

# Major League System

## Chapter 761 - 761: Breach (1)

As the season progressed, Ken continued to play at a high level when on the field. His new Perfectionist trait was instrumental in preserving his consistency, both on offense and defense.

Every few weeks, he and Ai would book the same hotel and enjoy their weekends together. But with his burgeoning fame, he was beginning to get recognized frequently, making it difficult to go out in public.

With Ken's now almost 6'6 frame, he easily stuck out in crowds. While he had always tried to be polite to any fans that he might come across, there were occasions that he was forced to put his foot down.

After all, being interrupted during a meal with his girlfriend all but killed the romance.

But with his fame, also came people who hated him.

Ken didn't look at any comments or messages on his social media platforms, leaving it all up to Tara whose workload had increased alongside his fame. The most notable hate coming from the University of Pennsylvania students who had been swept in all 3 of their games.

This was the same team Ken had thrown a perfect game against and dominated every time he played. They flooded his posts with garbage, sending threats while hiding behind their phones.

Tara had mentioned this to Ken, but told him not to worry about it. If things got bad they could always contact the University and have them take action against the student's in question.

It was currently the middle of May and the regular season had almost come to an end. Ken and Steve had completed their final exams for their first year of college, much to the latter's relief.

There would be no more academics until the beginning of their sophomore year in September, though Ken would likely not give up on studying.

Columbia ended up on top of the Ivy League conference with an 18-2 record, the best in the school's history.

In fact, the playoff series against University of Pennsylvania was kicking off this weekend. The winner of the best of 3 series would determine the Ivy League champions.

Ken was looking forward to beating this team once again and collecting his prize from the mission. As long as they won the series, he would be able to give Steve another one of his skills, improving him even further.

On the day before the playoff series began, the team trained at the home field like any other day. Coach Brown had been smiling for what seemed like the entire season, but today something felt different.

He seemed angry, as if something had pissed him off, though the players could only guess why. All they could do was ensure they followed his orders completely, to avoid being the focus of his anger.

Once they'd finished their final exercise of the session, it was one of the assistant coaches who addressed the team with some closing remarks.

When they were dismissed, Ken was making his way back to the lockers when he felt a tap on his shoulder.

"Meet me in my office."

'Eh?' Ken felt a bout of anxiety upon seeing how serious the coach looked, but he quickly nodded in affirmation. His mind seemed to race with possibilities, but he couldn't think of anything that he should be in trouble for.

Steve had seen the interaction and was also curious. Seeing how anxious Ken was, he didn't ask anything and kept his distance, he knew that the guy would tell him the details after.

As Ken was leaving, Steve pat his shoulder and wished him good luck.

Knock Knock

"You wanted to see me coach?" Ken asked, peering into the office.

"Come in and take a seat. Close the door on your way in."

Ken's anxiety peaked as he saw the serious expression on the coach's face. It was clear at a glance that whatever the conversation was about, it was not going to be pretty.

He did as he was told, sitting in the chair in front of the desk. The two sat in silence for a few moments while the coach seemed to be choosing his next words. In the end, he reached into his desk draw and procured a manila folder, placing it in front of Ken.

Ken gave him a confused look, before opening the folder.

His eyes widened as he saw a picture of him and Ai dining at a fancy restaurant on top of the pile. He moved the photo aside and saw another of them shopping at some of the high-end fashion stores.

"What the hell is this?" Ken queried, his face turning dark. These were intimate moments that he had with his girlfriend, who the hell was following them around and taking such photos?

"Keep going." The coach said.

As Ken flipped through the photos it was much of the same until the final photo was the one with the New York Yanks players. Anger and confusion was written on Ken's face as he tried to understand what the coach was getting at.

"Do you know why I'm showing you these Ken?" he asked.

"I have no clue." Ken replied icily. If there wasn't an explanation soon, he was ready to blow his top.

Feeling the rising emotions, Coach Brown didn't take long to answer.

"The NCAA have launched an investigation into your eligibility based on the evidence in that folder. An anonymous source has alleged that you have violated your NCAA contract by accepting gifts and or impermissible benefits because of your status."

"That is ridiculous."

However, the coach did not reply to the claim, pointing at the photos. "Are you telling me that you paid for all of these services? The fancy dinners, shopping spree's and even the expensive hotel?"

Ken didn't hesitate. "Of course... how else would I purchase these things?"

The coach nodded, "And how about the VIP tickets to meet with the New York Yanks players? Did you pay for that?"

Ken froze, "Those were given to me by Alex Cole when we met in Central Park."

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

## Chapter 762 - 762: Breach (2)

This time, the coach frowned deeply. "Accepting gifts like this is a clear violation of your contract. Alex should have known better than to give you the tickets."

"Wait what are you saying? The guy didn't even know who I was when he gave me the tickets initially!" Ken shot to his feet, slamming the table in the process. This was absolutely absurd.

Coach Brown shook his head, "That may be the case, but I'm afraid that changes nothing. You should have paid for the tickets, or at least reported the situation to me afterwards. If we got on the front foot earlier, things would have been more manageable.

"So what are you saying? What happens now?"

"While the investigation is ongoing, you'll be ineligible to play any games." The coach stated, his expression showing regret.

"You can't be serious right?" Ken replied incredulously.

"I'm afraid so Ken. If you want to expedite the process, make sure you cooperate fully with the University. We need to see receipts and bank records for the alleged offenses, only then can you be cleared. As for the tickets, I suggest you try and get in contact with Alex Cole and pay him for the tickets. Maybe then will things be easily smoothed over."

Ken's expression darkened. "I can't believe this... Not only did I have someone stalk me and my girlfriend, I also have to let the University through my personal bank records? Tell me Coach, when did I stop being an athlete and become a prisoner?"

His tone was cold, to the point where even the coach was affected.

"I'm sorry Ken, these are the rules of Collegiate sports, there is nothing I can do to change them." He replied sadly.

"I should have stayed in Japan." Ken stated to himself before turning on his heel and walking towards the door.

Just as he reached the threshold he stopped and spoke up with his back turned, "I will email you my bank statements after I get in contact with Alex. I trust that you'll expedite the investigation so that I can play as soon as possible."

Without waiting for an answer, he opened the door and left, closing it behind him.

Coach Brown was silent for a few moments before leaning back in his chair, his expression grave. The investigation into Ken couldn't have come at a worse time, which led him to believe that it was intentionally done by someone.

He let out a sigh and felt tired. "They better take this seriously..."

Brett Brown could tell how much this news had hurt Ken. The guy had always been so hardworking both off and on the field, in athletics and his academics. If the both the NCAA and the University failed to handle this correctly, they might end up losing him for good.

"Such a shame..."

Ken was seething as he left the coach's office. He had never felt his privacy so violated as he did right now, and all he could think about was the slimy bastard tracking him and his girlfriend while they were out and about.

The feeling was not a good one, especially since he was not even a real celebrity yet.

With a glum expression, he returned to his dorm and saw Tara and Steve waiting for him. For a moment he felt like just leaving again, but after seeing the concern written on both of their faces, he thought better.

Before they even asked, Ken explained the situation.

"What!? How can they do that?" Steve was fired up almost instantly, shooting to his feet in anger. He too was not happy with the fact Ken would have to sit out on games so close to the post season.

Tara on the other hand was quiet.

"I should have known..." She said, wearing a defeated expression. "When you received the VIP tickets, I should have inquired into it more. I'm so stupid!"

"H—Hey, don't beat yourself up." Steve quickly ditched his own anger and went to comfort her.

"He's right. This happened before you were my manager anyway." Ken stated, making his way over to his bed. He took a seat and let out a sigh.

"So what now?"

"I have to provide my bank statements to the University to prove that I indeed funded the hotel stays and shopping trips. As for the VIP ticket, the coach told me I would need to contact Alex and pay for them." Ken replied.

Saying it out loud left a bitter taste in his mouth, but he had no choice in the matter. As long as he wanted to play collegiate baseball, he would need to abide by their rules.

Of course if the NIL deal was here, none of this would be an issue.

"How would you even get in contact with Alex? He's a professional athlete." Steve asked.

"Well Ken is verified on instagram, so if he sends a direct message on there, Alex will be more likely to see it." Tara said.

Ken was a little surprised, but he didn't know much about instagram to begin with. Hearing this, he opened up the app and searched for Alex before sending a message.

"I guess now we just wait." He said, putting the phone down onto the bed.

"Hopefully he gets the message..." Steve said.

"If he doesn't, I'll just have to reach out to his agent and try to get an audience. I'm not sure that he'll oblige though, since I'm still a college student." Tara added.

BUZZ BUZZ

"Eh? Who is calling me?"

Ken quickly opened his phone and saw a video call request from someone. It was only when he looked at the name that he realized who it was.

"Alex is video calling me?"

"What!? Really?"

"Quick, answer it!"

Ken fumbled on his phone for a little bit before managing to hit the accept call button. In the next moment a familiar face appeared, dressed in his New York Yanks uniform. The guy was in the dugout and he could see other players in the background.

"Kenny! It's good to hear from you man."

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

## Chapter 763 - 763: Plan (1)

Ken was speechless in that moment, obviously not expecting Alex to video call him, especially during what looked like practice.

"Hey, is this a good time?" Ken asked, not wanting to get the guy in trouble.

"Yeah we're just taking a quick break. Look, Sanchez and Masaru are here too." He said, moving the phone and showing the other two players.

"Hisashiburi1 Ken!" Masaru said, waving in the background.

Ken felt his face heat up a little, seeing one of his idols greeting him in such a way. If this was any other circumstance he might be happy to chat for a while, but he needed to get the situation resolved as soon as possible.

He politely answered and steered the conversation back on topic.

"Alex, I'm in some trouble with the NCAA because of those VIP tickets you gave me. They said it violated the impermissible benefits clause."

"What!? That's a load of crap." Alex cursed, his expression morphing.

Ken agreed, but he continued, "I need to reimburse you for those tickets, otherwise my eligibility could be revoked."

Alex was silent for a while, "I got them for free, so I don't know how much they cost." He admitted, "Hold on a moment."

The guy walked over to the edge of the bullpen to the pitching coach, "Darrel, how much do we sell those VIP tickets for?"

"The ones I gave you? I think they're about 8 each." He replied.

Alex turned back to the camera, "Did you hear that?"

Ken nodded, hearing that he would need to pay a total of \$1,600 for the two tickets caused a serious pain in his heart, but as long as it got the university and NCAA off his back, it would be worth it.

"Can you send me your bank details and I'll transfer the \$1600 for the two tickets." Ken asked.

"1,600?" Alex asked, "Don't you mean \$16,000?"

"SIXTEEN THOUSAND!?! Didn't you say it was \$800 each ticket?" Ken almost collapsed from the shock, his mind going blank.

"No no, he said 8k each ticket. Right Darrel?"

Ken didn't even hear the next part of the conversation, his depression rising. While he had the money, his miserly ways made it almost impossible to justify spending so much money at one time.

Looking half dead, Ken spoke up again, "Send through your account details please... I'll transfer the money."

Only now did Alex seem to remember that Ken was a college student and did not have the same kind of money that he a professional did. He also felt bad that he was the cause of this whole issue.

"Once you leave college, I'll send you the money back alright? Also don't worry about the NCAA, Columbia will fight tooth and nail to keep you on the squad, as long as they're not idiots." He said, flashing Ken a grin.

Ken felt slightly better at these words and thanked him. He reiterated to Alex to send the bank details before hanging up the call and heaving a sigh.

