

# Major League System

## Chapter 741 - 741: Tickets (1)

By the end of the night, Ken was pretty tired. But that didn't stop him from laying on the bed and staring at the ceiling like he usually did.

He had a good game today both in fielding and batting. While he didn't get a chance to pitch, he was able to showcase other aspects of his game that he wouldn't have if he hadn't been training so hard to improve.

Unlike Japan where the Ace could pitch multiple games in a row, professional and college level teams had strict guidelines to prevent injuries and fatigue accumulation.

From his understanding, 30-50 pitches would require 1 to 2 days rest. 51-75 pitches needed 2-3 days and 75+ required one to sit out for 3-4 days.

These were just guidelines of course, and most clubs would err on the side of caution. Which made sense when considering how many resources were spent on a pitcher, both in salary and marketing.

Ken sighed wistfully, remembering the times where he would pitch upwards of 200 balls a day back in Japan. Before receiving the Fatigue management skill, this should have been impossible.

'It's no wonder I got injured in my previous life...'

The lack of regulations in Japanese amateur baseball was a double-edged sword. Injuries were more frequent and many players would ruin their arms before being able to meet their potential.

Ken was just one of many such examples. Thankfully things were different in this life.

Feeling a little melancholic, Ken decided it was time to cheer himself up. He had been saving his rewards from the pitching missions all this time, wanting to wait until playing his first game in college first before using them.

In reality, he was happy he held back. Without the rewards, he was able to focus more on improving his fundamentals and technique, rather than relying on whatever skill the system was going to give him.

Opening his inventory, Ken saw the two items and couldn't help but feel a surge of excitement.

"Tara... not there~"

Ken jumped in fright, quickly closing his system window and sitting up from the bed. He turned to see Steve with his eyes closed, talking in his sleep.

"Tara?" Ken frowned. There was something that Steve was not telling him. He had an inkling, but he didn't want to make assumptions.

Throwing it to the back of his mind, he laid back down and brought up his inventory again.

'We'll do the platinum ticket first.' He decided.

The last time he used a platinum ticket, he received the Mentor function. This is where he managed to learn a few of his pitches from James Anderson, the ex-Major league player.

'I wonder what I'll get this time...'

After selecting it, a shining wheel appeared in front of him. Not wasting a moment, Ken pressed the spin button and watched as the wheel began to spin fast. The familiar and therapeutic clicking noise of the spin entered his ears, causing him to let out a contented sigh.

The wheel came to a crawl, finally stopping.

[Congratulations, user has received skill: Zone Mastery]

'Zone mastery?' Ken was a little disappointed upon receiving a skill. He had been expecting another system function, especially since platinum tickets were so rare.

With little enthusiasm, he opened his skill window and scrolled down to the skill in question. But after seeing its golden hue and description, his eyes widened.

Zone Mastery (Legendary): Grants the ability to perceive the strike zone with absolute clarity, enhancing both pitching and batting accuracy.

'Holy crap... A legendary skill?'

His disappointment was quickly forgotten as he ogled the skill with drool pooling in his mouth. This was something that he needed, without a doubt. As for how unfair the skill was, Ken had long gotten over the moral dilemma of using his system.

'With this I won't have to worry about swinging at balls and only go after strikes. Not only that, my pitching control will significantly improve.' He thought excitedly.

While his control was already great, he was already looking for ways to push himself. With the zone mastery skill, Ken would be able to pitch around the zone with ease, creating havoc for those facing him.

"Just in time." He muttered.

But Ken wasn't done just yet. He still had the Diamond ticket remaining. Since this was the first time using one, he didn't know what to expect.

Upon selecting the ticket, a wheel did not appear, causing Ken to be a little confused. A loading bar appeared in its stead. For a moment, Ken had a feeling that the system had glitched or something.

But after reaching the end, another window appeared.

[Congratulations, user has acquired the skill: Intuition]

'Intuition?'

Without a word, Ken once again went to his skill window and scrolled down. The skill was also highlighted with a gold hue and had the word Legendary beside it, however there was no description.

He tried clicking on the skill, but nothing came up no matter how many times he tried, leading him to frown.

'Mika, what's up with this skill? Is it bugged?'

Although he hadn't really spoken to Mika lately since she had betrayed his trust, Ken had no one else to ask, so he bit the bullet.

[There is no description needed. User will understand when the skill activates.]

"..."

Although it was not a great answer, it was better than nothing.

The thing was, Ken already had a good intuition, at least in his own opinion. So what difference would this skill make?

The only solace was that the system had deemed this as a Legendary skill, which meant that it shouldn't be useless. Just to be sure, he queried Mika once more.

[...There are no useless rewards from the system.]

Ken held his tongue, not wanting to get into an argument. Since he would likely be pitching tomorrow, he'd be able to test out both of his new skills and hopefully play another great game to back up today's performance.

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

## Chapter 742 - 742: Tickets (2)

The next morning, Ken woke up at 5am as usual after a restful sleep. He woke up Steve and the two went for their morning run. With the weather a much more acceptable temperature, they made the most of it and ran outside.

Having run with Ken in multiple different locations, Steve had already mapped everything out and explained it to his friend prior. With this, the two did not get lost this time and returned to the hotel around 90 minutes later.

After a shower, the two joined some of the other teammates for breakfast.

"Did you see your home run on Sports Center last night?" Ayden said, sending a grin to Ken.

"Eh? They showed that?" Ken was a little surprised. This would be the first time he'd appeared on National Television.

Kaden pulled out his phone which was conveniently already on the video and showed Ken who watched the whole thing.

There was some color commentary and he had to admit that the play looked awesome from the angle in the crowd. He could see that the top end of the bat had narrowly missed the pitcher, much closer than he had initially thought.

"That's pretty cool." Ken stated, turning his attention back to his breakfast.

"Yeah, the University also made some social media posts and tagged you in it. I bet your notifications are going off like crazy right now." Kaden replied with a grin.

"Oh, I don't really go on social media."

"Really? How the hell did you hit 150k followers then?" This time it was Ayden who was gawking at him, clearly jealous.

"I've got someone who manages it all for me so I can focus on baseball."

Ayden sighed, "You already sound like a professional... Just like Ryan."

Ken's ears perked up, hearing a name he hadn't heard in quite a while. "You speak to Ryan still?"

He had completely forgotten that Ayden and Ryan were on the same U18 US team a few years back, so it would make sense if they kept in touch.

"Yeah, he's signed with the Miami Blue Marlins a few hours south of here."

Ken was shocked upon hearing this. In his previous life, Ryan did not play for the Blue Marlins, which begged the question, what had happened to him?

"He didn't go to College?" Ken asked, seeming far more interested than he liked to admit.

Ayden shrugged, "I heard he was going to Kansas State, but then he disappeared for a while. The next thing he told me was that he was playing in the minor league. But he's set to debut for the Blue Marlins this season."

Hearing that his rival was about to make his Major League debut while he was just starting his college career made Ken feel restless. However, he quickly calmed down after realizing that he needed patience.

The reason why he chose college was not only for Ai, but also to get an education. Not to mention that he would have missed out on potential rewards from the system missions that came with the college season.

Still, there was a burning desire to join him on the main stage, something that he couldn't resist even if he wanted to. Without knowing it, he'd already pumped himself up for today's game.

Just when everyone had almost finished breakfast, Clinton arrived downstairs, walking gingerly. He saw the group and waddled over before taking a seat and letting out a discomforted grunt.

"Morning guys."

"Hey man, you doing okay?"

However Clinton shook his head, "I've been ruled out for 4 weeks. Maybe I shouldn't have gone for that steal..." He said, letting out a hollow chuckle.

Steve froze, almost spilling the cereal contained in his spoon. He felt Clinton's gaze resting on him.

"Looks like you're up freshman. Don't let us down."

"A—Ah, I won't!" Steve felt bad, but he couldn't hide the smile pulling at the corner of his lips. If Clinton hadn't gotten injured, there was no way that he would have been able to play even a minute in today's game.

As if to back up this claim, it was addressed in the meeting later that day.

"Clinton is out for at least a few weeks, so we'll need others to step up. Steve, even though you're a freshman, you've shown some good promise in training. I'm moving you up to the starting line up."

Coach Brown wasted no time and called out Steve who enthusiastically responded. Ken could feel that the guy was excited, but then again, so was he.

Apart from Daichi, Steve was the catcher who knew him the best. With him making his debut the same time Ken was taking the mound for the first time, it almost felt like fate.

Upon thinking this, Ken suddenly grew suspicious.

'This isn't the doing of the system is it?' He thought inwardly.

He didn't ask Mika because he wouldn't trust what she responded with. Or perhaps he didn't really want to know the answer, since that would bring everything else into question.

Either way, he decided to ignore it for now. Aside from Mika accepting the rewards on his behalf, it hadn't touched his bottom line just yet.

If the system ever did something against his morals, he wasn't sure what he would do. Could he throw everything away and give up on baseball if it went too far? He didn't know.

Thankfully this was something that he didn't need to consider, at least for now.

The rest of the session continued with Coach Brown going through film of their game yesterday. There were a few defensive plays that he wasn't happy with, but other than that, things were quite positive.

The coach confirmed the starting lineup which largely remained unchanged apart from Ken pitching and Steve entering the lineup as the starting catcher.

With the game at 1:30pm, the team didn't have much time before they were hauled onto the bus and headed out to Melching field for the 2nd of their 3 games in Florida.

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

## Chapter 743 - 743: Dissatisfaction (1)

Playing during the day had a different vibe to playing at night. Ken preferred the day since it reminded him of back home, playing in the sweltering sun during Summer Koshien.

Of course he was just happy to play, especially if he was on the mound like right now.

'The view from up here is always the best.' He commented inwardly, staring down the lane at his first victim. Ken could see Steve behind the plate, looking as he always did with his glove raised, ready for his pitch.

Not wanting to waste anymore time, Ken began his windup. Every move was meticulous and full of power, yet it flowed naturally through his muscle memory.

With a large stride forward, his fastball roared through the air towards the strike zone, spinning like crazy.

WHOOOSH

PAH!

The sound of the ball striking the glove was like a thunderclap, heard from everywhere in the 1500 strong crowd. All murmurs ceased as everyone glanced up towards the scoreboard to check the speed.

"101mph!? Holy crap."

"This guy has a cannon for an arm..."

"What was his name again? Ken?"

Steve felt his hand sting from inside the glove. By now he was used to the feeling when catching Ken's pitches, but something felt a little different this time.

"Nice pitch."

He threw the ball back to Ken and thought deeply, trying to put a finger on why it felt different. Just to be sure, he called for another fastball, this time on the inside.

WHOOOSH

PAH!

Once again the ball rocketed into his glove, but this time Steve instantly knew what was different.

'I didn't even have to move my glove...' he thought, feeling an odd sense of wonder surge from within.

With Ken's fastballs, they often moved around a lot in the air thanks to the large amount of spin that he put on them. This meant that Steve had to track the ball in the air in order to make sure he could catch it properly.

By this point he'd already gotten a feel for the movements of Ken's pitches, but now, things felt different. It wasn't that the ball had stopped moving in the air, in fact it was quite the opposite.

Yet now instead of him needing to follow the pitch, he could just leave his glove in the same spot.

'Has he improved so much already?' Steve thought to himself.

He wasn't sure what he thought about this change right now, nor if it was just a fluke. While it was technically good, Steve couldn't help but feel like a big part of his usefulness was now null and void.

With Ken's ridiculous control, anyone could sit behind the plate and catch his pitches, provided they could deal with his speed. For some reason, this left him feeling a little bittersweet.

His gaze moved to Ken on the mound who was waiting patiently for the next lead. Steve let out a small sigh and called for a slider, placing his glove to the outside of the zone.

Ken was about to nod, but he suddenly felt weird. A bad premonition came over him as he envisioned his slider being knocked out of the park. He couldn't understand why, since it was almost like intuition.

