broadcast started.

Thankfully, he quickly changed gears.

"It feels great. We've been training really hard during the off season and the coach trusted me enough to put me in the starting lineup. Hopefully I've lived up to his expectations."

Ken sounded like a true professional as he answered, surprising even the reporter. What they didn't know was that Ken had already received some form of media training from his father who was considered an expert.

"Well I'm sure you've exceeded his expectations Ken. Tell us about the home run in the first inning? It's quite a rare feat to be able to hit a home run with a broken bat."

Ken nodded, "The hit felt good before the bat broke so I know that I hit it flush. I think that the shorter outfield played a part in turning it into a home run, but I'm just glad that that no one got hurt."

The reporter smiled, happy with the response. She was happy to talk to someone who wasn't all bravado and kept a level head during an interview.

"Now you're listed as a pitcher, will we see you on the mound in the near future? I'm sure our viewers are looking forward to it."

"I'm always ready to pitch." Ken admitted, "As for when that will happen, you'll have to ask Coach Brown. I'm fully invested in Columbia baseball, as long as I'm needed, I'll play whatever position the coach needs me to play."

Of course this was a lie. If Ken was taken out of the pitching rotation for no reason, everyone would hear about it. But he still said these words, showing his commitment to his college team.

Not only would this give him a good public opinion, it would also bode well for his relationship with the Bobcats and the coaching staff. This was a good trick in order to gain brownie points for the future.

"Well let's hope we get to see some of your wicked fast balls very soon. Thank you for joining us Ken, good luck in the games this weekend. This was Angelina Baker at Melching field, have a great night."

As she signed off, the light from the camera dimmed and her posture relaxed. She turned to Ken with a warm smile.

"Thanks for the interview, you are really well trained." She said, holding out her hand.

Ken wore a wry smile, but grasped the outstretched hand. While he might not have used the word trained, he accepted the compliment in stride.

By now it was already around 9pm and time to leave the field. Their next game was at 1:30 in the afternoon tomorrow. They would play 3 games in 3 days against Stetson, of which he was hoping to pitch tomorrow.

By the time they returned to the hotel, everyone was starving.

One thing about staying at a hotel was they generally had buffets. Ken was usually able to find something with rice, which made him happy.

Ken was joined by a few more people than usual at his table while eating. It seemed that after his performance, his popularity had grown within the team.

"Bro, did you get the broken bat from the game?" Kaden asked, his eyes sparkling.

Ken shook his head, however he saw Steve's body flinch, eliciting a raised eyebrow from him. But seeing as the guy didn't respond, he left it for now.

'I'll ask him later...'

"What a shame. You probably could have sold it, or kept it as a memento."

"It's just a broken bat." Ken shrugged, "I'm just glad I don't have to pay to replace it."

"Hahahah."

The table laughed. The notion of having to pay for broken equipment was outlandish to them, especially since most were on a scholarship.

"Oh right, is Clinton okay?" Ayden turned to the Captain and asked.

"Hmm?"

Tristan finished his mouthful of food and wore a pensive look, "I'm not sure. He should be receiving medical attention from the staff now."

"What happened?" Ken asked with concern. He hadn't seen anything that should have been a cause for concern.

"I think he strained his groin in the final inning while trying to steal a base."

"I don't even know why he was trying to steal a base, we were up 6 runs..." Kaden added, shaking his head.

Tristan spoke up, "Even if we were up by 20 runs you guys should still be fighting for more. Don't start relaxing just because you think we'll win the game."

Kaden rolled his eyes, but he fired back, "I saw you nodding off in the dugout by the end of the game. Don't lecture me about relaxing!"

"T—That's different. I get sleepy while on the road." He stammered, eliciting a few chuckles from the others.

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