"That was unexpected..." Tara stated.

"Yeah... I didn't even know you could video call on instagram." Ken added.

A few minutes later, the bank details came through and Ken transferred the money. There was a gloomy expression on his face, but it was something that he had to do in order to make things right.

"You think he's right that the university would fight for me?" Ken asked Tara, his tone showing some vulnerability.

Without realizing it, being disallowed to play baseball had affected him greatly. He hadn't felt this stifled since middle school where he was forced to sit out for nearly the whole season.

"Alex is right." Tara replied matter-of-factly. "There's no way that they'll sit on their hands and knees about this, not with the post season coming up."



"I hope so..."

"We're going to get some dinner, did you want to join us?" Steve asked.

Ken shook his head. "I still need to send these bank statements to the coach. The quicker I get this done, the faster my investigation should end."

"Alright man. We'll go have a workout afterwards, that should calm you down a bit." Steve said, patting his friend on the shoulder. The concern was clear in his voice and Ken felt marginally better because of it.

Once the two had left, Ken moved over to his laptop and downloaded his statements. The money he had to pay to Alex took a considerable chunk out of the money his Grandfather had given him, and he couldn't help but feel guilty.

Thankfully he was on a full scholarship, so this money should easily last him for the remaining 2 and a bit years he intended to stay at college. Provided the school didn't revoke his scholarship due to this whole fiasco.

Thinking to this point, a surge of irritation swept through Ken. While his father was on a lucrative deal with the Texas Shorthorns and could likely fund his schooling without any issue, this was beside the point.

Ken had been loyal to the Bobcats, doing favors for them with his large following online and the like. In interviews he always praised the team's coaching staff and the great conditions at the University.

If they were to turn their back on him now, he might have to consider drastic measures.

Ken was a simple person who valued loyalty and respect above all else. Should anything cross his bottom line, he wouldn't hesitate to cut them off.

'I hope it doesn't come to that.' Ken thought bleakly.

After sending the bank statements to the coach via email, he sat back in his chair and let out a deep sigh. Grabbing his phone, he called Ai to let her know what had happened, lest she find out about it through the media first.

Ai listened carefully and consoled him, like she always did. By the end of the phone call he felt better. They had made plans to catch up tonight as she wanted to see him in person.

Long time no see (In Japanese)

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

## Chapter 764 - 764: Plan (2)

Back in the coach's office, a man in his late 50's entered the room, his staunch gaze moving over the tidy office. He had a widow's peak and a head of black hair which faded to white at the edges.

"Frank, it's good to see you." Coach Brown said, standing from his chair and holding out his hand as a greeting. His posture was respectful, indicating that the man in front of him held a high status.

"I wish it were under better circumstances Brett." Frank stated, grabbing the outstretched hand.

Coach Brown agreed and gestured for the man to sit down.

"How is it looking?" Frank asked, his anxiety evident.

"I spoke to Ken. He has receipts and bank statements for most of the accusations, but not the VIP tickets to the Yanks game."

"Damn it!" Frank looked visibly annoyed, this was clearly not the news he was expecting to hear. "What was he thinking?"

"It's not as clear cut as you might think. Apparently Alex Cole had found them in Central Park and interrupted a special moment for Ken and his girlfriend... He felt bad and offered them the tickets without knowing he was a collegiate athlete." Coach Brown went on to explain.

Frank shook his head, "These details don't matter. The fact is Ken accepted the benefit and put his amateur status at risk." He let out a sigh, looking as if he aged.

"This is what I said to him. I suggested paying back the value of the tickets and sending through the bank statements, as long as we can prove to the committee that no harm was done, we should be able to get him back in the squad right?"

Frank's eyes lit up a little, but they became listless once more, "The investigation could take weeks Brett. The speed depends on the whims of the committee on any given day."

"Is there nothing that we can do to expedite the process? I need him for this post season Frank... Whenever he's on the field our guys play so much better." Coach Brown pleaded.

"There's not enough eyes on the situation for a speedy resolution. We could put the word out there, but then Ken's name might be dragged through the mud. You know how the media can be." Frank said.

The coach went into thought. If the case was publicized, the NCAA committee might be inclined to finish their investigation as soon as possible to avoid being bombarded with unhappy fans.

"I would like to run it past Ken first if you don't mind." Coach Brown said after a while. Ultimately the decision would rest on the young players shoulders.

"Mmm, I think it's for the best. Just remind him that we're on his side, I don't want him feeling like the University doesn't have his back after all this. After all, he will be our flagship player in the future." Frank stated.

"In the future?" Coach Brown grinned slightly. "I think he's already there."

Frank let out a small chuckle before bidding the coach goodbye. Whatever happened next would be in Ken's hands.

An hour later, Ken arrived at the coach's office after being summoned. They had just spoken a couple of hours ago, but this time Ken seemed to have calmed down.

"I spoke with the Athletics Director earlier and we might have come up with a plan to expedite your investigation." The coach didn't mince words, going straight to the point.

Ken's expression remained unreadable. He knew that there was no free meal ticket in this world, otherwise the guy would have just done it without speaking to him.

"Go on."

"We need to put some pressure on the committee. The only way to do that is to get word out to media outlets that there is an ongoing investigation surrounding you."

Ken frowned and could instantly see the down side. Announcing this investigation would be putting him under the scrutiny of the media. Ken had had his run ins with the media, particularly in Japan and knew what they were capable of.

"It seems like you understand the stakes." Coach Brown said after seeing Ken's expression. In a way he was glad that he didn't need to explain the situation to Ken, which meant he wouldn't rush into a decision.

"I'll be honest Ken. We need you for the post season." He said plainly, "It's in both mine and the University's interest for you to be on the field during the most important games. If it were up to us, we would release the news anyway."

"However," he continued, "Both I and the University respect you enough to let you make the decision. Our athletic director wanted to reiterate that we will support you no matter what happens."

Ken was a little surprised to hear this, but appreciative nonetheless. He thought for a while, but ultimately decided against making a decision right now.

"Coach, I appreciate your transparency. But I want to talk to my friend about what moves to make. Can you hold off on making a statement for now?" He asked.

Coach Brown nodded. "That's fine, just know that the longer you wait, the worse your odds for playing in the post season this year."

Ken stood to his feet and bowed slightly, thanking the coach. He left the room and returned back to the dorms, intending to talk things over with Tara.

Steve and Tara were still together, hanging out in his room when he returned.

"You ready to go get that workout Ken?" Steve probed.

"Not now, we need to talk business." He said with a serious expression. Ken then relayed everything that the coach had told him to Tara, in hopes that she would help him make the right decision. Search\* The website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

Tara was silent for a while before nodding.

"We can't release a statement about the ongoing investigation, not without backlash at least. But I know someone who could get the word out... As long as we play our cards right, we might benefit even more from this." She said wearing a cheeky grin.

"Damn you're hot when you speak business." Steve added, sending her a look.

Out of reflex, Ken's hand shot up and slapped Steve over the back of the head.

"Owww~"

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

## Chapter 765 - 765: Punishment (1)

Things were silent for a couple of days after Ken was served his notice and he was forced to sit on the bench for the first two games at Satow Stadium and watch his team compete. The first game was back and forth, with the Bobcats pulling off a squeeze bunt for Ayden to sprint across the plate in the 9th inning.

The team was jubilant after a hard fought victory and moved up 1 game in the series. As long as they could win their next one, they would be crowned champions of the Ivy League.

Unfortunately for them, Penn came out on fire. Not only did they hold the Bobcats to a single run, they managed to score 7 themselves, putting an end to Columbia's momentum.

Ken had tried everything to get back onto the field, but even with the stir he caused online, the NCAA was still silent. He had spoken to his family about the issue, but his father was also within the NCAA jurisdiction and could not help.

Meanwhile, a storm was brewing within the NCAA Headquarters.

Knock Knock

"I'm busy..."

The only response was even more knocks on the door, causing the middle-aged man behind his desk to let out a groan of annoyance. "Just open the damn door."

The door opened, revealing a woman dressed professionally. She was holding a stack of papers in her hands and looked stressed. Her usually straight and healthy hair looked frayed and she had bags under her eyes.

"Sir... Have you made your decision regarding the investigation?" She asked tersely.

The man scoffed, "I have many ongoing investigations, you'll have to be more specific." He said, ignoring the earlier rude tone.

The woman who had seemingly had enough of his crap walked forward and slammed the large pile of paper on his desk. "These are just a fraction of the emails I've received regarding Ken Takagi... and those are just the one's in English!"

Michael's face contorted briefly, but it was replaced by anger. "Shirley, I know you're stressed, but I am your boss. I expect a certain level of respect."

"Stressed!?" Shirley's voice went shrill, "I haven't slept since you decided to throw that kid's investigation to the bottom of the pile! Don't patronize me."

Michael flinched, realizing his mistake. It seemed that he had pushed the woman too far.

"Okay, I'm sorry. Why don't you head home and I'll deal with this mess." He replied, his voice softening.

The woman stared unblinkingly at him, "It's a clear cut case Michael... Just suspend him for a couple of games and move on. Why are you making it such an issue?"

At this, Michael shook his head vehemently. "Shirley, these people think that with just a few emails that they can force us into action and I've just about had enough. We will go through due processes, I don't care how much they whine and moan."

"Y—You!" Shirley held onto the final shred of her patience and swallowed down what she was about to say. Once she was calm enough, she let out a small sigh and turned, "I'm taking a week off. I can't deal with all of this."

"H—Hey!" Michael called out, but the door slammed shut behind her, leaving him with the mountain of emails on his desk.

"This is ridiculous." He muttered, briefly looking over the emails. Many were calling for Ken's immediate reinstatement into the team so that he could play in the post season.

"You think you're above the law because you're popular?" Michael scowled, tossing the paper back onto the pile. There was nothing that pissed him off more than entitled players who believed they could skirt the system.

With the little power he had, he could always make the investigations last longer than they needed to, dishing out his self perceived justice. He had looked over Ken's investigation already and things were rather straight forward.

But upon seeing the teen with so much money in his account and taking his girlfriend to all the expensive places in New York left him feeling bitter. He who was middle class at best was never afforded such a luxury when he was back in college.

'It took me twenty years to pay off my student loans, yet this guy is living a life of luxury, not to mention he's on a scholarship... It's time you learned about the real world.' He thought, a small grin creeping onto his lips.

RING RING

The sound of his land line phone broke his thoughts, annoying him.

"Shirley! Tell them I'm busy." He called out. However, upon hearing nothing in response, he remembered that she had gone home.

"Damn it..."

"Hello, Michael speaking." He answered curtly.

But his face soon turned panicked. "A—Ah yes boss, I'm well thank you."

"Okay, no problem."

"Yes sir."

"Yes sir..."

"I—I'll do it right away..." He responded, his whole body deflating. His hand moved and hung up the phone in the next moment.

BANG

He slammed the table with his fist, causing a tingling sensation to run up his arm.

"This bastard..." Michael was seething.

His boss had called him, personally inquiring about Ken Takagi's investigation which he had intentionally ignored. While he didn't go into great detail, the crux of the conversation was that it was to be actioned within the hour.

For the first time during his tenure with the company, his boss had laid into him. With a pay review coming up soon, he was now not in a good position.

"It's all his fault..."

Michael's mind began to formulate a plan, his twisted sense of justice still in full swing.