The moment the word came into his mind, he instantly understood.

'This must be the Legendary Intuition skill I got...' He mused.



With this in mind, Ken shook his head. It was better to not test out the effects, especially since it was the very first at-bat of his first innings in his college career. He could already imagine the headlines now if he gave up a home run.

Steve frowned, his annoyance growing. Having his lead dismissed in addition to already feeling like he was useless had a multiplicative effect on him. He had thought that Ken trusted his judgment, but it seemed that it was not the case.

Without making a fuss, he called for a two-seam within the zone. .

WHOOOSH

PAH

As expected, the fastball sailed right into his glove, bringing with it another round of dissatisfaction within Steve.

"Strikeout!"

"Nice pitching Ken!"

Ken then proceeded to strike out the next two players with relative ease. With Ken's deadly duo of Intuition and Zone mastery, the batters couldn't even touch the seams of his pitches.

"3 outs, changeover."

Steve made his way back to the dugout, only for Ken to fall into step beside him. He ruffled the guys hair and spoke with happiness, "Nice catching."

Steve didn't respond, unstrapping his chest guard and speeding up slightly. Just as Ken was about to chase after him, he was stopped by the rest of the players who came to congratulate him on his pitching.

"Damn man, I didn't think you'd go 3 for 3 in your first inning." Kaden said, patting him on the back.

"I believed in him." Ayden stated matter-of-factly. Out of everyone present, he'd faced the most balls from Ken in the U18 World Cup, therefore he wasn't surprised when the guy blitzed through the opening batters with ease.

"Keep up the good work." Coach Brown said, flashing him a small smile.

"Thanks coach."

When he finally got past the influx of people, Ken tracked down Steve at the end of the dugout. The guy was sitting alone, staring at his catchers mitt, deep in thought.

Ken was taken aback a little, but he still took a seat beside his friend.

"What's up with you man? You seem off."

Steve didn't respond right away, paying attention to the webbing in his glove. Just as it seemed like his question was going to be ignored, the guy responded with a question of his own.

"Do you think I'm useless?"

The question itself was almost laughable, but Ken felt as if the guy was being serious. If he were to brush off the question, he felt like it would do far more harm than good.

As he looked at his friend, he realized the guy was self conscious.

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

## **Chapter 744 - 744: Dissatisfaction (2)**

If he'd seen Steve acting like this before the issue with Steph over Christmas, he might not have recognized his friend. .

"I don't think you're useless, not in the slightest." Ken responded confidently.

Steve turned his head and looked his friend dead in the eyes, "So why are you refusing my leads? First you take away my catching ability, then you start cherry picking my leads."

"Huh?" Ken was stumped. Just where had this come from?

"What do you mean I took away your catching ability?"

Steve's fist clenched, "Your pitches... I don't even need to move my glove anymore. I used to have to follow your moving fastballs and make an effort to catch them, but now I can just stay still and they'll find their way into my glove."

Ken frowned, "Isn't that a good thing? If a pitcher has no control, then he's essentially worthless. But you're complaining that I'm too accurate?"

Steve scoffed, "You wouldn't understand."

He was right, Ken couldn't understand where Steve was coming from. In fact, he was quite annoyed with the guy right now.

"Ken, head up on deck to warm up." The coach called from the top of the dugout, getting his attention.

"Coming!"

Ken briefly turned to his friend and spoke, "Let's talk about this later. For now, let's win this game."

Not waiting for a response, Ken grabbed his gear and made his way up the stairs and onto the field to warm up. The moment he swung his bat, the conversation was directly moved to the back of his mind.

This was another perk of the Dauntless trait which allowed him to compartmentalize and always perform at his peak.

He looked to the field and saw Ayden standing a few feet away from 1st base, ready to run. Tristan was in the batters box awaiting the next pitch.

When the pitch finally came, Tristan stuck out his bat with two hands and sent a perfectly weighted bunt towards 3rd base. Even before the bat hit the ball, Ayden had already sped towards 2nd.

This time there were no fielding mishaps as the ball was swiftly scooped up by the 3rd baseman and sent accurately across the infield to 1st.

"Out."

The ending was rather close, but Tristan still walked away with a satisfied grin on his face as he walked back to the dugout.

"Send him home." He stated, patting Ken on the arm on the way past.

"Say no more."

With that, Ken walked into the batters box and went through his pre-hit ritual before getting into position. The pitcher was different to yesterday, but Ken was familiar with him from the film they'd watched.

Unlike the big guy yesterday, this pitcher was rather skinny but was quite tall, coming in just a couple inches shorter than Ken. He had a killer curveball that generally left batters swinging at air.

However, Ken was filled with confidence.

'Time to see how this Zone Mastery effects my batting.' He thought.

As the pitcher wound up and sent out his ball, Ken instantly realized that he'd thrown a curveball. Although he didn't expect it on the first ball, that didn't mean he couldn't hit it.

WHOOOOSH

WHACK

Ken timed it well, smacking it just below the strike zone with some force. Due to the lower speed of the pitch, it was lacking the usual carry that he might have expected.

Still, the ball flew into the outfield, out of reach of the right fielder for an easy 2 bases. His hit allowed Ayden to stroll onto home plate, gaining the first run for the Bobcats.

"Nice hit Ken!"

The dugout went crazy, whooping and cheering for the first run of the game. They continued their streak of scoring in the first inning with the trio of Ayden, Tristan and Ken.

"Batting 4th for the Bobcats, Number 7, DJ Larson."

With DJ's appearance, Ken took a lead from 2nd base, his eyes locked onto the pitcher. While he didn't have a mission to steal bases, he was always looking to score runs. Since there was only 1 out, he had the freedom to do so.

At least, that was until he turned to look at 3rd base. He saw the 3rd base coach sending out signals to stay put, likely relaying the coach's orders.

Ken frowned. Why wouldn't he try and steal a base in this sort of situation, especially with DJ at the plate who had the best plate discipline out of the team.

He backed off a little, getting closer to the base. As long as he could put some pressure on the pitcher, he might not even have to steal a base to get the desired result.

However, just as the pitcher entered his wind up, Ken felt his intuition stir. It was hard to explain, but an overwhelming confidence surged into his veins and before he knew it, Ken was already running full pelt towards 3rd base.

Nothing else existed in his mind but him and the next base.

"Ball."

"THIRD!"

The catcher didn't need reminding as he shot up and shuffled his feet slightly, sending a rocket-like throw towards 3rd base.

Ken saw the 3rd base coach pale, but he quickly made the action for him to slide. Ken smoothly sailed in feet first, his cleats touching the bag before he was unceremoniously tagged in the stomach by the opponents glove.

"Safe!"

Keeping his foot on the bag, Ken got to his feet and quickly brushed himself off, sending a grin to the dugout nearby. Though his teammates seemed pleased with his run, the coach was wearing an unreadable expression.

'Whoops, I probably pissed him off.' Ken thought, though he didn't regret it. It was likely that Coach Brown didn't want him to risk any injury while running the bases, but the entire notion was preposterous to him.

What was the point in playing baseball if he was restricted?

Ken turned his attention to the next pitch, waiting to see what would happen.

WHOOOOSH

WHACK!

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

## **Chapter 745 - 745: Unsportsmanlike (1)**

WHACK!

DJ got a hold of the ball, but it popped high into the air into right field.

Ken kept his foot on the bag, and got into position, ready to tag up once the ball was caught. He turned his attention to home plate, waiting for the call from the 3rd base coach on when to run.

"Go!"

However, Ken didn't go right away. Something didn't feel right. From his calculations, the ball shouldn't have entered the fielder's glove just yet. If he advanced a base before the catch, he could easily be tagged out at 3rd.

"W—Wait... Go now!"

Ken took off, bounding towards home plate with great speed. With his improved agility, his acceleration was impressive.

The throw came from right field, a one-hopper. But by the time it reached the catcher, Ken had already stepped onto home plate to complete the run.

The expected cheer did not come, causing Ken to turn around in question. It was then that he saw a commotion between the 3rd base coach and the 3rd baseman for Stetson University.

'What's going on?'

Without waiting for clarification, Ken ran back towards 3rd base and was the first to arrive, holding back the 3rd base coach. Due to their size difference, he was able to hold him back.

"You're a piece of sh—"

"Whoa now, let's calm down." Ken intervened, still unsure of what the issue was.

The plate umpire wasn't far behind Ken and put his body between the two. "What's going on?"

"This douchebag tried to trick our guy into running early. Dirty bastard." The 3rd base coach spat, still fiery.

At this explanation, Ken finally understood why he had heard two calls. Even without his intuition skill, he would have felt that the timing was off from the initial call, but this left a sour taste in his mouth.

He wasn't sure about the rulings, but it seemed rather unsportsmanlike to do such a thing.

The umpire was silent for a moment before pointing towards the 3rd baseman and announcing in a loud voice. "This is a warning for unsportsmanlike conduct. Anything else will result in an ejection."

"The runner advances, number 13 is safe."

With that, he made his way back towards home plate. The situation seemed to deescalate after the warning was given, allowing Ken the freedom to leave the 3rd base coach to his own devices.

He let out a sigh of relief and headed back to the dugout, only to be stopped by the coach.

"Nice running out there. Looks like I underestimated your speed." Coach Brown said, surprising Ken. He had expected a reprimand for going against his orders, but it seemed like results were everything to this coach.

"When I get on base, I always look to score." Ken grinned before walking into the dugout.

The coach was silent, but he felt the corner of his lips turn up in amusement. This was why he liked Ken, everything he did was to win the game, though it came with its own dangers.

Most pitchers would treasure their arms, choosing not to do anything that could possibly cause strain or discomfort. But Ken threw himself into both training and games with 100% effort.

It was as if he wasn't afraid of getting injured.

This was both a headache and a breath of fresh air for Coach Brown who had experienced quite a few pampered pitchers in his career. Though this was his first year as a Head Coach, he had needed to deal with these kinds of people many times before.

After all the drama, the Bobcats were up 2-0 on the scoreboard in the first inning. This seemed to be the trend for the new Columbia squad under Coach Brown.

However, the real test would begin with the next inning against the two clean-up hitters.

After Zeke got out with a grounder to the short stop, the Bobcats took the field once more to defend.

Ken was going to have a chat with Steve before the changeover, but everything happened so quick. The guy had been weird with him so he was a little worried they might not be on the same page.

However, there was no time to patch things up right now.

As Ken took his place on the mound, his eyes moved to the next batter coming up to the plate. Just from his body's size and shape, it was obvious that he had power.

"Batting 4th for the Cappers, Number Twoooo, Devonte Miller!"

The announcer embellished the call, eliciting a positive reaction from the crowd. It was the norm for the home team to get special treatment when it came to things like this, but Ken wasn't worried.

If he was honest, such things never bothered him.

Upon seeing the guy was ready, Ken looked at Steve who called for an inside fastball. He nodded and entered his wind up, striding forward with power.

The dirt kicked up as his lead leg planted, before his arm whipped past his head, throwing a blazing fastball right towards Steve's open glove.

PAH

"Strike."

Devonte didn't even swing, but Ken could see that the guy's eyes had followed the pitch carefully, as if he was trying to get used to its course.

The next ball was another fastball, this time a two-seam. The movement of the ball was crisp, showing that Ken was in good form.

Once again, Devonte bid his time and didn't swing, leading to a 0-2 count.

Steve called for a slider this time, outside of the zone. It was a good tactic, but Ken didn't think it would work, not against someone with as much plate discipline as Devonte.

However, he didn't shake his head and accepted the lead. They were up in the count, so there was no issue wasting a few pitches in order to secure the out.

Ken's slider snaked through the air, spinning wildly. It broke late, making it almost impossible for a batter to know what kind of pitch it was.

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

## **Chapter 746 - 746: Unsportsmanlike (2)**

PAH

"Ball."



For the 3rd time in a row, Devonte didn't swing, allowing it into the catchers glove. Yet every time, he had been watching carefully, biding his time.