He opened up his laptop and accessed Ken's investigation which he had filed away. After looking through the evidence again, it was clear that things could be settled after a brief suspension of games.

However, it was up to him to ultimately decide how long the suspension would be based on the available evidence. His eyes focused on a certain detail, a wide grin creeping onto his face.

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

## Chapter 766 - 766: Punishment (2)

Later that night, Ken received a phone call from the coach, urging him to come into his office. The time was already 9pm, so he was surprised that the coach would still be working this late.

Ken felt his stomach in a knot as he made his way across campus towards the fitness center. It had been a tough couple of days, but he was hoping for some good news since tomorrow was the final game of the series.

As he arrived at the office, Coach Brown was waiting for him by the door and gestured for him to come in. From the look on his face, it was clear that he was not bringing good news.

"Take a seat."

The coach walked over and sat at his desk, pulling out a piece of paper and placing it in front of Ken. It was an email from the NCAA Enforcement department.

Ken read through the contents and almost crumpled the letter in his hand by the time he reached the end. He raised his gaze to the coach, "Are they serious? 24 games?"

His tone carried his barely contained rage, hidden just beneath the surface. 24 games was half a season, not including the post season games, which meant he would not even be able to play organized baseball for almost a year.

"You saw what they said... The value of the VIP tickets was the determining factor of the punishment." He replied, though his expression showed he was also unsatisfied with the decision.

"We will have to submit a formal request to reinstate your eligibility after the penalty is served since it is classed as a level 2 significant infraction. They've also recommended the review of your current athletic scholarship." Coach Brown continued, his tone even.

Ken felt his shoulder drop and a sense of helplessness overcame him. He couldn't believe that he was in such a situation, especially when he believed he'd been doing the right thing all along.

"Ken... I'm sorry that it came to this." Coach Brown said, looking pained. "But this isn't the end. I've already talked to the athletic director, we'll be launching an appeal and pursuing damages."



Ken raised his head, a hint of hope within his desolate eyes. "You can do that?"

Coach Brown nodded, "And it's something we should do. The punishment does not befit the crime, especially since both yourself and the university have been fully cooperative in the investigation. We won't stop until we get to the bottom of this."

Hearing the man's words, Ken felt a little better, but that didn't change the immediate situation where he would have to miss out on the post season. After working so hard during the year, he would have to forgo the most important games of the year.

Ken stood up from his chair and thanked the coach, bowing slightly.

"I'll see you at practice tomorrow okay. Don't do anything rash, we'll release an official statement to the media about the investigation and our intention to appeal. If anyone approaches you for an interview, let us know and we'll handle it."

The coach made his way around his desk and placed his hand upon Ken's shoulder consolingly. "This is just a small hiccup Ken, you're meant for great things. Please don't let this effect you."

Ken nodded, though his mind was preoccupied. He left the office and began to walk the grounds of the campus, his eyes out of focus.

His mind was numb and it felt like he didn't have control over his body. He felt like a little kid once more, the same kid who was told to give up pitching by the scout at Osaka Toin.

Tears of frustration began to pool on the corner of his eyes, making his vision misty.

"Ken? Oh my god, what's wrong?" A female voice called to him before he felt hands on either side of his arms.

'Who is it?' Ken thought. He blinked his eyes a few times, trying to clear away the tears. The warm tears ran down his cheeks and he could finally see the figure in front of him.

Amelia was in front of him with her smooth brown hair tied up in a long ponytail and soft green eyes looking at him with concern. Ken barely registered who it was before he tried to continue on his way.

"H—Hey, I'm worried about you." She said, tightening her grip on his arms.

Ken could have broken free easily, but he didn't. He turned to her pretty face and stared into her soft eyes. In another life he might have chased after this woman, they might have even been perfect for each other.

However, there was only room enough for one woman in his heart, and this was not her.

"I'm fine. You'll hear about it in the news tomorrow." He said softly, removing her hands from his arm. They were soft and slightly cold. His touch lingered briefly before he turned his body and began to run, leaving the woman alone once again.

Ken ran with no destination in mind. He ran along the streets of New York, his body soon layered with sweat. For the first time in a long while, he didn't know what to do next.

A bitterness crept into his psyche, taking root. He found it ironic that even while being fully healthy, he was unable to play baseball. The circumstances were different to his previous life, but the end result was the same.

As he continued to run, he eventually found himself in front of a familiar building. It was only now that he realized it was Ai's dorm.

Ken began to catch his breath and pulled out his phone, noticing he had some missed calls from Steve and Tara. He ignored them and pulled up his contacts, hovering over Ai's number. He didn't want to talk about what happened, he just didn't want to be alone right now.

Just as he was about to put away the phone, his phone began to vibrate. Looking down at the caller, it was Ai.

"Hey..."

"Where are you!? Tara called me saying that you disappeared."

"I'm out the front of your dorm..."

"Eh? I—I'll be down in a moment."

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

## **Chapter 767 - 767: Fallout & Summer Break (1)**

The news hit the media the next day, drumming up a ton of backlash for the NCAA. Prominent Yanks players Masaru Tanaka and Alex Cole both made announcements on their social media denouncing the decision made. .

Columbia University had made their own announcement, making their intent to appeal the decision known to everyone. This had gained much support and many eyes were focused on the issue.

But it was the outcry from the Japanese people which made the most noise. For weeks, Ken's situation had been broadcast within the country, to the point where some of his old friends in the NPB spoke out for him.

Hiroki, Riku, Masayuki and his brother Daichi used their following to organize a boycott of American sports in Japan while Ken remained on the sideline. This was surprisingly effective, tanking the viewership of both the Major League and College baseball in the country.

Of course Ken had not asked for any of this, but nonetheless it had warmed his heart greatly. Unfortunately this had no impact on the decision in the short term and Ken was forced to sit on the sideline and watch his team play.

The Bobcats lost the final series game to Penn, robbing them of their Ivy League Championship trophy despite their historical season. Despite this, Columbia were still awarded a spot in the post season thanks to their win/loss record.

But having lost the momentum and missing a key player in Ken, they struggled against Virginia Tech after defeating Gonzaga, thus putting an end to the season once and for all.

With the final game done, the Senior players like Tristan, Jackson and Ethan were done with college. They had already graduated at the beginning of May and the only reason they stayed was for the post season.

There was a small party held for the end of season, hosted by the coaching staff. While the atmosphere was a little glum, there was at least some good news.

Ethan and Tristan were invited to some private workouts prior to the MLB draft in July. Their stellar season was likely a contributing factor towards their success this year round.

After some heartfelt goodbyes, the team disbanded, set to return when classes resumed in fall. With almost 3 months left of Summer break, Ai and Ken decided to head to Japan for some time.

As always, the flight was torturous, especially for Ken who was approaching closer to 6'6 every day. He had learned his lesson and paid extra for economy plus tickets, but the almost 15 hour flight had nearly killed him.

Only when they arrived on solid ground and he could stretch his limbs did he breathe a sigh of relief.

"We're home..." Ai said, gripping Ken's arm in her own.

"Mmm." Ken replied with a smile.

Once they left the airport, a gust of wind blew against his face, tousling his hair. The air smelled fresh, unlike New York City, giving him a sense of nostalgia.

They caught the train back to Yokohama and left the station, beginning the familiar walk back to Ai's parent's house.

It had been so long since they walked here together and so much had changed. They were no longer those kids in High School, tiptoeing around their relationship.

As Ken's eyes drifted around the familiar street where he used to run every day, he remembered just how simple everything had once been. It might have felt challenging back then, but now that things had changed, he missed it.

He missed when his family lived together, his Yokohama teammates. With the nostalgia came a tinge of sadness. He would never get to experience the joys of his childhood again.

"Do you remember when I hit you on my bike over there?" Ai asked, nudging him slightly.

Ken let out a small laugh, "Yeah... Then we went to deliver bread to the turbo granny."

Ai giggled, "Then you took me back to your house to get patched up." She recalled, reminiscing fondly.

"Yeah... Mom was already trying to matchmake us back then."

"Haha, my mom too. No wonder they got along so well."

The two walked in silence for a while and could soon see her parents house from the end of the street. Instead of continuing forward, Ai stopped in place and tugged Ken's arm.

"Do you remember what happened here?" She asked shyly.

"No?" Ken replied with a confused expression.

Ai frowned and was about to admonish him, however before she could, Ken's finger lifted her chin and he planted a deep kiss onto her lips. Whatever complaints she had soon melted away.

Only after a few moments did Ken relinquish his lips giving a wicked grin. "Just kidding~"

Ai puffed her cheeks, sending a playful punch to his gut. "You almost made me angry." She stated, but there was humor in her tone.

"Come on, let's go. Apparently Dad's been waiting by the window all day for us to come home."

"Eh?" Ken was a little surprised, but he still followed along.

As they got to the end of the driveway, Ken saw the shutters move briefly, as if someone had just closed them in a hurry. Yet even as they approached the door, no one came out of the house.

Knock Knock

The moment Ken's knuckles rapped on the door it swung open, revealing Tetsu in his navy blue singlet. The guy had flour sprinkled on him as usual and his arms were as thick as ever.

He eyed Ken, starting from his feet all the way up to his head. Since Ken had grown much taller since he'd last seen him, Tetsu had to crane his neck in order to see his face.

"Hey Dad, I missed you." Ai said, throwing her arms around his neck and pulling him into a big hug. The guy mumbled a few words, his face turning slightly red.

When they had finished the hug, Ken moved forward and held out his hand. "Mr. Koyama, it's nice to see you again."

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

## **Chapter 768 - 768: Fallout & Summer Break (2)**

Tetsu slapped the hand away almost immediately. "How many times I gotta tell ya to stop callin' me that. Call me Tetsu ya bastard." He said, wearing a big grin.

Out of nowhere he moved forward and hugged him tightly, squeezing the air out of Ken's lungs with his huge arms. Even with the weight training he'd been doing, it seemed he was no match for the man's strength.

"O—Okay." Ken wheezed. "It's good to see you again Tetsu."

Despite feeling a little awkward at first, Ken soon felt right at home. Seeing Naomi again reminded him of his own mother, and he was quickly made to feel welcomed in the house.

As tumultuous as his relationship had been with Tetsu during the past few years, one fact remained. The guy had walked into a hostile environment and rescued him when he was captured by Tetsuhiro's thugs.

Whatever differences they had at the time were annulled right then and there. The only reason why he felt so awkward afterwards is because he felt guilty about whisking Ai all the way to America without her parents.

He couldn't imagine what sort of worry a parent would have in that situation.

They were treated to a lovely Japanese meal by Naomi who despite being terrible at baking, was great in the kitchen. This had always confused Ken since they ran a bakery full time.

Both Ken and Ai were jet lagged from the long flight and the time differences. After dinner, Ai excused herself and went upstairs, beckoning for Ken to follow. However, Tetsu grabbed his arm and spoke for him, "He'll be up soon."

Ken raised his eyebrow, but waved at Ai to go without him. He needed to chat to Tetsu at some point anyway, though he would have wished he was in better shape to do so.

"Follow me." Tetsu said, standing up from the table and heading towards the lounge room. He had been here before on the day where Ai moved. Back then he had met Tetsu's gangster friend Tsukasa.

Once in the lounge, Tetsu gestured for Ken to have a seat. He then left the room briefly, returning with an expensive looking bottle of whiskey.

"I know yer not 20 yet. But 1 drink shouldn't hurt ya." He said with a grin, procuring two glasses and pouring some in each. The guy then left once more, returning with two large ice cubes.