With the count 1-2, they were still in a good position. This time Steve called for a fastball on the top of the strike zone, holding his glove ready.

Ken felt a bad premonition in that moment, so he quickly shook his head. However, instead of calling for another ball, Steve kept his glove in the same spot, stubbornly refusing to yield.

Ken frowned. This wasn't like Steve, not at all.

Annoyed, Ken was inclined to call a timeout and get to the bottom of it, but he soon calmed down, letting out a sigh. It was clear that he would get nowhere right now.

'I guess I can use this as a test to see what happens if I go against my intuition skill.' He thought, nodding his head. At worst case, he would be thumped over the fence.

Ken sent his fastball directly for the glove, his eyes watching its course carefully. It flew through the air, moving as if it was alive.

Devonte's powerful figure sprung into action at last, pouncing upon the high ball.

WHOOOOSH

THWACKK!

The sound of the baseball being struck couldn't have sounded more clean. It was a perfect hit and left the bat at a great angle. Ken's gaze followed the ball in the air as it flew over the fence with ease.

'That had to be almost 400 feet...' Ken thought glumly. 'I guess that's what happens when I ignore my intuition.'

Throughout this life, he had not conceded many home runs, even less while he had his system. To be struck for a homer in his first game pitching in College stung a little, but it seemed like a necessary evil.

Ken turned his gaze back to Steve whose mouth was agape. Even from his position on the mound, he could see that the guy was remorseful.

What made things worse was that Devonte had flipped the bat, beating his chest in triumph as if to provoke Ken on the mound.

"This is my house rookie!" He shouted, his eyes locked onto Ken as he rounded the bases.

Ken let out a hollow chuckle, shaking his head. Even though the guy had hit a home run, his team was still down on the scoreboard. If the guys team still lost after this, Devonte would only look like an idiot.

A few of his teammates didn't take kindly to the excessive celebration. Kaden spoke a few colorful words to the guy on his way past, but things didn't escalate from there.

By the time he'd returned back to home plate, things settled down, at least on the field. The crowd was still cheering loudly, lauding the massive hit from the clean-up batter.

Ken was about to call timeout and have a chat to Steve, but he saw the coach walking onto the field to address the umpire and paled.

'No way... Is he taking me off after that?'

"Timeout please."

The coach walked over to the mound, beckoning Steve to come up with him. Ken was a little perplexed, but he waited until the two arrived.

"I thought you guys had been a battery before?" Coach Brown asked, though it was obviously rhetorical.

Steve lowered his gaze, obviously feeling guilty.

"Sorry coach, that ball wasn't my best." Ken said, "I won't let it happen again."

At this, Steve's eyes widened, not expecting Ken to take the blame. He looked at his friend and only felt shame.

Coach Brown looked between Ken and Steve, knowing there was something that he wasn't being told. However, he shook his head in the next moment before replying, "Just make sure you two are on the same page."

With that, he left the mound and returned towards the dugout. The coach seemed to have a 6th sense which allowed him a lot of insight in matters such as these.

Steve lingered for a moment, "I—I'm sorry man, you didn't have to—"

"Don't worry about it. If you want to win then we need to work together alright? Keep your head in the game, we can chat about this later."

Ken made a shooing motion to Steve, telling him to get back to his mark. Steve let out a small chuckle and did as he was told. He knew that Ken had taken the blame for him, likely because the coach would be more lenient on him.

This made him feel warm inside, allowing him to see his earlier mistake. He had been rather selfish after feeling that Ken no longer needed him. This paired with the guy waving off his leads had led to him making a stupid decision.

They both needed to trust each other, especially if Steve wanted to become the starting catcher at some point.

With his head now screwed on, Steve was ready to rumble.

"Batting 5th, numberrrr 7, Jose Chavez!"

With the earlier home run, the crowd was much more animated as Jose came up to bat. Unlike yesterday when they were behind by a large margin for most of the game, there was only a 1 run differential right now.

The guy stood in the batters box and got into position. His shoulders weren't as wide as Devonte's, but it was clear at a glance that the guy was a power hitter.

Instead of being skittish, Steve called for a fastball on the inside for the very first ball. Ken nodded and took up his stance.

WHOOOOSH

CLICK

The ball popped into the air above home plate, spinning crazily in the air. Steve flipped off his mask and followed the ball, his eyes never leaving it. Even with the barrier approaching, Steve committed and was able to get under it.

Pah

"Out!"

"Nice catch!"

"Hehe~" Steve's mischievous smile returned as he sent a glance to Ken on the mound. It seemed like the two had returned to normal.

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

## Chapter 747 - 747: Leverage (1)

Coach Brown whistled a small tune as he walked into his office on Monday morning.

"Morning Felicity" He said, wearing a brilliant grin.

"M—Morning Coach. You're in an awfully good mood today." She replied, feeling a little odd.

"Really? How could you tell?" He asked playfully, taking his seat behind his desk. Usually he was rather serious around the office, but it was quite hard to keep up appearances, especially after the team had so much success over the weekend.

Instead of answering, Felicity continued her cleaning of his office before promptly leaving. Coach Brown didn't seem to mind as he opened up his laptop and jovially checked the sports headlines.

"Columbia Bobcats sweep the Stetson Cappers in 3 straight games to begin their season strong."

The body of the article showcased Ken's broken bat home run in the first game as well as their great defense throughout the series. This only improved the coach's mood further.

Coach Brown opened up his emails and could see a few, including one from the Columbia board of trustees. His expression faltered briefly, but upon reading it, a wide grin appeared.

"Looks like those guys understand." He muttered with glee.

Knock Knock

"Hmm?"

"You asked for me coach?"

Coach Brown looked up to see Ken standing at his doorway. In his jovial mood he had forgotten that he indeed had asked him to see him in his office.

"Ken my boy, take a seat." He said with glee.

Ken felt a little weird, but he still did as he was told. The coach was rather chipper, so it didn't look like he was in trouble or anything. It turned out that he'd been dreading the meeting for nothing.

"How would you rate your performance in your opening games?"

'Eh? What kind of a question is that?' he thought.

"I think it was solid for my first games of college. Of course I've still got a lot to learn, so I'll be in your care." Ken responded carefully. He didn't want to seem too arrogant or too humble.

"Heh." Coach Brown grinned. "I'd say you had a stellar showing to start the season. Besides that home run, you only gave up 2 more hits in the 7 innings you pitched. I think that deserves some praise."

Ken nodded, not sure where the coach was going with all of this. He wasn't some kid who needed constant reassurance that he was playing well since he was a typically confident guy.

Seeing that Ken wasn't acting overly enthusiastic, the coach cleared his throat. "Well it's not just me who thinks you're doing well. We've been approached by a couple of magazines that want to interview you. Would you be interested?"

Ken raised his eyebrow. He wasn't expecting to get media attention this early into the season, especially since he'd only pitched in a single game.

"I don't see the harm in accepting." Ken replied, "What are the magazines?"

"Baseball America and a local one. You could probably skip the local magazine for now." Coach Brown stated. He didn't want his players focusing too much on media, especially since Ken was just a freshman.

Not only did players have to balance their athletics, they also needed to stay on top of their academics. Adding things like media on top of their already large schedule would be too much.

"Okay, I'll do that then."

"Excellent!" Coach Brown clapped his hands together, happy to get it out of the way. "Ah, by the way... The school board have asked for a favor..."

At this point, the coach seemed rather uncomfortable, causing Ken to feel wary.

"What is it?"

"Well you see..."

A few minutes later, Ken left with a perplexed expression. Out of all the things he'd thought might happen in the meeting, this was not what he expected.

It turned out that the school was rather aware of Ken's social media presence and wanted to capitalize on it. They were offering more budget to the baseball program as a leverage for some favor from Ken.

Apparently his following was more than 20 times that of the Columbia baseball page, something that he never would have expected.

But Ken knew better than to agree to any terms right away, especially since he held the power in this negotiation. Which was why he said that he needed to talk to his Social Media Manager first before agreeing.

After telling Coach Brown he had a media manager, the guy frowned. It wasn't until he explained that it was an unofficial title and that the girl was another student at Columbia that the coach relaxed.

He had almost forgotten the rules were rather strict before the NIL deal was introduced.

Like this, Ken returned to his dorm room only to see Steve still sleeping. He had decided to give the guy a day off since they had just come back from Florida and he had a meeting with the coach this morning.

Leaving the room, he went back out to the hallway and knocked on Tara's door.

The girl opened the door after a while, her hair all messed up as if she'd just been asleep.

"Hey, have you got some time this morning before classes?" Ken asked.

Tara didn't respond right away. She rubbed her eyes a few times before staring at him, for a little bit.

"Oh shi—"

SLAM

Ken's nose was only inches away from being smashed by the door which had flown shut in front of his face.

"S—Sorry I'll be out in a sec!" Tara responded, seeming flustered.

Ken scratched his head, feeling at a loss. This situation had reminded him of the time where he'd surprised Ai back in Japan. She had been wearing a green face mask back then and had also slammed the door in his face.

The memory caused Ken to let out a chuckle, his eyes dancing in amusement.

'Maybe I should call in advance whenever visiting a woman.' He mused inwardly.

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

## Chapter 748 - 748: Leverage (2)

A few minutes later, Tara appeared with her blond hair now brushed and tied up in a ponytail behind her head. It seemed she hadn't had enough time to put on makeup, but to Ken, she still looked rather pretty.

"Ahem. Let's go get some breakfast then." Tara announced, her bag slung around her shoulder.

The two then proceeded to the cafeteria. The woman was yawning a few times on the way, making Ken realize that he had probably woken her up from her sleep.

"Sorry for waking you, were you up late studying last night?"

Tara scoffed, "Not everyone is addicted to studying like you."

"Hmm?" Ken raised an eyebrow. He didn't remember mentioning to Tara that he studied every night, so how did she know?

Tara covered her mouth, realizing that she messed up. "Um, I mean cos you know... You're from Japan."

However, now her words just sounded racist, leaving her feeling even worse. "I—Argh damn it... Steve complained to me that you make him study every night." She admitted, choosing the lesser of two evils.

"Oho? Do you two chat a lot then?" Ken asked, his features turning frosty.

Tara shuddered. Even though they had not signed a contract or anything, this man was her boss. With the amount of fame and attention he was garnering online and his abilities, it was basically guaranteed that he would enter the Majors after college.

If she messed up and caused him to become estranged, she would regret it.

"W—We talk a bit. But it's completely professional."

"Yeah... Sure it is." Ken shook his head, feeling exasperated. From how both Steve and Tara were acting, it was clear that there was something going on behind the scenes that he didn't know about.

Just over the weekend Ken had caught Steve muttering in his sleep about Tara, several times at that. This in addition to how she was acting right now caused his intuition to tingle.

When they finally sat down at the table, Ken decided to address it head on.

"Look, you and Steve are adults. What you do outside of class is none of my concern. Of course this changes if it begins to effect our professional relationship." Ken stated seriously.

"The last thing I want is to lose such a capable manager because of something like this."

Tara's expression faltered as a look of guilt and other emotions flashed across her face. However, she smiled softly, "It's okay, this is my dream job. I'll do whatever it takes to keep things professional."

Ken wasn't expecting such a response, but the result was the same.

"Right, the coach approached me about something. I wanted your opinion."

Ken then explained everything, sparing no details.

"Absolutely not!" Tara stated, just about crossing her arms like a stubborn toddler.

"Hmm? Can you tell me why?" Ken asked, genuinely curious.

"Well first off, they want to use you for advertising. Not only do they not allow you to receive any brand deals or market products, but they want to take advantage of this loophole and not give you anything in return. Basically, you'll be used as a tool."

Tara seemed quite passionate about this, leading Ken to have his doubts on the school board's motives. From what the coach had said, Ken didn't mind doing them a favor, but he didn't realize it was as deep as this.

"But they said they would put more funding into the baseball program." Ken retorted.