Ken felt like it would be rude to refuse, even though he had yet to drink anything since regressing. But in his previous life, he could only afford beer, so whiskey was something that would be a rare treat.

Handing him the glass, Tetsu let out a grin. "It burns on the way down, just so ya know."

Ken smiled and took a sip, feeling the burn almost instantly. Despite this, the aftertaste was smooth and had a lovely wood flavor the sat upon his palate.

"Good whiskey." He commented, raising the glass in appreciation.

"Bah, what would you know about good whiskey?" Tetsu said letting out a laugh, but he didn't disagree.

"Ya been takin' good care of my girl?" He asked, swishing the liquor around in his glass.

"Of course. We see each other every week unless I'm traveling with the team." Ken responded with a nod. He would see her more if he wasn't worried that he would become a distraction to her studies.

"Mmm... I trust ya Ken. I heard the news about yer suspension. Those bunch'a bastards are way outta line." He spat, clearly upset about the situation.

Ken shrugged, "It is what it is, the university is doing what they can to appeal the verdict, but who knows what will happen."

Tetsu was silent, taking another sip of his whiskey. "Are ya doin' alright?"

Ken took his own glass and sipped once more, savoring the burn. He felt like a cigarette right now, feeling that it would pair well with the burn of the whiskey.

"About as well as I can." He eventually responded. For some reason, the Tetsu today felt dependable and easy to talk to. It was as if he really was a father, and not just some irrational kid like he had acted in the past.

Tetsu let out a hollow chuckle. "Yer all grown up now Ken." He said, his words filled with both pride and something more.

Ken raised an eyebrow, "I wasn't before?"

He shook his head. "When I look at ya now, I see a man. A man who will do whatever it takes for his loved ones, even if it means gettin' dragged over the coals."

Ken listened, swishing the last bit of whiskey in his glass. Tetsu's words made him feel warm inside. For some reason, the validation seemed to fill a hole, one that he didn't know existed until now.

He brought the cup up to his mouth and gulped down the last bit of whiskey, feeling like he'd just swallowed a tongue of fire. He embraced the burn and locked eyes with Tetsu who was sitting across from him.

"I have an ulterior motive for staying here." He said plainly, "it's about Ai."

Tetsu's face suddenly blanched with shock, his bottom lip quivering. "D—Don't tell me..."

Ken nodded and was about to speak up, however he was interrupted.

"AI'S PREGNANT!?! I'm gonna be a Granddaddy?" he shot to his feet, tears already pooling in the corners of his eyes.

"W—Wait. That's not—"

The sound of footsteps rang out as Naomi burst into the room. "I'm gonna be a Grandmomma!? This is the best day of my life!" She squealed, running into the arms of Tetsu.

The two embraced, jumping up and down on the spot. The pure joy emitted from them would have been wholesome, were it not for the fact that they had completely misunderstood.

Ken massaged his temples and spoke up, "She's not pregnant! I wanted to get your blessing to marry her." He stated, trying not to show his annoyance.

"Eh?"

"EH!?"

Both Naomi and Tetsu looked at each other briefly before obvious disappointment flashed on their features.

"Oh... I see. That's wonderful."

Ken sighed, however he was assaulted by another bone crushing hug by Tetsu in the next moment.

"You've got my blessing kiddo."

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

## **Chapter 769 - 769: Same Wavelength (1)**

A few days later, Ken bid farewell to Ai and headed down to Osaka in order to meet up with Daichi. They would be in Japan for almost 2 months, hence they didn't need to spend the whole duration together.

Plus, Ken wanted to have some alone time with his brother whom he hadn't seen in such a long time. Now that he thought about it, the last time they saw each other was about a year ago.

This time, he called in advance.



After getting off the bullet train and heading out of the station, Ken saw a familiar figure with his back against the wall, staring down at his phone. The guy had wide shoulders and a baby face, his hair styled in the latest trend.

Ken stopped in place, looking the guy up and down. He looked more like a fashion icon than a baseball player, causing a teasing smile to appear on his face.

Staying out of his vision, Ken walked up and spoke up in a fanatic voice, "C—Could I please have your autograph Daichi~"

The figure stiffened, and he turned around, holding his hand out as if to accept a pen and whatever item they wanted signed. Yet upon turning, he saw a towering figure causing him to flinch.

"Damn it, you tall bastard." Daichi exclaimed, letting out a laugh. He moved in and hugged Ken joyfully. "It's been so long brother."

Ken smiled, patting the guy on the back, "Too long..."

"What's up with you these days? You get a modeling contract or something?" Ken asked, pulling back and gesturing to his outfit.

Daichi scoffed, "Miho threw out all my old clothes, I just wear whatever is in my closet." He admitted, letting out a dry chuckle.

"You're looking good man. You healthy?"

"I'm in the best shape of my life." Daichi retorted with a sly grin. However, his face faltered a moment later, "How are you holding up after the suspension?"

Seeing how the conversation had already turned depressing, Ken threw his arm over his brother's shoulder and began to walk, "Let's not talk about such depressing things. We're going shopping."

"Shopping? Don't you hate shopping?" Daichi asked in surprise.

"Yup, I couldn't think of anything worse to do with my time." Ken admitted with a grin. "But this is something that I need to do."

Daichi rolled his eyes, "So why are you taking me along?"

Ken let out a laugh, "You're famous, maybe I'll get a discount if I'm with you."

The two laughed together and made their way into the shopping district of Osaka. It wasn't until they arrived at a jewelry store that Daichi finally put the pieces together.

"W—Wait, you're buying a ring!?" He asked in shock.

Instead of teasing his brother, Ken nodded. "I've already asked Ai's father for his blessing. I just need the ring and an appropriate time to do it."

Daichi was speechless for a while, but his mouth soon blossomed into a smile. "Looks like we're on the same page brother..."

"Eh? What do you mean?"

Daichi pulled out his phone and opened his gallery before handing it to Ken.

"Don't tell me... You also bought a ring?" Ken was flabbergasted. Even though they were so far away from each other, they seemed to be at the same point in their relationships, however a frown crept onto his face.

"When did you buy this? And why didn't you tell me?" He asked suspiciously.

Daichi let out an amused chuckle, "I bought it last week." He said, retrieving the phone. "I already told mom and dad, it's your fault if you didn't talk to them."

"Ah..." Ken felt a little guilty. He had not been speaking to his parents as frequently as he should have, to the point where even Daichi who was across the world spoke to them more than he did.

"Well congratulations man. When are you going to pop the question?"

At this, Daichi's face turned a little anxious. "I'm thinking of doing it at Miho's graduation at the start of next year."

"Why so anxious? I'm sure that would be the perfect time to do it." Ken replied.

Daichi shot him a look, "Do you remember that her father is the Dean at Tokyo University? I would have to run everything past him first."

"Ah, I see your quandary. But you have to ask for his permission first right? Why not bring it up then." Ken queried.

Letting out a sigh, Daichi nodded, "He's an intimidating man. I'm afraid he might look down on me because I don't have a college education."

At this, Ken let out a peel of laughter. "If he gives you trouble, just talk to Coach Takashi... He'll sort the guy out quick, smart and in a hurry."

At the mention of the old U18 National team coach, Daichi's face froze. "Ah damn it! I forgot that I would also need the old man's blessing too. He dotes on Miho far more than her father does."

"Oops, my bad." Ken replied, though he found the situation a little funny. He had been dreading his own conversation with Tetsu about asking for his daughter's hand in marriage, but it seemed his brother had it far worse.

"I'm sure everything will be fine bro. Now come and help me decide what ring to get." He said, ushering Daichi into the store.

They were promptly served by one of the staff who asked if they needed help.

"Ahem, hi there. My brother Daichi Takagi has taken time out of his schedule of being a star player for the Hanshin Tigers in order to help me choose a ring for my girlfriend. Could you help us out? And perhaps offer a discount of some sort?"

Ken's words were over the top, causing the attendant to blink a few times in confusion. "R—Right this way please."

Daichi facepalmed, trying to hide the redness of his cheeks from the embarrassment he was feeling.

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

## **Chapter 770 - 770: Same Wavelength (2)**

An hour later, Ken walked out of the jewelery shop with a satisfied expression on his face, a contrast to his brother who was dying of embarrassment.

"How can you be so shameless?" Daichi asked.

Ken shrugged, "I'm just a poor college student. You expect me to pay full price?"

"Didn't Grandpa give you a heap of money?"

"Yeah, and it won't last if I spend it frivolously. Plus, I intend to pay him back when I finally make it to the league." Ken said matter-of-factly.

"I guess you're right." Daichi replied, though it still didn't reduce the embarrassment that he felt. Every single sentence Ken had spoken would make reference to his position as a professional in the NPB.

He had never used his status to get a discount on anything, so doing so felt wrong.

But he soon threw it to the back of his mind, choosing to ignore it. "So? Now that you've got the ring, have you thought about how you're going to propose?"

Ken shook his head, "I haven't thought that far yet."

"What about at a baseball game?"

"Really? Wouldn't that be too embarrassing?" Ken replied.

"Now you're talking about embarrassment?" Daichi shook his head incredulously. "Why don't you come to one of our home games at Koshien stadium and use the jumbo screen. The place has a lot of sentimental value and means a lot to all of us."

Ken froze on the spot, his brother's words sending a shockwave through his body. Koshien was where he and Ai had basically started their relationship. He could still remember the final game when he was forced to stay on the bench, she had been by his side, cheering him up.

Just thinking about declaring his love and intent to marry her there felt right, almost as if everything had come full circle. After a few moments, his mind was set on it.

"You're right brother... Thank you." He said, giving a smile.

"Any chance you can get us some good tickets? At a discount maybe?"

Daichi's face stiffened, "Do you really want to go down that route again?"

"Oh crap... How could I have forgotten?" Ken mumbled, remembering his suspension. He had been so caught up in the moment that he had forgotten about all of his worries.

"I'll pay for the tickets myself, I wouldn't want to get into any more trouble." He said eventually.

Once the two were done shopping, Daichi needed to stop by his apartment before heading to the stadium for practice. Ken was invited to sit in and watch, provided he didn't interfere.

Having some curiosity about the difference in training sessions between college and the NPB, Ken agreed wholeheartedly. They arrived at the stadium and went through the players entrance.

Ken's tall form stood out, getting a lot of looks from the staff members around, though no one seemed to recognize him. They all greeted Daichi with familiarity, which was understandable.

While Daichi went to the locker rooms to change, Ken walked out onto the field and suddenly felt a rush of nostalgia. He bent down and grabbed a small handful of dirt, feeling it in his hands.

He had a bag of this dirt in his dorm back in New York. This showed how much this place meant to him even now.

As he looked up, he saw the familiar field and thousands of empty seats that would be overflowing at certain times of the year. Though he practiced at this place almost every night in his Image Training, seeing it in person was much different.

"What are you doing here?" A voice called out, filled with suspicion.

Ken turned, only to see another familiar face. "Coach Hashira? Sorry... Daichi invited me along to watch him practice, I hope you don't mind." He said, bowing slightly.

Coach Hashira was picked up by the Hanshin Tigers at the start of the season. He was the coach for Shinjuku High for many years before being noticed by the organization. In fact, in his previous life, he was the one who saw Daichi's talent in High School and drafted him into the team.

"Why do you look familiar?" Coach Hashira asked, narrowing his deep brown eyes. The middle-aged man had dyed black hair and eyebrows and was practically dressed with a whistle hanging around his neck.