Tara scoffed, "They have the number 1 high school recruit, of course they would want to allocate more resources and grow their baseball program. Even if you didn't do anything, they would capitalize on your name to draw more prospects. This means they'd need to increase the budget."



Ken frowned deeply, his mind returning to this morning in the coach's office. From the coach's expression, Ken felt that the guy was being sincere, so he likely wasn't involved in the scam, or at least didn't understand the full extent.

"You need to understand that we're building a brand here. While you might not be able to profit from it in college, once you enter the MLB, your brand will be your 2nd meal ticket." She stated.

Ken's mouth twitched. Of course he knew that the NIL deal would be coming in July of next year, but he couldn't say anything.

Tara's words made a lot of sense. He hadn't realized his own value in the eyes of the school, especially since just his name would bring both spectators and potential recruits in the future.

It seemed that they wanted to leverage his name and fanbase, using him as a tool, just like Tara said.

"So what, do I just refuse to help them? Won't they retaliate somehow?" Ken asked, feeling a little trepidation. The last thing he needed was to start drama with his new college.

Tara shook her head, "We'll give them some terms. Is there anything that you want? Remember you have all the leverage here. Not only does your fanbase dwarf theirs, you're also someone they don't want to lose by any means."

Ken thought for a few moments before a smile crept onto his face. "There is one thing..."

Things moved fast and in only a few days, their demands were met.

As the Bobcats team sat down for their usual film session ahead of their next road game series, Coach Brown addressed the players.

"Alright, we've got 4 games in North Carolina against Davidson this weekend. We'll be going over some of their games from last week in this session, so I need you all to pay attention if we want to continue our hot start." He said, wearing a serious expression.

"But, before that I have an announcement to make."

Hearing this, the players looked at each other with confusion. It seemed that not even Tristan the captain knew anything about this so-called announcement.

Ken on the other hand was wearing a grin, his eyes twinkling with amusement.

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

## Chapter 749 - 749: Lie Exposed (1)

"Stephen Adams, you've been award a full ride scholarship."

Steve's eyes widened in shock after hearing the news, looking left and right as if the coach was speaking about someone else. He didn't have long to think as the entire team broke out into cheers.

They piled onto him, showering him with congratulations.

Ken smile genuinely, watching his friend's reaction. He had been working hard this whole time, and no one deserved it more than Steve.

While his family had come into some money thanks to their inheritance, the money would have only lasted another semester before Steve would have needed to find other arrangements.

With this, he wouldn't have to stress about finding work or going into tremendous debt in order to pay off his tuition fees.

When things had finally settled down, the two friend's locked eyes. Steve could tell that Ken had a hand in this, though he had no evidence to back up these claims.

"Thanks man."

"Why are you thanking me? You earned it." Ken replied.

Steve shook his head. The coach had already said they didn't have the budget for any more scholarships this year, which meant something had to have happened. However, he didn't break the illusion and just smiled, deciding to be happy instead.

"Alright, great job Steve. Let's get back to the session." Coach Brown stated, bringing up the projector.

...

A few weeks later, the weather had finally started to warm up in New York. Columbia were due to host their first home game at Robertson Field at Satow Stadium on Wednesday night.

For Ken who didn't enjoy traveling, having a stretch of home games was a dream scenario for him. Not only would he be able to stay in the comfort of his own bed, Ai would also be able to watch him live.

The Bobcats were off to a great start to the season, their best in recent memory. Out of 15 games, they had only lost 2, placing them 6th overall in Division 1 baseball.

While the season was still young, the buzz surrounding the new Bobcats team was something that Columbia baseball had never seen before. This, in addition to Tara's media campaign resulted in a lot of attention.

Of course this would only continue as long as the team kept winning, which seemed like it would be the case.

On the day of the first home game, training was adjusted to a light workout and fundamentals before a film session. Coincidentally, today's game would be the first conference game against University of Pennsylvania.

Games within their conference were far more impactful, or at least that's what Ken had understood based on the Coach's enthusiasm.

The guy was like an entirely different person as he passionately went through the film session with the team. Ken could almost feel the hate in his voice as he spoke about the other coach's tactics.

"This game is a must-win guys, I need you at your peak performance today. Ethan, you'll be sitting out this game. Ken, we're counting on you for the first 7 innings."

"Yes sir!"

A few chuckles rang out after Ken shouted his catchphrase, lightening the mood a little. Ken's standing within the team had skyrocketed ever since the season had started, cementing him as one of their pillars.

Not only was he one of the best pitchers on the team, he was also deadly in the batters box. This made him a dependable teammate.

The team were given an hour to get some food and get ready before meeting to catch the shuttle to Satow Stadium. Since it was the first home game, there was an evident excitement within the team.

"Is Ai coming tonight?" Steve asked as the two made their way back to the dorms. Search\* The \* website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

"Of course. I bought a ticket earlier in the week." Ken replied matter-of-factly.

"Eh? You didn't get a ticket from the coach?"

"What?"

Steve shook his head, "The coach was handing out tickets for the reserved section, real good seats." He took out two tickets, showing Ken.

Ken frowned. He was a known miser who liked to keep a tight lock on his money, however he definitely would have paid double for Ai to see him play.

But upon seeing that there were even better seats, for free, Ken's annoyance grew.

Before Steve could blink, Ken's hand flashed out, plucking the tickets from his hand in a single move. With the tickets now in his possession, he smiled, "Thanks man."

"O—Oi! Give me at least one back." Steve cried.

But Ken just extended his arm upwards and out of Steve's reach. With his height, it was like picking on a child after stealing their candy.

"I need these for Ai and Tara, who would you even invite?"

Steve froze, his expression changing slightly. "Ahem... Okay you can have them. You owe me one though." He said, changing his tune.

Ken stared blankly at his friend for a few moments, the cogs turning slowly in his head.

"You were going to invite Tara?"

"Eh? No way... Why would I invite our Social Media manager?" But as soon as he said that, he realized his mistake. He should have steered into the accusation, saying that he was wanting some good content for his social media.

"I knew it!" Ken exclaimed.

He had been thinking that there was something weird between the two for a while now, but this all but confirmed it.

However, his expression soon turned sour as he remembered the conversation he'd had with Tara a few weeks ago. He had queried her on their relationship, stating his fears that it would mess with their professional relationship.

He had basically forced her to decide between the two.

Steve looked guilty, but he opened up a little. "She's been a little stand-offish lately, so I thought I'd invite her to the game. The second ticket was for Kate, just so she would have someone to talk to while they watched the game."

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

## Chapter 750 - 750: Lie Exposed (2)

Ken raised his eyebrow, "You were going to invite Kate? A woman you slept with, to sit alongside the woman you fancy?" He asked, feeling gobsmacked. This was a disaster waiting to happen.

Steve froze, his guilty expression thickening.

"Look man, I was going to tell you... That night, I didn't really sleep with Kate." He admitted.

"Excuse me?"

Looking a little uncomfortable, but at the same time filled with remorse, Steve began his explanation.

"That night I struck out time after time when hitting on girls at the party, even though Tara was a great wingman. I would say jokes, but only she would find them funny." He said, letting out a sigh.

Ken held his tongue, allowing his friend the time to speak. In reality, he didn't know how to feel after finding out that he was lied to, so he just listened silently.

"By the time I'd talked to 5 or so girls, I lost interest. Tara and I went outside and we began to talk, for hours. Eventually the party ended and we walked back to the dorm, but we still felt like talking for longer."

Steve continued, "You were fast asleep and Kate was at another party, so we went to her room and continued to chat. One thing led to another and well..." his voice trailed off.

"So when I saw you in the morning, you lied to my face?" Ken asked, his expression unreadable.

Steve's face paled slightly, but he still nodded. "I knew that you'd be mad, so I made up the most plausible excuse I could think of. I'm sorry."

For a moment, Ken felt betrayed. Steve was the closest person outside of his family and girlfriend. He even called him his brother, comforting him after what happened with Steph.

Ken continued his walk silently towards the dorms, his mind preoccupied. He didn't accept Steve's apology and left him standing on the spot.

Steve reached out for a brief moment as if he was going to call out something, but his hand lowered slowly and he remained silent, lowering his gaze. He could tell that Ken was hurt, likely more about the lie than the actual act itself.

But there was nothing that he could do now. Nothing would fix his mistake.

Ken arrived at the dorm by himself and stood outside of the door.

Knock Knock

A few moments later, a familiar face appeared.

"Oh, if it isn't the hot roommate. What can I do for you sir?" Kate said, leaning against the door frame and pushing out her chest slightly.

"I need to speak to Tara." He said flatly.

"Tch." Kate clicked her tongue in annoyance and turned, "Tara. Your boss wants to speak to you."

Tara poked her head from the other side of the door with a smile, however upon seeing Ken's expression, it faltered slightly.

'Oh crap.'

"What can I do for you Ken?" She asked, trying to hide the guilt from her tone.

"We need to talk."

"Sure thing, let me grab my laptop—"

"You won't need it." Ken said, turning on his heel and walking away.

"Ah..." Tara looked anxious, but she put on her shoes quickly and followed behind him.

The two arrived at the cafeteria where Ken got some food and loaded up his plate. He found a seat away from prying eyes and ears and said a quick prayer before tucking into his food.

Tara sat opposite him, her anxiety evident. She wanted to ask what was wrong, but there wasn't an opening during Ken's feasting. Thus she was forced to wait nervously until he was done.

'Did he find out what happened? Is he going to fire me?' she thought frantically.

After Ken finished his meal, he moved the plate aside and looked at the capable woman in front of him.

"3 weeks ago we sat in this cafeteria and talked about something. Can you remember the contents of the conversation?" Ken asked calmly.

Tara nodded, "We spoke about the University's request."

"And?"

A flicker of understanding flashed across Tara's eyes. She now knew why Ken had wanted to speak to her, but she felt a sinking feeling in her heart.

"And... My and Steve's relationship."

"Yes." Ken nodded, "So why did you lie to me? If I remember correctly, you said that it was strictly professional between you two."

Tara felt her face flush red with both embarrassment and guilt. She wanted to shout that it was none of his business, but that would be a lie. He had already been very accommodating, even suggesting that he was willing to look the other way unless it affected their business.

Yet she had indeed lied. What had been a single night of passion and vulnerability became a source of shame for her. The worst part was that she didn't feel guilty about the act itself, just what had come afterwards.

"I—I didn't want it to affect our working relationship." She admitted.

Ken shook his head, his disappointment evident. "Both you and Steve broke my trust. It is a painful pill to swallow, but I could have probably overlooked it. After all, I see the way he looks at you."

"I'm not so cold-hearted that I would deny my best friend's feelings just because things could become a little uncomfortable in the future."

Tara's eyes widened in shock, almost not believing what she was hearing. Her heart ached slightly as hope dawned on the horizon. But she didn't want to believe it, not yet.

"This is me drawing a line in the sand." Ken said, his expression serious. "If you have no feelings for Steve, I need you to make it known to him. He is a good guy and I don't want him constantly strung along or kept at arms length."

"But if you really have feelings for him... Let's cut all this cat and mouse crap."

Tara's head was lowered at first, but she raised her gaze, her eyes meeting Ken's as they filled with resolution.

"I'll speak with him."

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

## **Chapter 751 - 751: Trance (1)**

Steve returned to the dorm room only to see that Ken was not present. With a bitter smile, he took off his shoes and laid down on his bed, staring at the ceiling.

"I messed up..." He muttered in a helpless tone.

He hadn't seen Ken like this before which honestly scared him a little. While they had been friends for over 2 years, the guy had become irreplaceable in his life.

But his heart ached. Tara was someone that he truly enjoyed being around, though things had become strained as of late. She had stopped laughing at his jokes, even making excuses to cut their meetings short.

Steve wasn't dumb. It was clear that she was trying to create some distance between the two, in order to be professional.

"If I knew that, I wouldn't have let myself fall in the first place." Steve reached out his hand, clasp at air, a bitter taste in his mouth.

Knock Knock

After some time, a knock sounded at the door.

"That's odd..." Steve remarked. If it was Ken returning from eating, he would have just entered the room.



Rolling out of bed, Steve went to the front door and opened it, only to see the girl he'd just been thinking about. His eye's widened in both surprise and happiness, but he quickly remembered their circumstances.

With a listless expression, he spoke up, "Ken isn't here. He's probably in the cafeteria."

Before she could respond, he tried to close the door.

Tara placed her arm on the door and prevented him from closing it, her expression filled with something that Steve didn't recognize.

"I'm here for you, silly."

She moved into the room and threw her arms around Steve's neck and began to kiss him deeply. The shock was so much that Steve almost tripped over himself.

The door was shut with her foot as the two made out passionately for a few moments.

Coming up for breath, Steve didn't know what was going on. "You're sending me a lot of mixed signals..."

Tara giggled, finding the commentary amusing. "How's this for a signal?"

Steve felt a hand grab him, causing his whole body to tingle.

"I'm reading you loud and clear." He stated, bending down to kiss her again.

The two stumbled over the mess laying around in the room and found themselves onto Steve's bed. It was there that they exchanged feelings, coming to an understanding without words.

...

Ken walked past the room door and could hear all sorts of noises coming from within. A small smile touched his lips until he remembered that they had to be at the bus shuttle in less than 30 minutes.

"He shouldn't take long..." Ken muttered.

However, he still needed to shower. Letting out a small sigh, he knocked gently on Kate and Tara's door, only to be greeted by Kate once again.

"Oh? Back for me this time?" She asked, batting her eyelids.

"I need to use the shower... My room is currently preoccupied."

Instead of making it difficult for him, Kate let out a small chuckle and opened the door. "Be my guest."

Thankfully he was able to get to the bathroom and shower, but this left another issue. He didn't have any clean clothes with him, so he would need to get into his own dorm room.

Poised against the bathroom door, Ken listened carefully. After not hearing anything, he let out a sigh of relief and opened the door, wearing only his towel.

The first thing he saw was Steve and Tara laying on the bed, with Tara's naked leg wrapped around the former's body.

"Have you come to join us boss?" Tara asked, amusement in her tone.

Ken's expression faltered before he completely ignored her. Tara might be without shame, but he certainly was not.

"Our shuttle leaves in 20 minutes, you better hurry up and get ready." Ken said to Steve who was currently on cloud 9.

"Oh crap, the game!" Steve sat up, almost flinging Tara off the single bed in his panic. Thankfully she gripped onto him tightly, though the tanned skin of her body was suddenly exposed.

Steve jumped off the bed and flew into the bathroom, leaving both Ken and Tara alone in the room. One was wearing just a towel, while the other was covering herself with the sheets.

"You moved pretty fast." Ken stated incredulously.

Tara laughed, "The early bird gets the worm." She said with a grin.

"But the second mouse get's the cheese."

"What?"

"That's the next part of the saying..."

Tara tilted her head in thought, "Really? I didn't know there was another part..."

"Anyway, you should probably get ready too. I've got a ticket for you. You'll be sitting next to my girlfriend." Ken said, fishing the ticket out of his pants pocket in his hands.

He was going to give it to her, but realized that she would have nowhere to put it. So he just awkwardly held onto it for a moment before placing it on the desk nearby.

"I'm going to turn around now, would you mind..."

Tara got the hint and waited till he turned before getting out of bed.

"Thanks boss." She whispered.

Ken felt the warm breath of the woman on his back, causing him to shiver.

Thankfully she left shortly after, allowing Ken to breathe a sigh of relief. It had been quite an awkward moment for him, but he was glad that the two were able to talk things through.

"I guess they didn't do too much talking..." Ken muttered, turning his attention to the messed up bed.

Shaking his head, Ken quickly got ready and grabbed his things, waiting for Steve to finish in the shower. The guy was quick enough that they just had enough time to make it if they jogged.

"You ready?"

Steve didn't reply right away as he clutched his bag and stared at the floor for a few moments. He lifted his head and sent Ken a genuine smile, "Thank you man..."

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

## **- Chapter 752 - 752: Trance (2)**

### **Chapter 752 - 752: Trance (2)**

A little later in the evening, Ai arrived at Satow Stadium. Ken had told her that she needed to go to the ticket booth in order to claim the reserved seat since he hadn't been able to hand it over in person.

The line wasn't too busy and she was able to secure the ticket.

After passing through security, Ai made her way into the designated seating and saw an attractive woman with her long blond hair tied up in a bun right next to her seat.

Ai sat down and turned her attention to the field. They were good seats and she could see the two teams going through their warm-up drills below.

"Hi there."

Ai turned to see the woman smiling at her. For a moment she didn't know how to respond, but she eventually replied, "H—Hello."

Her English was still not the best, but it had been getting better. The hardest part was when someone spoke too fast, or if they had an accent that she didn't recognize.

"You must be Ai."

"Eh? You know me?"

The woman giggled, holding out her hand. "I'm Tara, Ken's Social Media Manager." She said, her eyes filled with amusement.

Hearing this, Ai didn't take the hand right away. Her eye's scanned Tara, looking her up and down as if to evaluate her from the perspective of a woman.

Just when Tara was about to take back her hand, Ai grabbed it. "Nice to meet you Tara."

Though she wore a smile, it didn't reach her eyes. It was clear that Ai was wary of this woman, especially now that she saw just how pretty she was.

It wasn't that Ai didn't trust Ken, but that all women regardless of their man's loyalty would feel somewhat threatened when met with another pretty woman who spent a lot of time with their partner.

Tara could feel the tension, but it wasn't unexpected. She leaned forward and whispered, "I'm also Steve's... girlfriend."

The words felt a little foreign, but surprisingly they made her happy.

"Oh..." Ai's expression changed, a sense of camaraderie blooming. Her smile widened, this time genuine. "You must have your hands full then."

"Hah, you can say that again." Tara replied, letting out a giggle. There was a flash of something dirty in her eyes for a moment, as if she meant something else by the statement.

However Ai was not yet proficient enough with English to understand the double meaning.

The two continued to get acquainted with each other now that the ice had been broken. Ai was also happy that there was someone else she could practice her English with.

On the field, Ken cast his gaze into the crowd as if looking for someone in particular. Once his eyes fell upon Ai and Tara in the stands, he breathed a sigh of relief. He had been worried Ai would be stuck outside of the stadium.

Around 30 minutes later, all the ceremonies were over and done with and Ken took the field alongside his teammates. The announcer called out their names, his deep voice rattling through the speakers.

Ken had to admit that hearing his name said with enthusiasm was a nice change compared to the away games over the past few weeks. The crowd being in their favor was also a boon, filling him with some confidence.

There was also the fact that Ai was here to watch him perform live for the very first time.

Ken's eyes shined as he looked ahead towards the first batter from the University of Pennsylvania. However, his eyes were focused on the strike zone. He could almost see a translucent box hovering in the air, as if he knew exactly where to pitch.

Ken felt an unexplainable sensation run through his body, something that he hadn't experienced before. It was a kind of supreme confidence that left him unshakable, almost as if the result of the match was inevitable.

Part of him was intrigued, but he didn't want to break his immersion.

WHOOOSH

PAH

"There it is! 100mph fastball!" The announcer chirped, eliciting a cheer from the crowd.

PAH

PAH!

"3 up, 3 down! Ken sends the Earthquaker's lead off batter's back to the dugout!"

For the next 80 minutes, Ken was in a trance. The cheers of the crowd felt like rain pattering on his back and his teammates words were muted. The only thing he could see was Steve's glove hovering within the strike zone.

He was so engrossed in the game that Ken didn't even notice that it was the 9th inning already. Usually he would have been taken out in the 7th, but things felt different tonight.

Ken leapt forward, sending a nasty curveball right at the plate. It seemingly stalled in mid air before dropping into Steve's glove as the swing of the bat sailed over it.

"Strikeout!"

Catching the ball thrown his way, Ken returned to his spot on the mound before picking up the rosin bag and rolling it around in his hand. He glanced to where Ai and Tara were sitting, seeing that they were at the edge of their seats.

'Why do they look so nervous?' Ken thought briefly.

If it was any other time he might have explored this thought, but right now he was in the zone. He didn't know how long until the game would finish, but as long as batters kept coming up to the plate, he would strike them out.

He turned to home plate once more and let out a breath. He lunged forward, sending a roaring fastball towards the top of the strike zone.

WHOOOOSH

CLICK

The bat struck the ball from underneath, sending it high into the air. The arena seemed to hold its breath as they watched it float down towards the mound.

Ken held out his glove, not having to move an inch as it found its way back home. There was a few moments silence before the crowd erupted into a crazy fervor.

He was about to step back into position to face the next batter but before he knew it, Steve had arrived in front of him, grabbing him by the waist and lifting his body.

'Huh? Is the game over?'

\*DING\*

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

## **Chapter 753 - 753: Dinner Date (1)**

"Bro you did it!" Steve cried in elation.

Before Ken had a chance to ask what the guy was talking about, the rest of his teammates flooded him. He felt hands slap every part of his body and his head got ruffled so many times that his hat fell off.

A rising sense of annoyance was creeping up within him, but this dissipated when he saw the Coach run onto the field with glee. He had never seen Coach Brown so pleased before. search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

It wasn't just him, even the assistant coach's and bench players took the field, joining in on the celebration.

'Damn, do they get this excited for every home game win?' Ken thought. But he decided to go with the flow, finally giving a smile.

He turned to Ai in the crowd, only to see she had her hands on her face and looked quite emotional. Ken felt that it was odd, but still waved to her.

When things finally calmed down, they returned to the dugout in great spirits. The coach hadn't been able to put away his grin since the game had ended, a sign that he was indeed pleased with the result.

"Feels nice to get a win at home." Ken remarked while placing his things away in his bag.

"Ken, you've got an interview." Coach Brown said, patting him on the back.

Ken rolled his eyes but he didn't argue. He knew that not only could he gain more exposure by doing interviews, but that it was also his obligation as an athlete.

He grabbed his cap out from his bag and placed it on before leaving the dugout and heading onto the field. It didn't take long to find the spot where the interview would take place, after all, it was hard to miss the giant camera and well dressed reporter.

Upon seeing him, the woman waved, getting his attention.

"Hey Ken, Patricia Matthews for ESPN+, it's nice to meet you." She said, holding out her hand.

Ken grabbed the offered hand and spoke some pleasantries. The woman was in her mid 30's with brown hair that went past her shoulders. She wore light makeup and had the air of a professional who had been in the industry for a while.

"We're going live in 5, 4..." The camera man spoke, counting down the rest of the numbers with his hand. Once they were live, the bright light atop the camera lit up, almost blinding Ken.

"Yes that's right Phil. I'm here with Ken Takagi who has just come off a stellar performance in the Bobcats first win of the conference. Tell me Ken, how are you feeling after throwing a perfect game?"

Whatever Ken was going to answer with was suddenly stuck in his throat. All of his media training went out the window as he heard her words.

"Eh? Perfect game?" He queried.

"Yes... You threw a perfect game tonight, didn't you know?" Patricia asked, trying to understand if he was joking or not.

"Ah, right. I guess that's why everyone was so happy after we won." Ken replied sheepishly. Things started to make sense now. He was so absorbed in the game that he hadn't realized.

"Honestly, I was just focused on trying to get each batter out. Whether I have a perfect game or not, I'm just happy to get the win at the end of the day, after all, personal accolades mean nothing if we can't win as a team." Ken stated.

His words were honest and obviously so. They painted him as a selfless player who just wanted to succeed, which wasn't far from the truth.

"That's great to hear. It's very rare for a young prospect with so much potential to be so team oriented at this stage of their career." Patricia spoke words of praise, happy with the response.