"I used to play for Yokohama High, coach. We played against each other a couple of times when you coached Shinjuku High." Ken stated.

The man's face frowned for a few moments as if he was pouring through his memories. "AH! Ken? Is that you?"

"Yes sir, it's good to see you again." Ken replied modestly.

"Hahahaha, I knew it." He guffawed, holding his stomach. "Man, I've really got to thank you for thumping us in the first round back then. Because of you, Tatsuo blossomed into a powerhouse. If it wasn't for your brother, we would have won the next two Koshien's." He said with a little regret.

Hearing the name Tatsuo, Ken flinched. This was the name that haunted him in his previous life, the naturally talented shortstop who had toyed with him in the opening match of Koshien.

He had not intended to force the guy to improve, but merely wanted to exact his own type of vengeance. But seeing how the guy had given up at the end made him feel pissed off. Even now he could remember striking him out in front of the whole stadium of cheering fans.

"I'm glad that everything worked out." Ken said politely.

"Mmm very much so. Your name has been heard quite a lot within the pro circuit recently, I hear that you were suspended." Coach Hashira commented.

Ken didn't really want to talk about it, but he also didn't want to be rude, so he merely nodded in affirmation.

"Well, feel free to watch our practice. If there's some time at the end I might even let you pitch to your brother in the bullpen." He said, sending him a wink.

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

## Chapter 771 - 771: True Bro (1)

Ken sat patiently by the side as the team went through their practice. The thing he was most surprised about was that most of the players went through their own routines and only for certain drills did they group up.

At first Ken thought they looked a bit lazy, but once the drills began he was quickly proven wrong. These guys were professionals. The ease at which they were performing tasks was what made it seem like they weren't putting in 100% effort.

'So this is a professional team...!' Ken thought, his eyes locked onto Daichi.

The guy was popular within the team despite being a rookie. The older players ruffled his hair and treated him well, as if they were looking out for him.

This brought a smile to Ken's face, but it also made him feel a little jealous. If he had decided to stay in Japan, would he have been accepted like this into a professional team?

But this wasn't the time for such thoughts. If he continued along this line of thinking then he would get depressed. After all, he was still suspended from playing in College, and wouldn't be able to play organized baseball for almost a full year.

When the group activities finished, the pitchers and catchers made their way over to the bullpen. Daichi waved at him, gesturing for him to come over.

It was only now that some of the players noticed his presence since he'd been sitting down the entire time.

"Who is the beanstalk?" A player asked Daichi, within Ken's earshot.

'Beanstalk?' Ken felt his eye twitch.

"That's my brother Ken." Daichi replied, holding back a laugh.

"Eh? That's the guy you've been talking about? He's pretty damn tall..."

Ken didn't exactly appreciate being talked about while he was within earshot, so he walked up and introduced himself. "I'm Ken Takagi, Daichi's older brother." He said, holding his hand out.

"Keiji Takamura." The guy responded, taking the hand. He looked to be in his mid 20's and was fit. The first thing that Ken noticed was the grip of his handshake. Even if he didn't know that the guy was a pitcher, that alone would be enough to assume so.

"You've pitched really well this season." Ken added with a smile.

"Hehe, it's easier with this guy giving me leads." Keiji responded, nudging Daichi.

"Yeah, tell me about it." Ken laughed.

"Oh that's right, you're also a pitcher." The guy nodded and turned to Daichi as if Ken was not present, "Is he any good?"

Daichi let out a chuckle, "He's good. At least he was back when I was catching for him."

"Oho? You doubt me little brother?" Ken replied, feeling his ego attacked.

Keiji ignored him and asked Daichi, "Who is better? Me or him?"

This time, Daichi looked pained, as if he didn't want to answer the question. The duo of Ken and Keiji glared at him, waiting for the answer.

"Heh... It's been too long to give a proper answer." He said, trying to skirt the question.

Keiji frowned, "Daichi-chan, this question should be a no-brainer. After all, I'm the Ace for the Tigers..."

Ken could feel the tension rising, so he quickly took a step back. "Let's not pressure him. I'm sure we have our different styles."

"Yeah, this is why I'm a professional and you're still a no-name at university." He replied simply.

'This bastard... I tried to give an easy way out but he wants to be persistent.' Ken grit his teeth and tried to swallow the insult. He didn't want to make things difficult for Daichi who would have to deal with the fallout.

However, Daichi frowned in the next moment and stood up to Keiji, "Did you know, my brother was the first pitcher to ever throw a perfect game at Summer Koshien? He's also been throwing over 100mph ever since he was 15 years old. He's the most hardworking and dedicated person I've ever known, and the very reason why I even got into baseball in the first place."

Keiji was taken aback, not expecting Daichi to have his hackles raised. Before he could reply, Daichi stepped forward and got into his face.

"I like to think that I'm an easygoing guy, but one thing that I won't tolerate is having my big brother disrespected in front of me." He said coldly. "Now get into the bullpen and warm your arm up."

Ken's eyes were wide open in shock, not believing what he was seeing. Was this really his brother right now? The same guy that was bullied in middle school and who was far too anxious to even speak to people some time ago.

Keiji's expression twisted and for a moment Ken thought he might have needed to step in, however the guy cooled down. "You're right, I took things too far." He turned to Ken and bowed slightly, "I apologize for my rudeness."

Then he jogged off to the bullpen, leaving the two brothers standing on the field.

There was a few moments silence before Ken placed his arm around his brother's shoulder. "Look at you little bro, still bossing the pitchers around like you own the place." He said teasingly.

However, he felt warm inside. He was very much like Daichi, he didn't care what people thought about him, but when they talked about his family, he would react like this.

Daichi let out a sigh, "He's a good guy but he's very competitive. I don't doubt that he knows all about you and was just trying to get you to challenge him."

Ken let out a small laugh, "He sure has a roundabout way of going about it. Why didn't he just challenge me himself?"

Daichi shook his head. "He's a professional player Ken. It wouldn't look good if he were to challenge an amateur pitcher, no matter their skill level. Only if you issued the challenge could his pride allow him to accept it." He said knowingly.

"Ah... Makes sense."



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

## Chapter 772 - 772: True Bro (2)

Ken decided not to pitch that afternoon, mainly because he didn't want to cause anymore tension between Daichi and his teammates. He also had not packed cleats and didn't want to risk injuring himself while pitching.

The training session ended and the two retreated to Daichi's apartment where Ken would be staying the night. It was a rather simple place and the house was pretty empty, a typical bachelor pad.

There were signs that a woman had been present, mainly because of all the hair products in the bathroom, but other than that, it was largely untouched.

The two ordered takeout and sat down in the lounge room, popping the TV on. Like most men who got their own place, there was a large TV, with the sole purpose of watching sports.

Daichi put a game on, the Chiba Cougars against Hiroshima Koi.

"Oh! There's Hiroki!" Ken called out, pointing at first base. The guy looked even bigger than he had the last time Ken saw him, and his tight uniform was practically bursting due to his muscular figure.

"Yeah, he's been playing well this year." Daichi commented his face looking a little pained. "He's one of the hardest batters to strike out in the league. I almost need to let him hit and hope that it goes to one of our fielders." He said wryly.

"Hehehe, yeah that guy was always great at batting." Ken said, his eyes full of reminiscence.

"Hey, so I talked to the arena staff about getting a proposal on the big screen. They said it's about 30,000 yen, and they'll need at least a day's notice for it." Daichi said.

"30,000 yen... That's about \$200, not bad." Ken nodded. "What else do they need from me?"

"A personalized message and your seat numbers for the camera crew. I think it will take place at the start of the 7th inning, so you'll just have to live with the anxiety for a while." Daichi said with a grin.

As he mentioned the anxiety, Ken felt his chest tighten. Now that plans were being made, it all suddenly felt very real. Even though he'd asked Tetsu for Ai's hand in marriage, he had yet to pop the question.

While he and Ai had already discussed marriage briefly, and he had gotten confirmation that she would say yes, that didn't make it any easier. The pessimistic side of his brain told him that something might go wrong, like he would lose the ring, or need the toilet as the time window approached.

"Bro, I'm just kidding... Don't get cold feet now." Daichi said, trying to calm him down after seeing the guy pale.

"Y—Yeah no problem..."

"There's a game this Saturday. Book your tickets online and send through the details to this email address." Daichi said, handing Ken a card. "You can use my laptop to do it."

"Alright, I'll do it later."

However, Daichi was having none of it. "Knowing you, you'll forget or might even chicken out. Do it now and get it over with."

So Ken was forced to buy his tickets and send through the information to the email provided, all while Daichi was looking over his shoulder.

Ken purchased 4 tickets for himself, Ai and her parents. He thought that they would appreciate also being present while their daughter was proposed to.

Once it was done, Ken sat back in the chair and let out a nervous breath. He felt a little better now that it was all organized, but there was still some anxiety.

"You should probably call Ai and her parents to make sure they can attend..." Daichi said.

So he did just that.

"Hey, I'm with Daichi. You're on speaker phone." Ken said.

"Hi Daichi~"

"Hello Ai, I hope you're well."

After some pleasantries, Ken brought up the baseball game and said he'd bought tickets for her and her parents to attend.

"Ah, this Saturday? Sorry, I already made plans with Rie to go to a convention. Mom and Dad should be able to go though."

"O—Okay..."

"I've got to go, love you."

BEEP BEEP BEEP

The two were silent, no one knowing what to say in the moment. Daichi realized their mistake in that moment, "You probably should have called to confirm the date first..."

"You don't say?" Ken said glumly.

However, he froze in the next moment, pulling up his contacts.

RING RING

"Who are you calling?" Daichi asked with curiosity.

RING RING

The phone rang for quite a while, until finally a voice answered.

"Ken buddy, I'm a little busy at the moment. Can I call you ba—"

"Hiroki! I need you to get Rie to cancel her plans with Ai this Saturday. I don't care what you say, but I'll owe you one." Ken shouted, his voice desperate.

"A—Alright, I'll get it done."

BEEP BEEP BEEP

"Dude... You called Hiroki in the middle of the game!?" Daichi asked, his shock evident.

"It couldn't wait."

The two turned to the live match and saw the coach saying a few words to Hiroki, looking rather upset. However, Hiroki made his way onto the deck and began his warm up swings.

After the previous batter scored a single, Hiroki stepped up to the plate, his powerful body poised to strike.

The first ball was pitched and like a well oiled machine, Hiroki swung with great might. The crack of the bat hitting the ball reverberated even through the TV speakers, causing the two to open their mouths in shock.

The commentators were practically jumping out of their seats as the ball flew deep into the stands.

"That's gotta be the biggest home run of the season! Easily over 400 feet!"

"Damn... You're right, he has gotten better." Ken said simply.

About 5 minutes after Hiroki returned to the dugout, Ken's phone rang. It was Ai.

"Hey, you didn't cancel my ticket yet did you? Rie just canceled our trip on Saturday so I'm free now."

Ken practically had tears in his eyes, 'You're the best Hiroki!'

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

## **Chapter 773 - 773: Show Time (1)**

"Are you sure you can afford this Ken? You didn't have to bring us along as well." Naomi asked, seeming a little anxious.

"It's fine, my dad gave me an allowance." Ken lied, sending the woman a smile.

"Yeah don't sweat it honey, he might be poor now but he'll be a Major Leaguer in a few years. HAHAHA." Tetsu spoke up, wrapping his arm around his wife's shoulder.

Ken's eyebrow twitched in annoyance, but he let the words go. He wasn't poor, in fact he probably had more money in savings than both Ai's parents. Not that this mattered to him at all.

He felt a soft hand squeeze his own. Ken turned to see Ai wearing a brilliant smile, "Don't worry about him, he's just happy that you invited them."

Ken tried to smile back, but seeing her reminded him of what was going to come. He felt his stomach twist in a knot, feeling like he needed to use the bathroom.

"What's wrong?" Ai asked with concern.

"N—Nothing, just a sore stomach. I'll head to the bathroom quickly." Ken replied, getting up from his seat.

"Oi, the game's about to start, don't take too long." Tetsu called out to him.

Ken walked up the stairs and found the bathroom before going into one of the stalls. Thankfully they were clean.

Taking a seat he tried to calm himself down.

'Why isn't my Dauntless trait working?' He thought, feeling his heart pounding in his chest. Now that the day he was going to propose had arrived, his nerves were at their peak.

He had thought that his trusty trait would keep him calm in this situation, but it seemed to be either faulty, or not working at all.

'Why is this happening Mika?'

[I have made the trait inactive for now.]

'W—What? Why? I'm practically soiling myself right now.'

[Answer: Dauntless trait minimizes stimulus of the limbic system responsible for emotions such as anxiety, fear, happiness and love. If user activates the trait, they will not be able to fully experience such emotions.]

Ken froze. If this was true, then activating the trait would basically be numbing his emotions. For an act that was meant to showcase one's love for their partner, doing so would be cruel to both himself and Ai.

After a few moments, Ken took a deep breath out. 'Thank you Mika...'

He had not asked her to do this, but he appreciated it. Now that it was out in the open, Ken understood that he needed to fully feel these emotions, to know how important this moment was to him.

[No problem.]

Ken reached into his pocket and pulled out the ring, still in its box. He opened it, revealing a cushion cut diamond engagement ring in a four-prong setting. The employee had said that it was 1 carat, but he had no idea what it meant, only that it was expensive.

He eyed it for a few more moments before closing the box and placing it away. His expression turned into one of determination and he left the bathroom with renewed vigor.

"Are you feeling better?" Ai asked when he finally sat down.

"Mmm, sorry for worrying you." Ken said smilingly.

The game soon got underway in a rather packed Koshien Stadium. They cheered for the home squad loudly, creating a hearty atmosphere.

"There he is!" Ai said, pointing to Daichi who had stepped up to bat.

Ken sat up taller in his chair, much to the dismay of the poor person behind him. Seeing Daichi in the Hanshin Tigers uniform reminded him of his previous life, though things were much different now.

On the mound was another familiar face, James Anderson. This was the guy whom he'd taken as a mentor through the system and learned most of his breaking balls from. He was advanced in years, but he was still a fan favorite, even in away stadiums.

Ken looked at the ex-Major Leaguer and could still see the silhouette of his younger self. If the guy was 10 years younger, the duel might have been a lot closer.

THWACK!

The sound echoed over the arena, followed by the roars of the crowd. The ball flew over the back fence and into the stands. Ken jumped to his feet and cheered, as did Ai.

As Ken watched his brother raise his arm and run around the bases, he truly felt happy in that moment. He wished that his parents were also here to witness this night, but it wasn't like he had told them in advance what was happening since it was a spur of the moment decision.

After the home run, the Tigers quickly took control of the game. With their ace Keiji Takamura on the mound, the next 6 innings resulted in only a few hits with no runs for the Yokohama Warriors.

Throughout the entire time, Ken was focused on the game. He wanted nothing more than to rush down and jump on the mound, even if he knew that he wouldn't get as far as the barricade.

Without realizing, his hands were balled into fists and his leg was bouncing.

'I just want to play...'

He felt a hand on his arm, breaking his concentration.

"Don't worry, you'll get to play again soon I promise." Ai said warmly.

Ken relaxed, feeling a warmth within. This woman understood him so well that she could practically tell what he was thinking at all times.

"Everyone, please turn your attention to the big screen, we have an announcement from one of our guests in the stadium."

Ken's heart leapt into his throat and began to beat wildly.

'It's happening already? Wasn't it meant to be in the 7th inning?' He cried inwardly.

However, it was currently the top of the 7th, he had been far too preoccupied to notice the passing of the time. He saw Ai's head turn to the jumbo screen with curiosity, giving him a small window of time to make his move.

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

## **Chapter 774 - 774: Show Time (2)**

The message upon the screen read: "From the moment I laid eyes on you in this life, I knew you were the one I wanted to share it with. You are as beautiful on the inside as you are on the outside. Will you do me the honor of becoming my wife, so we can chase our dreams together?"

Ken was the one who had written the small proposal, so he didn't take the time to look. Using the opportunity while Ai was distracted, he slid to the ground and knelt down on one knee, fishing the box out of his pocket.

He was so nervous that he almost dropped the ring box, but his quick reflexes allowed him to hold onto it. Ken stared at Ai's face as she read what was on the screen in confusion and waited for her to realize.

The words on the jumbo screen disappeared, replaced by a live camera shot showing Ken and Ai. After seeing herself, Ai was initially confused, but then her eyes widened in shock.

She turned around, only to see Ken down on one knee, holding up a box with a beautiful ring inside. Her face flushed red and her emotions hit her all at once, threatening to begin the waterworks.

"Ai Koyama, will you make me the luckiest man in the world and marry me?" Ken asked, his voice a little shaky.

Behind Ken, Naomi had already burst into tears and was being hugged by Tetsu.

Ai was silent for a moment, as if trying to taking everything in. She could see the shaking of Ken's hands which held the box, and realized that she needed to give an answer.

"Yes! Of course I will, silly." She replied, tears now spilling from her eyes. Ai held out her left hand and Ken placed the ring on her ring finger. It somehow fit perfectly. Search\* The website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

The crowd cheered after seeing that everything went well and the two embraced. Ken leaned down and kissed his woman passionately, yet still did his best to hold back in front of the huge crowd.

Now that the question had been asked and answered, all that Ken felt was happiness emanating from within, like a warm glow that overcame him. This was the happiest moment of his life and something that he would cherish.

The game continued on, but Ken could no longer pay attention to it. After receiving congratulations from Ai's parents, he suggested that they leave early to celebrate. A notion that was quickly agreed on.

Ken and Ai walked the entire way arm in arm, their joy evident.

The group went out to dinner at a Yakiniku place where they celebrated heartily. Tetsu drank to his heart's content, mumbling something about his little girl no longer needing him. Naomi consoled him, but she also had drunk quite a bit.

Only Ai and Ken were sober, enjoying each others company. Ai couldn't keep her eyes off the sparkling new ring on her finger.

"This ring is so beautiful... How did you know my size?" She asked with sparkling eyes.

Ken didn't want to admit that it had been a complete guess, but there was no other explanation. "It must have been fate." He said lamely.

"PFFT." Ai giggled, seeing the serious expression on Ken's face when he said this. She was in a great mood and they enjoyed themselves thoroughly.



"Maybe we should take these two back..." Ken suggested, gesturing to Naomi and Tetsu who were clearly intoxicated.

"Eh!? I ain't goin' back home ya bastard!" Tetsu exclaimed, hugging the bottle of beer close to his chest.

"You're not going home, we got you that nice hotel room remember?" Ken explained in exasperation.

"Oh, in that case..." Tetsu grabbed his beer bottle and chugged it down before shakily standing up from the chair and almost stumbling.

Ken was able to hold onto him before he went crashing into the hotplate, saving the guy some pain. Like this, they made their way to the hotel which was only a 10 minute walk. But with Tetsu's stumbling, it took a little longer.

When they finally got to the room, Ai made sure that the two were safe inside before joining him in the hall.

"Where to now fiancé? She asked, letting out a cute giggle.

Ken contemplated, "We can either go back to the hotel room, or go out for dessert."

Ai moved her hand forward and touched his chest, running it down to his stomach softly, "How about we have dessert in our room instead?" She said lasciviously.

"T—That works too..." Ken replied, sweeping her light figure into his arms.

She let out a sound of shock, but it was quickly followed by giggles as Ken carried her down the hall with enthusiasm. He got to the door and tried to fish out the card, which was a little difficult while holding the woman in his arms.

With his fine motor control he was able to get it free and successfully open up the door to the room.

He took her to the bed and placed her gently upon it, moving forward and kissing her deeply upon the lips. Ken could feel his body heat up in anticipation of what was to come.

Ai giggled, placing her finger upon his lips and stopping him in his tracks.

"Let me freshen up first." She said, sending him a wink. "Go lay in bed, no peaking."

His disappointment at being stopped quickly disappeared. Ken heeded her words and took off his shirt before jumping into bed with his eyes closed.

Around five minutes later, Ai emerged from the bathroom wearing a lacy black lingerie, contrasting with her flawless light skin.

"Open your eyes." She said, her tone slightly husky.

Ken didn't hesitate and he was greeted with a feast for his eyes. Her lithe figure and impressive assets were barely hidden by the lace, making for an appetizing display.

"Truly a decadent dessert." He said.

Ai giggled in response, "Well, are you going to stare at me all night, or are you going to unwrap me?" She asked.

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

## **Chapter 775 - 775: Celebration (1)**

Michael made his way into the elevator, his hands balled into fist. His heart was beating loudly in his chest as anxiety crawled through him like a snake, making his limbs feel heavy.

As he entered and pressed the button for the 3rd floor, he saw Shirley his receptionist about to enter. But after raising her gaze and seeing him, she quickly turned and walked past, as if she didn't want to see him.

This caused fresh anger to rise, drowning out his anxiety briefly. He pressed the button to close the door a few times, mumbling something to himself.

"That bastard... Couldn't even take your punishment gracefully. Kids these days are rotten to the core..." search the website to access chapters of novels early and in the highest quality.

As the doors closed, Michael seethed inwardly. After handing his verdict to Columbia University, his life had turned to hell. At first things were silent, and he strolled into the office with a renewed sense of purpose, his sense of justice satiated for now.

At least until the next case.

But after a few days, things went nuclear. Not only was the media all over the NCAA, Columbia University had appealed the decision, even threatening legal action should a satisfactory outcome not be reached.

This in conjunction with the reported boycott of American sports in Japan had caused Michael to become somewhat of a pariah in the office. The people whom he once thought respected him were now avoiding him like the plague.

Shirley was one such example, only talking to him when completely necessary, and only about work. Her tone was professional, so he could not reprimand her at all.

Stewing in his anger, Michael had spent the following week after the incident keeping to himself. The cases which used to bring him satisfaction now seemed annoying, significantly ruining his mood.

Earlier he had received a call from his boss, telling him to come to the 3rd floor. This had instantly filled Michael with anxiety, for his pay review was coming up and he was currently embroiled in all this mess.

He was not fearful for his job since the NCAA was a governing body, and took great care of their employees. This was one of the reasons why he'd been able to deal out harsh punishments without getting in trouble.

Once the elevator stopped on the 3rd floor, he adjusted his tie and walked out, his gaze moving across the office space. It was spacious and more modern looking than his own floor since most of the big wigs resided here.

"Terry." Michael called out, raising his hand and acknowledging a colleague.

However, his face soured upon seeing the guy look directly at him and ignore him a moment later. Feeling humiliated, he mumbled something under his breath and continued to the largest office on the floor.