"There's quite a debate online about your decision to come to Columbia despite being the number 1 High School prospect. Would you like to comment on why you chose this college instead of other high profile programs?"

Ken resisted the urge to frown as he heard the question. There were many fans who weren't happy with his decision, highlighted by the comments on some of his social media posts.

He didn't know why people were so obsessed with his choice.

"I'll say this: The coaching staff and team dynamic were a great fit for my personality and I have no regrets. We'll see just how well the high profile programs compare to us in the post season."

Ken's words thundered in the ears of Patricia who could already feel this interview would get a lot of attention. She hid her smile and said a few more pleasantries before ending the interview.

Once the camera light turned off, she turned to Ken with a brilliant smile.



"Wonderfully done Ken, I think there'll be a lot of talk online about this interview."

Ken was rather indifferent, but he still kept his manners and thanked Patricia for her time. All he wanted to do now was go shower and meet up with Ai and maybe grab some dinner.

He walked back to the dugout and pulled out his phone, sending Ai a message to meet him out the front in around 30 minutes.

"Way to steal the spotlight when my girl is watching." Steve said with a grin.

Ken laughed, "Hey, I wouldn't have had a perfect game without you behind the plate." He said matter-of-factly.

"Damn right!"

The two laughed, clearly in a good mood.

Since there were no showers at Robertson field, the team moved over to the Chrystie Field House and got changed. A while later, both Steve and Ken left their belongings with the staff and headed out to meet their women.

Ken saw Ai chatting with Tara in the sea of people thanks to his height. The problem was, many of the crowd could also see him from a mile away.

"Ken! Great game out there man."

"Go Bobcats!"

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

## **Chapter 754 - 754: Dinner Date (2)**

He recognized some people in the crowd from his classes. These people would always try to talk to him in between lectures, but now he didn't have the time.

"Sorry, I'm a little busy."

Ken tried to palm people off and eventually arrived in front of Ai after some time. Instead of greeting her, he grabbed her hand and began to walk off, "Let's get out of here first."

Steve wasn't far behind, dragging along his own girlfriend through the sea of people. It wasn't until they were a block away that Ken finally slowed down and could breathe a sigh of relief.

He turned back and saw Ai, flashing her a smile. Without a word he embraced her and gave her a deep kiss, as if they hadn't seen each other in a long time.

Truth be told, since the last few weeks had required the team to travel, he hadn't seen Ai for almost a month. The kiss lasted for some time before Ken pulled back and smiled.

Steve and Tara were standing by the side awkwardly as the two reunited. For a moment, Steve thought about doing the same to his girl, but he quickly decided against it, after all, they had just seen each other earlier.

The two had also not yet decided that they were dating, at least officially. Everything was too new to tell.

"You played well tonight. Congratulations." Ai said softly, in Japanese.

"It's because you were watching me."

"Ahem... Should we go get some dinner?" Steve asked, seeing that the two were acting all lovey dovey and speaking in a language he couldn't understand.

He had picked up a few words from Yuki, but Ken and Ai spoke far too fast for him to understand properly.

Only now did Ken remember that they had company. "Ah, right. Does anyone have any recommendations for food tonight?"

However, Ai was the one who replied. "I booked already. It's called La Grande Boucherie." Funnily enough, she pronounced it perfectly.

"Eh!? How did you get a booking on such short notice?" Tara exclaimed, clearly recognizing the name of the restaurant.

Ai looked rather smug, "I booked it over 3 weeks ago."

Ken and Steve hadn't heard of the spot before, but judging by the reaction it should be a rather fancy and prestigious place.

"Is it... Expensive?" Steve asked, looking a little worried.

Tara nodded, "It's not too bad, depending on what you order."

Ken had long activated his poker face skill. He did not want to appear cheap, not in front of his girl, just in case he embarrassed her.

"Don't worry, I'll shout us a meal." Ken stated, though it pained him to do so.

Steve let out an audible sigh of relief, placing his hand on the guy's arm. Even though he'd recently received a scholarship, it didn't mean he had disposable money to throw around. In fact, he'd given majority of it to his parents.

With the destination set, they hailed a cab and arrived in around 20 minutes despite the usual New York traffic on the roads.

The first thing they noticed was the line leading into the restaurant. Even with a reservation it seemed that they would have to wait for a while.

As they lined up, a server came past and asked if they had a reservation. Hearing Ai say that she reserved it under the name Takagi made him feel warm inside.

They were then taken to another line inside to wait for a table.

Ken looked around, noting how fancy the place looked. The only issue was that it was absolutely packed.

"Wait, did you reserve for 4 people?" Ken asked, paling a little. There was no way that she could have known he would invite Steve and Tara to dinner almost 3 weeks ago.

Ai nodded, "I figured you would invite Steve and I wasn't sure if he had a girlfriend or not, so I said four just in case."

"You're the best." Ken said, wrapping his arms around her. It was amazing to have such a capable woman by his side who seemed to think of everything.

They didn't have to wait too long and were brought into the restaurant in one of the corners. This suited Ken just fine as he took the spot closest to the wall after pulling out the chair for Ai.

Steve mirrored his manners and they were soon greeted by a waiter who poured them some water and handed over the menu's. She was bubbly and wore a great smile despite how busy the restaurant was.

As Ken opened the menu, he instantly paled. He almost closed it again on instinct, but remembered he had company.

"What do you feel like?" Ai asked him, batting her eyelids as she looked at him calmly.

"M—Maybe some steak." He said, dropping his gaze to the menu. But open seeing the price tag next to the filet, he quickly changed his mind.

"Ahem... Salad sounds good."

Ai placed her hand upon his arm and gave him a knowing look. "It's a special occasion, you should treat yourself."

"You're right..."

Steve closed the menu and smiled, "I'll have the Tomahawk ribeye." He announced.

Ken flinched, quickly looking at the price next to it. While there were many french words mixed in, he could see clearly that the meal was meant for two people.

He raised his gaze, sending a dangerous look to his friend. "We'll share it..."

After the initial shock of the prices, Ken actually loosened up a little and enjoyed himself. Having played a great game and now relaxing with those close to him, he was in a great mood.

The food was delicious, perfectly cooked and seasoned, filling his stomach as well as his heart. Though he might not do this often, it certainly was a good experience.

When the time came for the bill, the server returned.

"Your bill has been taken care of Mr. Takagi. Thank you for dining at Le Grande Boucherie." She said with a smile.

Ken was gobsmacked, "May I ask who paid the bill?"

"He wishes to remain anonymous."

Although this might seem like a good deed, Ken was a suspicious person.

"How much was it?"

"Sorry?" She asked in confusion.

"The bill. What was the total?"

"Umm... \$632.50 including tax."

Ken felt as if he'd just taken a knife to the heart, but he still took out his wallet and fished out some money, counting it in his hands.

He hesitated before putting 8 bills on the table. "There's 750, please give me a receipt."

"B—But sir... the bill has been paid." The server looked perplexed, as if she didn't know what to do.

She eventually had to go and get the owner of the restaurant who arrived at the table wearing an exasperated expression. "Ken, you won't let me treat you to a meal on such a special day?" He said, looking a little hurt.

'Eh? This guy knows me?'

Tara spoke up instead, "Sir, Ken is right to refuse your patronage. I'm sorry if it's caused you any offense. You know that the NCAA has strict guidelines for student athletes accepting any gifts or benefits."

"Ah... I didn't think about that." The well dressed man in his early 40's said. After thinking for a little while, he motioned to the server to go and print out a new bill.

Ken also wasn't aware that this violated the NCAA regulations. Thankfully Tara was there to help mediate, otherwise things might have got a little uncomfortable.

"Sorry about the inconvenience. I know it might be in poor taste... but would you mind signing a baseball for my kid?" He asked, not wanting to miss the chance.

"Erm, sure thing." Ken replied. He felt that it was the least he could do considering he made the guy's night a little difficult.

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

## **Chapter 755 - 755: Road to Success (1)**

The group parted ways after the dinner date. Since it was a weeknight and they still had class the following day, it wasn't advisable to stay out too late.

Steve and Tara took a cab back to the college while Ken accompanied Ai to her dorm. Ever since being captured on the streets back in Japan, he was hypersensitive about Ai walking alone in the streets.

It was unfortunate that he could not stay the night, but he bid her farewell with a long goodbye kiss.

"I'll see you this weekend." He said, lingering.

"Mmm, we should have more double dates in the future." Ai replied with a grin. Since it was getting warmer, there would be a lot more home games coming up.

Ken paled slightly, "Maybe at somewhere a little cheaper next time?"

Ai giggled, "Hey, that place was well priced. It's not my fault that Steve ordered the most expensive thing on the menu."

"Next time I'll order something from the kid's menu for him." He stated with malice.

The two said their goodbyes and Ken hailed a cab, heading back to the dorms. It had been a long day and he was feeling rather tired from all of the excitement.

By the time he arrived back, it was already close to midnight and all he wanted to do was sleep. Without thinking, he opened the door and kicked his shoes, disrobing as he made his way to bed.

He glanced at Steve's bed, only to see two bodies curled up against each other, sleeping soundly. Ken rolled his eyes and got into bed, his energy spent.

Out of habit, he opened the system and went through his status window. He couldn't see any changes to his stats, and was about to close it before asking Mika to send him to sleep.

However, a red notification caught his eye, clearing his mind instantly.

'Huh? What is this?'

He tapped on the missions menu and his eyes opened wide in the net moment.

#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)

\*Hidden Task: Throw a Perfect Game\* [Completed]

#### 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]

>Hidden task rewards - Trait: Perfectionist [Claim Reward]

'No way! A new trait?'

Ken felt like a kid on Christmas day preparing to open up his presents. Without waiting a single moment, he claimed the reward and closed the window.

[Congratulations, user has received the Trait: Perfectionist]

Trait: Perfectionist

Description: User's drive for excellence pushes him to refine his skills and performance to the highest standard. While demanding, this trait ensures continuous improvement and consistency in all aspects of life.

Effects:

Flawless Execution: Reduces the likelihood of mistakes during high-stakes moments.

Practice Efficiency: Maximizes the benefits of training sessions, ensuring faster skill mastery.

Detail Orientation: Heightened attention to detail allows user to spot errors in technique or strategy.

Consistency: Ensures steady performance across all games, reducing variance in results.

Bliss. This was what Ken was experiencing right now.

With the addition of this trait, Ken's efficiency would be through the roof. Not only would this trait be useful in games, it would also translate to the real world as well.

Just thinking of the benefits was enough to wake up Ken's previously tired mind. However, the biggest boon of all was the final effect: Consistency.

As a professional athlete, no one was immune to slumps and dips in performance for varying reasons. But with the Perfectionist trait, provided he was not injured, his performances would vary quite little.

After going through a slump himself when the system was upgrading, he was well aware of how hopeless one would feel in the moment.

'This is the kind of reward I needed...' Ken thought.

But now was not the time to celebrate. He had classes tomorrow, so without dwelling on it too much, he asked Mika to activate her sleep protocol and send him into a deep sleep.

Perhaps it was because he was very tired, or Mika believed he needed more rest, Ken didn't wake up until 7am, a full 2 hours later than he usually would. He stirred, letting out a big stretch.

The sun was coming through the blinds, illuminating the room. Ken turned his head and saw Steve still asleep, his body on the ground with his legs still on the bed. Tara was wrapped up like a cocoon in the guy's bed, causing Ken to let out a dry chuckle.

He didn't wake them, instead heading into the bathroom in order to shower. He would have to make up for missing out on his run this morning, but Ken was in too good of a mood to let that bother him.

As the warm water washed over him, he stared at his new trait, unable to hid the grin on his face. With every mission he completed, the rewards would get better and better.



It was to the point where he didn't know what kind of rewards he would receive in the future.

'Maybe I'll get an autopilot skill one day, and not even have to play.' Ken joked darkly.

But he froze in the next moment, 'I'm kidding Mika... Please don't give me a skill like that.'