He rapped gently on the door which was already opened and poked his head in. "Mr. Emmert, you wanted to see me?"

The man was in his late 60's with pale blond hair wearing a black suit and light blue button up beneath it. While he looked in great health for his age, his face looked weary, as if he'd been struggling to sleep of late.

This was the President of the NCAA, Luke Emmert. It had been months since Michael had seen the guy, since his duties as the President required him to travel quite a lot.

"Close the door and take a seat." Luke said, his tone sounding as weary as he looked.

Michael stiffened, but did as he was told. After promptly closing the door he sat in one of the comfy chairs across from the president, feeling his heart hammering in his chest. He had a feeling that he would be reprimanded, and was not happy about potentially losing his pay rise.

Luke sat back in his chair and let out a large sigh, "Do you know why I called you in here?" He asked.

Michael nodded, he would have to be dumb not to understand the reason. "It's because of the Takagi case."

"Good, at least you're not completely oblivious." He remarked, sitting back in his chair. "Michael, I've been in this position for 10 years and I can only think of one occasion where we've had more media attention than right now."

At these words, Michael paled. Even he knew the circumstance that the man was talking about. 8 years ago, the scandal involving an assistant coach at Penn State University. Not only was the situation horrible, the NCAA also came under investigation when emails to the university were leaked.

"Mr. Emmert, you can't tell me that this situation is comparable to back then." He replied indignantly.

"I never said that, Michael... I said that the media attention is comparable." Luke said calmly, "We are receiving huge backlash from multiple angles right now. Networks, Media outlets, Colleges, everyone seems to be up in arms about the punishment."

Michael froze, "M-Mr. Emmert. The value of the tickets escalated the breach into the severe category. A 24 game suspension is well within the jurisdiction of the NCAA rules."

Luke shook his head, disappointment evident in his features. "You want to deal such a harsh punishment to the number 1 High School recruit who plays for an Ivy League school? Not to mention a guy who has been labeled as Japan's precious gem?"

"It seems you have a poor sense of judgment Michael. It is my fault for placing you in this position and letting you do as you please." He said wearily.

"Mr. Emmert! I thi—"

Luke raised his finger, causing Michael to swallow his words.

The President then opened his draw and collected a manila folder which appeared to be bursting from the seams. He placed it on the table in front of him without a word.

Michael raised an eyebrow, waiting for clarification.

"These are your cases over the past 5 years. I must say, you seem to get a kick out of killing the dreams of these kids." He said, tapping the table.

Before Michael could respond, Luke continued. "We're putting you on indefinite administrative leave while we conduct an internal investigation. You are to collect your personal belongings and leave the office immediately."

Luke stood up and gestured to the door where two large men were waiting. "Security will escort you to your desk and out of the building."

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

## **Chapter 776 - 776: Celebration (2)**

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Now engaged, Ken had decided to organize a party while in Japan to celebrate. He decided that he would invite all of his old friend's and teammates to a restaurant in Tokyo, going all out and booking a large room.

It was clear how much this meant to him since Ken was usually tight with his money. He was a little worried since it was short notice, and many were either still at university or playing professionally.

As he and Ai sat in the restaurant by themselves waiting, Ken tapped his foot anxiously as he waited for people to arrive.

"Why are you so nervous?" Ai asked, placing her hand upon his own.

"I'm not nervous..." He replied.

"Welcome guests, please come through."

Ken heard the waitress speak beyond the closed door and suddenly shot to his feet in excitement, causing Ai to let out a small giggle in response.

The door opened and a short guy appeared, his arm interlocked with a woman.

"KEN! I missed you~" He yelled, unhooking his arm and launching himself towards Ken like a child who had not seen their father in years.

The force in which he barged into Ken almost caused him to fall over, but he was too happy to care in that moment. He hugged his friend who he had not seen in such a long time.

"It's good to see you too Shiro." He said with a grin.

"Ai, congratulations on your engagement." Kaori said, moving forward and hugging Ai in a far less dramatic fashion.

"Thank you, and thank you for coming. Ken has been anxious this whole time, thinking no one would show up." Ai said with a small giggle.

"Hah! All Shiro has been talking about this whole week is seeing Ken again." The two began to chat while Ken and his long lost friend caught up.

"Are you still playing baseball man? Why haven't I seen you on TV yet." Ken asked, giving his friend a playful nudge.

Shiro looked a little embarrassed, "I'm playing casually at university, but I think I've given up on joining the pro's." He said seriously. "I'm studying engineering, so a lot of my time is taken up studying."

Ken nodded, feeling a little wistful. He could remember a time where the two were fighting for a common goal, battering and bruising their bodies all in the hopes of improving.

While a little disappointed, Ken could not blame his friend. Not everyone who he played with would share his same dream, nor did they have the required talent and work ethic.

As the two chatted, the next guests arrived.

"Hiroki you bastard! You've been ignoring me for so long." Shiro called out, confronting the Greek god head on.

"Who the hell is this kid?" Hiroki asked, flashing Ken a wicked grin.

Shiro held his heart, as if the blow was too much for him. However, Hiroki ruffled his hair in the next moment, "I've been busy, it's hard being a star player ya know." He said haughtily.

Rie also arrived with Hiroki. Together they looked like a protagonist and female lead from a manga. With Hiroki's muscles and Rie's assets, it felt like they were a perfect match.

Ken grabbed his friend into a hug, welcoming him. He wasn't sure if Hiroki could make it since it was still the middle of the season, but thankfully he was in the area.

The 3 old Yokohama teammates didn't get to chat for long before another figure arrived, this time solo. He was around 6'1 and had a lean but fit body and was dressed well.

The guy looked and saw that everyone had a partner and turned to leave.

"Oi Riku you bastard, where the hell do you think you're going?" Hiroki shouted, causing the guy to freeze on the spot.

"Tch."

He reluctantly turned around and walked in, promptly ignoring Hiroki. "Ken, congratulations on your engagement. It seems like everyone is able to find a partner these days except for me..."

His gaze moved to Shiro, "Which one is your girlfriend?"

Shiro was a little taken aback, but he pointed to Kaori who was next to Ai.

"Damn it! How can a raccoon looking bastard get such a cute girl and I can't?" He cried.

"O—Oi! That's rude."

"Hahahaha!" All the guys started to laugh, causing the atmosphere to bloom.

"Hello everyone." A voice called out, causing Hiroki, Riku and Ken to shudder. A gloominess quickly pervaded the once jovial atmosphere, causing them to turn to the voice.

As expected, it was Kuro. However, the most shocking thing was the western woman that he was locked arms with. She was blond and tanned, reminding Ken of some of the college girls back in America.

"No. Way..." Riku stated, his jaw dropping.

"Kuro, it's good to see you." Ken said, acting like a good host. "Who is this girl that you've brought along?"

"Oh, this is my girlfriend Alissa. She's from Australia and only speaks a little Japanese." He said off-handedly.

"AUSTRALIA!? CURSE YOU KURO!! How dare you crush my dreams!" Riku was beside himself, contemplating his entire life in that moment.

Ken saw Kuro give a gloating smile briefly before he went over to Ai to introduce his girlfriend.

Ken ordered some drinks and organized some food with the waitress to come out soon. However, more and more people began to show up in the meantime.

Masayuki, Yusuke, Yuta and his girlfriend Yuko from Yokohama. Just when the food was about to be served, Daichi and Miho walked in and joined the large table, giving their congratulations to the new couple.

To see most of his friends in one place celebrating with him left Ken feeling warm inside. He turned to see Ai smiling and laughing next to him and truly felt content in that moment. Whatever struggles he was dealing with back in America seemed small in comparison to right now.

It was truly invigorating.

"Let's make a toast." Hiroki said, standing up.

"THE PARTY HAS ARRIVED ORYAHHHHHH!"

"Captain Makoto!"

"You're late, take a seat and shut up." Hiroki barked, sending the muscular guy a glare.

"Eh?"

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

## **Chapter 777 - 777: Back Home (1)**

The return trip to the US was far better than Ken had expected. After popping the question and celebrating with all of his old friends, he left with a renewed sense of enthusiasm to start the new academic year at Columbia.

Despite knowing that he would not be able to compete for a while, Ken had kept up with his training, not wanting his fitness level to drop due to laziness. It was always easier to stay in shape than get into shape.

Ai and Ken had decided to spend a week in Austin with his parents before the new semester began. When they arrived at the airport, a red Silverado was waiting for them.



"Well if it isn't the two lovebirds!" Steve said with his usual mischievous grin painted on his face.

"It's good to see you bro." Ken said, unable to control the smile on his face. Despite the long flight, he was in a genuinely good mood.

"Congrats on your engagement by the way. I would have loved to be there." Steve added.

"Eh? Who told you?" Ken asked, wearing a mystified expression.

"Yuki, of course. I visited your parents every few days to check up on them since you left them to go to Japan." Steve winked.

Ken's eyes narrowed, "You liar. The only reason you come to my house is for my mom's cooking."

Steve gasped, holding his heart as if he had been wounded by such words. "Kenneth, Is that how little you think of me?"

"Kenneth?"

Ai began to giggle, clutching the sides of her stomach as she listened to the back and forth of the two. The laugh was infectious and the two quickly forgot about what they were bickering about.

In the car, Steve began to ask questions, wanting all the details.

"I'll tell you when we get there, otherwise I'll have to repeat myself." Ken said, rolling his eyes. He couldn't blame the guy for being excited, but he was still a little fatigued from the trip.

When they arrived, Steve was the first in the door, acting as if he owned the place. "I'm home~"

Ken sent a swift kick to his backside, causing him to fall forward. "Mom, Dad, we're home." He said, ignoring his friend who was now glaring at him.

"There you are!" Yuki exclaimed, holding her arms out.

Ken smiled, feeling warm. He moved forward to hug her, but froze after she blew right past him, taking Ai into a warm hug.

"Eh?"

"PFFT."

Steve's hand shot up to his mouth to stop himself from laughing, but Ken saw it and sent him a stern look. He turned to see his mother chatting away with Ai, almost as if he didn't exist.

"Ahem... Mom, I'm home." He said.

"Yes yes, welcome home." She replied dismissively before taking Ai into the dining room.

His father appeared, a knowing look painted on his face. The guy moved forward and held Ken by the shoulders, "Welcome home Ken, and congratulations." He said with a grin.

"Thanks Dad."

The two embraced and Ken felt a little better.

"Don't worry, she'll remember about you soon enough. When you were born, your mother didn't give me any attention for months." He said with a chuckle.

Soon enough, everyone sat down for a meal. It was already dusk and Ken was starving. The food on the flight was subpar to say the least, so having his mother's cooking was like the difference between Heaven and Earth.

Ken told the story of how he had proposed and had even been able to get footage of the game, saving it on his phone. Yuki had tears in her eyes and his father gave him a proud look afterwards.

"So, have you thought about the wedding yet?" His mother asked with enthusiasm.

Ken felt a little embarrassed and he turned to Ai. Thankfully she also seemed unsure, making him feel a little better.

"We haven't talked that far yet." Ai admitted.

Yuki was about to say more, but Chris placed his hand on her arm. "They're still young honey, and both are attending College. How about we talk about this after they graduate?"

"But that's like 3 years away!" Yuki exclaimed.

"Let's just think about it for a while okay Mom? We haven't even decided where we'll be getting married yet." He admitted.

Ai turned her head and looked at him oddly, "Well, we'd have to get married in Japan right?"