[...Don't be ridiculous.]

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

## **Chapter 756 - 756: Road to Success (2)**

Ryan took a seat on his brown leather lounge chair, letting out a sigh of contentment as he could finally relax. With the extra work he'd been putting in ahead of his call up to the Miami Blue Marlin's, he was a little sore.

He stretched a little before grabbing the TV remote and switching it on, flicking through the channels absentmindedly. He didn't often watch television, but he wanted some background noise to fill the empty house.

After renewing his contract, he could finally afford his own place. While it was still some distance from the Blue Marlins home field, it was certainly better than room sharing.

It had been a hard road ever since that fateful day where he escaped his father's clutches. The backlash was swift and the consequences dire. With his college eligibility compromised due to renegeing on his alleged commitment to Kansas State University, he had little options remaining.

If it wasn't for Leo who had not only housed him, but also given him the advice he needed, there was no doubt that he would have been forced onto the streets.

He was also the one who supplied Ryan with the invitation to the closed tryouts for the Miami Blue Marlins. As a man with nothing to lose, he managed to impress the coaching staff enough to secure a minor league contract.

Starting from their Single-A team the Jupiter Hammerheads, Ryan worked his way through the trenches, living from paycheck to paycheck. The contract would only last a year, meaning their was no time to relax.

He was swiftly promoted to the Double-A team and performed well, giving the organization enough confidence to send him into their Triple-A side.

This was where things became complicated.

Not only did the team have an experienced ex-Major League pitcher, he was also quite harsh on the young Ryan. Instead of being a good veteran, the guy held the younger teammates in contempt.

For a while, the two clashed and Ryan's performance dipped as a result. There was a time where he almost got sent back down to the Double-A team, scaring him dearly.

After this, Ryan yielded. If he wanted a chance at making it to the Blue Marlins, he needed to focus on getting better himself, not worrying about what other people thought.

But no matter how much he tried, he didn't receive the call up that he had been desperately waiting for. In fact, his contract had all but expired, meaning he would either have to negotiate for another minor league contract, or be released from the organization.

Just when all seemed lost and the expiration date approached, he received a call. The general manager of the Blue Marlins called him personally, asking if he was ready to be called up to the Major League.

Ryan almost burst into tears on the spot, feeling all of the hardships overwhelm him. He had finally done it, secured a place on the main roster of a Major League club.

He hired an agent at once and met with the Blue Marlins team before signing a substantial contract.

Although he had yet to play a match, the season was still young. The staff wanted to refine some things before finally introducing him into the pitching rotation very soon.

In fact, his first game would be this coming Saturday. As long as he was in shape, Ryan was ready for his debut.

**BUZZ BUZZ**

Ryan placed the remote down and picked up his phone and began typing a message back.

"In sports news, Columbia defeat University of Pennsylvania in devastating fashion. Freshman Ken Takagi threw a perfect game, the first in the school's history. ESPN+ Journalist Patricia Matthews was on the scene for an interview."

Ryan's eyes widened as he heard the familiar name. His gaze snapped to the TV, only to see a female reporter standing next to the tall figure of Ken, garbed in his Columbia uniform.

The guy looked bigger and more mature than he remembered, unsurprising since it was almost 4 years ago since they competed against each other.

"Yes that's right Phil. I'm here with Ken Takagi who has just come off a stellar performance in the Bobcats first win of the conference. Tell me Ken, how are you feeling after throwing a perfect game"

"Eh? Perfect game?"

Ryan scowled. The look of confusion on Ken's face pissed him off for some reason. "As if you didn't know that you threw a perfect game." He scoffed. But despite his complaints, he had to admit that the feat was impressive.

"Honestly, I was just focused on trying to get each batter out. Whether I have a perfect game or not, I'm just happy to get the win at the end of the day, after all, personal accolades mean nothing if we can't win as a team."

Ryan shot to his feet, feeling a rising anger within him.

"Foolish! If you throw a perfect game, of course your team is going to win you idiot." He said scathingly.

With annoyance, he turned the TV off, tossing the remote aside. He had sat down to relax after putting in some extra training, but it had only resulted in him getting worked up.

Ryan opened his sliding door and walked onto the balcony, overlooking the street. He felt the cool breeze across his skin, yet it did little to quell the fire burning inside of him.

A small grin crept onto the corner of his lips.

"So you're coming for me then? Finally." He murmured.

He tapped on the railing, his thoughts preoccupied. Things seemed to shift in his mind, slowly falling into place.

"I won't let you catch up... I'll become the best pitcher in the Majors before you graduate college." The words were said with complete confidence, as if the result was already a forgone conclusion.

Despite not yet playing a single professional game, Ryan Smith made his declaration.

"Don't fall behind too far Ken... My true rival."

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

## Chapter 757 - 757: Irritation (1)

Ken's perfect game was promoted everywhere over the next few days, causing his fame to skyrocket in a short amount of time. The situation got even bigger when some of the Yanks players reposted the headlines on their own accounts.

He received a message from a few of his friends in Japan who had heard the news. Apparently the Japanese media had gotten hold of the story and began to market him once again.

It was as if they had completely forgotten about the smear campaign they created while he was in his slump.

Ken had already learned to ignore the media attention, both good and bad. It was also great that he had a Social Media manager to look after his accounts since he had enough to focus on.

This would increase doubly when the NIL deal was struck in July of next year. Just thinking of all the brand deals Tara would have to deal with when that time came made him dizzy.

'I'll have to pay her a wage when that time comes.' Ken thought to himself idly.

The next game against University of Pennsylvania was tonight and he already knew that he wouldn't be pitching. In fact, the coach had already hinted that he wouldn't even be placed in the outfield.

Ken couldn't help but feel a bit exasperated. He had pitched a total of 95 balls on Wednesday, yet the coach was worried his arm wouldn't have recovered by now.

But with his Fatigue management skill, 95 pitches was nothing. He could pitch double that and still be fine the next morning, but it wasn't as if he could explain this to the coach.

"What's got you so down?" Steve asked, looking bored.

Ken let out a sigh, "I probably won't be playing tonight." He admitted.

"Join the club..." Steve huffed.

"Hmm? Has Clinton recovered already?"

"Yeah... Don't get me wrong, I'm glad he is no longer injured. But I was hoping for at least another few home games before I got shafted to the bench." He admitted.

"Well, you were batting pretty well. Maybe they'll use you as a designated hitter since Jackson will be in the outfield."

Steve gave him an annoyed look. "You say that like the coach won't put you there."

Ken shrugged, "I can see he wants to keep me rested... Even though I'm perfectly fine. Chances are I'll be riding the bench all night."

"Oh... I'm sorry to hear that man." Steve said, placing his hand on Ken's shoulder.

Ken glanced at Steve and shook his head, "Sure doesn't look like it judging by the giant smile on your face."

"Oh my bad." He quipped back, but the smile remained. "Are we going out to dinner after the game again? That steak was delicious the other night, so much better than the food here."

"Yeah, but you're paying this time."

"W—Wait, what!?"

Letting out a small chuckle, Ken stood up and stretched, feeling the condition of his body. There was still a couple of hours till the game and he was feeling a little restless. He hated staying idle.

"I'm gonna go for a light jog, you coming?"

However, Steve shook his head, "I'm lacking a bit of energy these days, but I'm not sure why. Maybe I need to go see the team doctor."

Ken scoffed, "You can attribute that to the extra workouts you're partaking in with your new girlfriend. Even I never knew you had so much stamina..."

"Ah... You're right. She's quite insatiable. This one time—"

"I don't want to hear it." Ken said, cutting him off. He had not yet devolved to a state where he wanted to discuss such things openly in front of his friend. He grabbed his shoes and bade his farewell before going out for a jog.

As he jogged through the now familiar campus, Ken could feel his blood boiling, eliciting a weird sensation. He tried to increase his pace and quell the feeling, but it didn't go away.

'Mika, what's happening to my body? Why do I feel so irritated?'

At first, Mika didn't answer, leaving him even more frustrated.

[User is currently experiencing sexual frustration.]

'Excuse me!?!'

Ken almost skidded to a halt, his hackles raised. To think that Mika would utter such nonsense.

'How could you say such a thing? What are you even talking about?' Flustered, he shot back at Mika.

[The issue can be resolved in one of two ways. User can have se—]

"OKAY that's enough!" Ken yelled, throwing his hands in the air. A group of students snapped their gazes onto him, their eyes showing uncertainty at his weird behavior.

"Ah, sorry I'm on the phone." Ken replied, pointing to his ear. Of course there was no ear piece in, but he would have felt far too awkward to just leave things be.

Feeling both embarrassed and frustrated, Ken broke into his run once again. He quickly increased his pace until he was just below a sprint. Sweat poured from his face, and his body was quickly heating up.

"Ken?"

Ken turned his head, only to see a woman dressed in tight legging shorts, showing off her long and tanned legs. The girl's long black hair was tied into a ponytail, and her green eyes were visible even from a distance.

"Hey Amelia..." He said, slowing down his run. If he wasn't such a polite person, he would have continued his run and ignored her.

"Hey, I haven't seen you around in a while. Congratulations on the Perfect game the other day, it's all I've heard around campus the last few days." She said, smiling. However, there was a slight awkwardness in her body language.

"Ah, thank you... How's your training for the Olympics going?"

"It's good. I qualified so long ago that a lot of the excitement has drifted away." She admitted. "Don't get me wrong though, I'm sure when it's closer I'll regain my motivation."

Ken nodded, he could understand her entirely.

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

## Chapter 758 - 758: Irritation (2)

"Just don't get complacent okay?" He said with a small smile.

"Heh, you obviously don't know me that well then." She quipped with a bit of attitude. But after saying so she realized that it was the truth, after all, they had not seen each other since the frat party.

An awkward silence followed, stretching out between them. Just as Ken was about to make up some excuse, Amelia spoke up.

"You're looking well."

Ken looked her up and down unconsciously, seeing her lithe yet explosive figure and replied, "You too."

She let out a giggle, "Be careful or I might just steal you away from that fiance of yours."

'Argh you idiot...!' Ken chastised himself. Was he flirting with Amelia? This was not like him at all. In an instant, a wave of guilt washed over him, dousing his irritation.

"I've gotta go. I'll see you around Amelia." He stated before beginning his jog once more.

Amelia looked a little disappointed, but she still responded in kind. Her eyes watched Ken's retreating figure and felt some sadness before she turned and went her separate way.

Ken returned to his dorm right away and went to take a cold shower. After what had happened, he indeed understood that there was something wrong with him.

Mika's confronting words bounced around in his mind. Could he really be sexually frustrated? And could that cause his body to react in such a way?

He thought back to when last he and Ai last rendezvoused and was surprised to discover it was over 2 months ago. To Ken who had remained a virgin for many years, this didn't sound like too long.

Especially when remembering the fact he had lived two lives and already experienced puberty twice. But as his rational mind poured over the situation, he had an epiphany.

In college where it was all around him, it was no wonder why he began to get frustrated. In the few days since Steve and Tara had begun dating, they'd already made themselves at home in his dorm.

Thankfully he was not present when they were doing the deed, but just knowing it was happening was enough. Ken felt a little annoyed, not at Steve, but because he was letting such a thing effect him.

'I thought I was mentally stronger than that.' He thought.

After getting out of the shower, he got dressed and packed his equipment since they were due at the meeting place soon. This was when he remembered that he would have to sit through an entire game on the bench as a glorified cheerleader.

Ken sighed, taking a seat on the bed. He pulled out his phone and opened up social media, something he rarely did. His notifications had gotten out of control and his direct messages were filled with unread messages.

He scrolled down and happened across an ad for a hotel. It was then that a few cogs clicked in his mind.

"Ah!"

He quickly clicked on the ad and began to browse some of the hotels in the New York area. At a glance a few were expensive, making the idea far less appealing than he had initially thought.

The reason why he and Ai had been lacking physical intimacy was not because a lack of wanting to. It was because the both of them were living in a dorm in different College Campuses.

While Ai could technically stay the night at his dorm, they would need to notify in advance and provide an ID. Only when getting approval would they be able to go through with it.



To Ken, this killed the romance a little. Not to mention that their room was rather messy thanks to Steve who often 'forgot' to clean up after himself.

But if he got a hotel for the weekend under the guise of taking a break together, things would feel much more organic. Of course he couldn't outright say the reason since he was a little worried it might cause some complications in their relationship.

With his heart set, Ken found a reasonable priced hotel and booked without a second thought. His pupils were already dilated thinking about what kind of night they would have.

'This should get me through the game tonight...' Ken thought.

"Yo, you ready to go?" Steve burst through the door and saw Ken sitting on the bed before calling out.

"Yeah, let's go."

He grabbed his things and headed out the door, a small grin creeping onto the corner of his lips.

"B—Bro... Your creepy smile is back." Steve felt his PTSD kicking into high gear as he saw flashes of the training demon appear. Whenever he saw this face, it would always end up with him sprawled on his back gasping for air.

However, Steve had no need to worry, since he would not be the target of Ken's intense exercise routine.

Ken ignored him, blissfully thinking about tonight.

"Oh, I booked us a table at this restaurant. It's called iHop." Steve said casually. His eyes were trained on Ken, as if to gauge his reaction. He was banking on the fact that Ken hadn't been in America long enough to recognize the restaurant.

"Change of plans, you and Tara can go to dinner, I'm taking Ai out for the weekend." Ken replied dismissively. .

"Oh, I see... Well next dinner date is on you since I'm only paying for this one." Steve added with a grin.

Too absorbed in his own thoughts, Ken mumbled something in response, seemingly accepting the situation.

The two arrived at the meeting place and were taken via shuttle to Satow Stadium. After heading into the locker room, Coach Brown went over the game plan and announced the starting line up.

As expected, Ken was not in the lineup at all. With Clinton back, he took the catcher's position and Steve was moved to designated hitter while Jackson took up his spot in the right outfield.

The coach had his eyes on Ken who was still wearing a small grin, as if nothing could possibly effect him.

'He's taking this better than expected...!' Coach Brown thought suspiciously.

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

## **Chapter 759 - 759: Motivation (1)**

The Bobcats played well, even without Ken on the field. While they lacked his explosiveness with the bat, the trio of Ayden, Tristan and DJ put them ahead early in the match.

Ethan was on form, only giving up a 5 hits in his 7 innings and giving up a single run.

The coach had decided to use Steve as the designated hitter. While he struggled at the first and second at-bat, he managed to hit a homer in the 6th, sending it over the fence in the right outfield.

Ken instantly knew that the slugger skill had activated, since the sound of the ball making contact with the bat was super loud. Even Steve was surprised that he had hit the ball so far.

Seeing the guy waltzing around the bases with the crowd and dugout cheering loudly brought a smile to Ken's face.

The game ended with the Bobcats taking down University of Pennsylvania once again. This brought them to 2-0 in the Ivy League conference and though it was early in the season, the coach couldn't wipe the smile from his face.

Ken and Steve left the locker rooms and met up with Ai and Tara. This time they picked a different meeting place to avoid being swamped by the crowd.

"Where are we going to dinner tonight?" Tara asked, hooking her arm around Steve's.

"Ai and I have other plans, so you guys can go on ahead." Ken said firmly. His eyes had been gazing at his woman the entire time, almost as if he was already undressing her in his mind.

Ai blushed, feeling like she was a sheep being eyed by a wolf. "Since when did we have plans?" she asked, but she didn't seem upset.

Ken grinned toothily, "Since I made them." He swooped in and grabbed her hand, giving a brief farewell to Steve and Tara.

He left the two standing awkwardly, watching the two walk away. They saw Ken's long arm reach down and grab a swift handful of Ai's behind before she promptly swatted it away.

"Um... That seemed a little weird." Tara stated, turning her gaze to Steve.

Steve shrugged, "The guy's been pent up for months, I'm glad they're getting some alone time." He stated.

Tara's eyes widened slightly in understanding, then she let out a giggle. "It's good that they're on the same page then."

"Eh?"

"Never mind. Where are we going to dinner tonight?"

Steve felt a little awkward, but he answered, "I made a reservation at iHop..." .

"IHop!? I didn't even know they took reservations..." Tara scowled at him. "I'd rather eat the cafeteria food."

Steve's eyes lit up briefly at the prospect of not having to spend money, but seeing the expression on his girlfriend's face, he knew that it was not the best move.

"Ahem... Let's go somewhere else then."

Meanwhile, Ken sent Ai back to her dorm to get some things while he waited outside. He had packed his equipment bag with some clothes and necessities for the two nights so he wouldn't have to go back after the game.

Around 20 minutes later, they caught a cab and arrived at Park Central Hotel, their home for the next two nights. After check-in they went upstairs and checked out the room.

While it was rather small, and the view wasn't the best, it was a hell of a lot better than the dorm room. Not to mention, there was much better company.

As he looked at the beautiful figure of his woman peering out of the window, primal thoughts took over his mind. He imagined tearing the clothes off her body, one by one until there was nothing left.

Ai turned around, seeing Ken poised to strike. She let out a small giggle and moved toward him slowly, her blue eyes filled with a hint of amusement.

"Not yet," She said, running her hand down his chest. "Take me out to dinner first."

Ken snapped out of his state and managed a smile, "You're right, I got a little carried away." He admitted. "Let's go get some dinner, I'll save you for dessert."

Ai laughed and sent him a lascivious look before walking towards the door.

SLAP

Unable to help himself, Ken sent a spank towards the curvy posterior of his woman on her way past. The feeling on his hand was wonderful, almost causing him to lose what little restraint he had left.

Ai's gaze snapped towards him, "I'll make you pay for that later."

"Please do."

"PFFT. Hahahaha"

Ai entered one of her giggling fits, spreading infectious laughter in the small hotel room. The haze of lust cleared, giving Ken some clarity.

'I really love this woman...' He thought.

"Now let's go, If I don't eat now then I might pass out the moment we get into bed." Ai said, beckoning him out the door.

"Yes ma'am!"

The two left the hotel and found somewhere close by to eat. Instead of a fancy restaurant, they opted for some sushi. Ken didn't often eat sushi back home, only when his mother made it, but this place wasn't too bad.

Instead of rushing back to the hotel, Ken took Ai on a stroll through times square with no destination in mind. He would have gone into Central Park, but he heard that it could be dangerous at night.

The whole street was lit with various advertisements and was bustling with people. They saw various people dressed up in superhero costumes parading around, and tourists taking photos.

"This reminds me of Tokyo." Ai said, keeping her body in close to Ken.

"Mmm, it's not the same though." Ken admitted. "Do you get homesick?" He queried.

Ai nodded, "I miss Japan, and my parents." She admitted. "But I plan to go see them in the Summer."

"I'll come with you then. I want to go visit my brother as well."

Ai smiled sweetly, "We can stay at my parents house in Yokohama, I'm sure my parents would love that."

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

## **Chapter 760 - 760: Motivation (2)**

Ken nodded. He needed to have a proper discussion with Tetsu about his daughter. While he could have likely called him and asked over the phone, such a matter was best discussed in person.

After around an hour roaming, the two returned back to the hotel where things quickly devolved into something primal. Both Ken and Ai quickly lost themselves to their natural urges and became unionized over and over again.

Ken returned back to the dorms on Monday morning after bidding farewell to Ai. Their departure was rather bittersweet, but it was made better upon scheduling their next visit.

They had decided to rent a hotel room every month or so, provided Ken was not traveling for baseball. This all but disintegrated any of his frustrations he had due to pent up 'stress'.

"Good morning~" Ken called, strutting into his room at around 7am. There was a spring in his step, as if nothing could effect him.

He turned to see the room in shambles, dirty clothes, mess and general untidiness that happened in his absence. A bit further in was Steve and Tara staring at him weirdly.

"A—Ah, sorry about the mess." Steve said, remembering that Ken was a bit of a neat freak. His gaze moved to Ken's bed which was currently housing Steve's dirty laundry and his eye twitched.

'OH CRAP!' Realization struck Steve who suddenly paled. This was a surefire way to piss Ken off.

Unexpectedly, Ken just trudged by and placed his bag atop his bed before casually picking up the laundry and tossing it over to Steve's side without a word.

"Just try clean it up before class." He stated nonchalantly before heading back towards the door. "I'm going to grab some breakfast before class, you guys wanna come?"

Both Tara and Steve stared at Ken, as if he was a completely different person.

"Um, no thank you."

Ken shrugged, "Suit yourself." He said before whistling a tune on his way out.

Steve turned to his girlfriend and asked, "Who was that and what did he do with Ken?"

Tara giggled, "He finally got to relieve his stress. But I suggest you clean up your room before he returns. The effects won't last too long."

"Really? What would happen if I left it?" Steve queried, but he didn't even need an answer. He felt a phantom in his stomach, as if he'd just been punched in the gut.

"Never mind... I'll go clean it."

A bit later in the cafeteria, Ken helped himself to a hearty breakfast of bacon and eggs. His mind wandered as he stuffed his face, remembering flashbacks of the previous two nights.

He could still smell Ai's perfume on his shirt, causing his face to redden slightly.

However, he felt slightly guilty when he thought about how he'd been acting the last week or so. When Mika had suggested that he'd been sexually frustrated, he jumped down her throat, metaphorically of course.

Thinking along these lines, he realized that he hadn't apologized to her. Scratch that, ever since she'd accepted the mission rewards on his behalf, Ken had been quite mean, merely using her as a tool whenever he needed something.

Now that his mind was cleared up, the first thing he wanted to do was apologize.

'Hey Mika, are you there?'

[Affirmative.]

The monotonous voice responded.

'I just wanted to apologize for how I've been treating you lately. You were right about me being frustrated, and you were right about the rewards. I'm sorry.' He said sincerely.

Mika didn't respond straight away and only silence hung in the air between them. However, just as Ken was about to reiterate his words, she spoke.

[I am also sorry for betraying your trust Ken.]

Ken's eyes widened in surprise. A big part of him believed that Mika was just like a machine, lacking any emotions. But not only did her response show remorse, it actually felt sincere despite the monotone nature of her voice.

'What say we bury this feud?' Ken replied, feeling happy.

[Sounds good.]

With the air cleared, Ken felt a lot lighter. He didn't realize the weight of the grudge that he'd been holding onto for quite some time, but now with it gone, it was as if he could finally breathe again.

[I suggest you look at the sports news.]

Mika's words interrupted his thoughts, causing him to raise an eyebrow. He didn't inquire, but pulled out his phone and opened up the sports news.

Ken didn't have to scroll far to see the article.

"Blue Marlins pitcher records a shutout in his debut match."

Ken clicked the link and was brought to a 3rd party website. The first thing he saw was Ryan Smith, dressed in the white and black uniform of the Miami Blue Marlin's, standing on the mound.

His eyes widened before he quickly scoured through the article.

Without realizing, his heart began to beat louder and a fire rose from the pit of his stomach. He had heard that Ryan signed with the Blue Marlin's and would play his first game soon, but to do so in such a fashion was amazing.

Ken clenched his fist, a burning determination assaulting him.

'He's already in the league...'

Ken couldn't help but feel like he'd fallen behind, despite going different paths. For a brief moment he questioned his decision to go to college, but he quickly dismissed the doubt.

Even though the path might be longer, the benefits far outweighed the unknowns of entering the draft too early. Not only would he have to play through the minor league, he might have been screwed over with a long contract for a failing team.

Ken shook his head and closed his phone, his eyes moving to his right hand. He stared at his palm for a few moments before clenching his fist.

'Thank you Mika... I think I needed that motivation.' He said sincerely.

[You're welcome.]

'Don't get too comfortable Ryan... When I enter the league, I'll overshadow you once again.'

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