At these words, Yuki's face dropped a little. Seeing this, Ken felt that he was about to get in the middle of something that he didn't want to be in right now.

"H—How about we talk about this another time?"

"Excellent idea." Chris interjected. "Honey, why don't you bring out that cheesecake you made earlier today." He said, steering the conversation away from the sensitive topic.

"Cheesecake!? Damn Yuki, you're the best." Steve exclaimed with excitement.

Amidst this, Ai sent him a questioning gaze, prompting Ken to pat the back of her hand. He wordlessly conveyed that they would talk about this later.

Once dessert had been served, Ken and Ai said goodnight and headed to bed. They were still rather jetlagged from the flight and could do with some good rest.

"What was up with Yuki when I mentioned having our wedding in Japan?" Ai asked softly.

Ken shook his head. "I'm not sure. She hasn't been back since we moved here more than a year and a half ago. Maybe she's afraid that if she goes, she won't want to come back?"

Surprisingly, Ken had guessed the exact reason. Despite settling into her new life, Yuki was extremely homesick. It wasn't just the social aspect, but the culture as well.

She had tried to be strong for her husband, but it felt like she had left a big part of herself in Japan, her home country. Perhaps she was overreacting, but the thought of heading back to Japan scared her, much more than she would dare to admit.

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

## **Chapter 778 - 778: Back Home (2)**

The next morning, Ken woke up nice and early as usual. His muscles felt a little tight, mainly because of the long flight the day before. He gave Ai a kiss on her forehead and got up, changing into some tight fitting clothes for his morning run.

Upon going into the lounge, he saw Steve sleeping soundly, his soft snores filling the room. There was drool dripping out the corner of his mouth, painting a comical sight.

With a small smile, Ken nudged him once, "You coming for a run?"

"I'm up." He said sleepily, sitting up on the spot.

It seemed that living with Ken the past year had conditioned him to waking up quickly and efficiently. He trudged over to the door and grabbed his shoes, placing them on as if he was on autopilot.

They walked onto the street and could already feel a warm breeze beginning to stir. It was not yet dawn, but the light was starting to creep into the sky.

Without a word, Ken broke into his jog, hearing Steve beside him.

It was almost fall, which meant the new academic semester would be starting at college. They would be starting their sophomore year which meant the classes would only get harder. The time had flown by, but one thing had remained constant throughout.

His friend Steve.

While the guy could be rambunctious and cheeky at times, he was truly a good friend. Although he made some questionable decisions at times, Ken could not fault him, for he truly was like family to him.

He turned, only to see Steve digging in his nose with his finger. Whatever good will suddenly vanished and he let out a groan.

"Gross."

The two completed their workout and began to stretch in a park nearby. It was too early for kids to be there, otherwise they might have caught a few suspicious gazes.

Ken had been putting off looking at his mission window ever since he learned of his suspension. Now that he was back in the states, he knew that it was finally time to face the music and try and move on.

They walked back home, taking only a few minutes. Steve entered the house first, only to see Yuki sitting at the table cradling her coffee.

"Good morning Yuki~"

However, she merely looked at him before turning her attention back to her coffee. This time, it was Ken's turn to laugh at his friend's misfortune. It seemed that he didn't know that his mother was a zombie before her morning coffee.

"I'm going to shower..." He mumbled.

Ken felt slightly better and walked out to the front porch and leaned against the rail. His eyes moved to the sky and saw the sun already over the horizon, shining down.

'I guess it's time...' Ken thought, bringing up the system window.

#NEW MISSION: NCAA Division I Tournament.

\*Task 1: Hit 20 home runs [27/20] [Completed]

\*Task 2: Finish season with best ERA [Completed]

\*Task 3: Finish season with greater than 70 RBIs [71/70] [Completed]

\*Task 4: Finish on top of Ivy League [Completed]

\*Task 5: Win Ivy league Championship [Failed]

\*Task 6: Qualify for NCAA Super Regionals [Failed]

\*Task 7: Qualify for College World Series [Failed]

\*Task 8: Win College World Series [Failed]

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

REWARDS:

>Task 1 rewards - 50,000 Major points [Claim Rewards]

>Task 2 rewards - 50,000 Major points + Draft stock increase [Claim Rewards]

>Task 3 rewards - 70,000 Major points + Draft stock increase [Claim Rewards]

>Task 4 rewards - 100,000 Major points + Additional Mentee skill slot [Claim Rewards]

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

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

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

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

>Task 9 rewards - [Based on Performance] [Claim Rewards]

Ken let out a defeated sigh. Not wanting to dwell on his failures, he quickly claimed all the rewards.

[Congratulations, you've received:

270,000 Major points

Additional Mentee skill slot

Recovery Elixir x 1]

'Oh? A Recovery Elixir, that's great.' Ken thought with surprise. The others rewards he'd been expecting, but it seemed that task 9 had given him the elixir as a reward.

While he couldn't use it on himself, it was always great to have just in case something happened to someone that he loved. It had already saved his own life, as well as his Grandfather's who was suffering from cancer.

Feeling a little better, Ken brought up his status window.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 5 (659,880/1,000,000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 19

TALENT ASSESSMENT: SSS+

POTENTIAL: EX-

MAJOR POINTS: 659,880

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS

-SYSTEM SHOP

-LOTTERY

-IMAGE TRAINING

-IDENTIFY

-TRAINING PLAN

-MENTOR (1)

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: SSS+

>Pitching: SSS+

>Fielding: A+

>Game Intelligence: A+

>Mental: EX-

>Skills: 25

>Traits: 3

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. SSS+)

Balance and Coordination: SSS+

Agility: SSS

Strength: SSS

Stamina: EX-

Apart from his large stock of Major Points, Ken didn't notice anything out of the ordinary. He regretted that he missed out on the EX-Grade Elixirs, especially since he was only a few months away from finishing Mika's training plan.

Once that happened, he could have pushed his body once more with the elixirs.

'Perhaps this is for the best.' Ken tried to tell himself. There was no use in beating himself up about it anymore than he already had.

Shaking his head, Ken turned to the Mentor window.

# MENTEE LIST:

>Shiro Masuda

>Stephen Adams (1)

NAME: Steve Adams

AGE: 19

TALENT ASSESSMENT: SSS

POTENTIAL: EX

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: SS

>Pitching: C

>Fielding: SSS+

>Game Intelligence: SS

>Mental: SSS-

Skills: 2 (1)

-Fatigue Management

-Slugger

[Please select a skill to impart]

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

Pitching Variety: Grants the user increased proficiency when learning new pitches

'DUDE NO WAY!' Ken almost jumped in fright after seeing the golden hue of the Legendary skill staring at him. He didn't even think twice before selecting it, worried that the system might change its mind.

"ARGH!"

Ken heard a yell from inside the house, causing him to run inside. "What happened?" he asked his mother.

"I—I don't know, it came from the bathroom."

'Oh crap! I've done it again...' Ken cursed inwardly.

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



## Chapter 779 - 779: Good News (1)

After once again having to pick up Steve's naked body off the floor of a shower, Ken chided himself for once again forgetting such an important detail. This would now be the 3rd time that Steve had collapsed in the shower because of imparting a skill to him.

Not to mention he had also done the same to Shiro some years before.

"What happened?" Steve asked, finding himself naked on the bathroom floor with a towel draped over him.

"You passed out in the shower..."

"Again? Why does this keep happening to me... Maybe I need to see a doctor or something." Steve replied, rubbing his head.

Ken didn't know what to say, nor could he advise his friend from going to see a doctor. Going might result in some wasted time and money, but it wouldn't be harmful to get a checkup.

"You can talk with the medics when we get back next week." He said eventually, patting the guy on the shoulder. "Mom will be cooking breakfast soon, maybe that will make you feel better." He said, consoling the guy.

"Y—Yeah, you're right." He replied, clutching the towel to preserve the little dignity he had left and got up from the floor. "Shower is all yours..."

Ken watched the guy leave and let out a small sigh of relief. He closed the door and locked it before jumping into the shower himself. Despite the embarrassment Steve had felt, it was likely that he would have thanked even if he had he known the truth.

The fact that the system would allow Ken to impart a legendary skill to Steve was something that he could have never predicted. It mentioned that it would help pitching and batting, but there was no way that it wouldn't have an effect on catching as well.

Now that Clinton had graduated, Steve would be the starting catcher in their sophomore year. Having this legendary skill would improve his playing greatly, perhaps increasing his draft stock greatly.

Ken felt some excitement and looked forward to seeing the differences in his friend. While it wouldn't make much of a difference while he was pitching since he also possessed the skill, when it came to catching with the other pitchers, the changes should be evident.

For the next few days, they settled down at Ken's home. Steve was called back to his own house after his parents guilt tripped him, otherwise he would have stayed the remainder of his summer break.

Soon enough it was time to say his goodbyes to his parents.

His mother had warmed up to him once more, no longer ignoring his existence. She hugged him deeply and held on like she didn't want him to go. .

"I miss you Kenny... Please look after yourself." She said, kissing him on the cheek.

Ken didn't shy away or feel embarrassed and let her show her love. After stepping back she hugged Ai as well, speaking in whispers so that he couldn't hear.

He turned to his father and the two embraced.

"I know you're busy, but make sure you call your mother once in a while okay?" He asked, patting him on the back.

"Mmm, I promise Dad."

With that, the two left for the airport, leaving both Chris and Yuki watching their taxi drive off. Chris saw his wife's sad expression and wrapped his arm around her, pulling her close.

"They'll come visit again soon." He said, consoling her.

Yuki didn't respond right away, wiping the tears away from the corner of her eyes. "He's growing up so fast... They both are." She mumbled.

"Mmm. Pretty soon they won't need us anymore." Chris said, both pride and bitterness within his tone. He felt Yuki flinch in his arms and instantly knew he messed up.

"What do you mean they won't need us!?" She wailed, tears flowing down her cheeks like she had a broken water pipe.

"T—That's not what I meant!" Chris shouted in a panic, trying to calm down his hysterical wife. But no matter what he did, she continued to cry.

His face faltered for a moment before he thought of something. "Once they have babies, they'll need us even more!" He exclaimed.

The moment he said this, the crying stopped instantly.

"Really? You think so?"

"Of course honey... What kind of life would a child lead without their grandparents?"

'Ah damn it...' Chris cursed inwardly, annoyed at his big mouth.

Yuki's face shifted to one of sadness in the next moment, her head lowering. "You're right..."

"Honey... You know that's not what I meant. The circumstances are completely different." He tried to console her.

"Mmm, it's fine." She replied, wearing a smile that didn't reach her eyes. "We're not even in the same country, so it's not like I could mend that bridge even if I wanted to."

Chris frowned, but he pulled her close and hugged her tightly. "It's not your fault. She's the one who cut us off, remember?"

The two stood like this for a while in silence. It was a sad moment that reopened some old wounds, but they would get through it, like they always did.

Chris had felt his wife grow a little distant lately, oftentimes seeing her staring out the window, gazing at the street unmoving. At first he had thought nothing of it, but it was clear that there was something going on.

"Do you miss Japan?" He asked, seemingly out of nowhere.

Yuki pulled back, her puffy eyes looking at his face with suspicion. "Why are you asking this all of a sudden?"

"It's just a question." Chris responded simply.

"Of course I miss Japan... This is nice here, but it doesn't feel like home." She admitted, though it seemed painful to do so.

Chris nodded. While he was living out his dream job of being a coach, his wife was suffering at home. As a man, this went against his bottom line.

"When Ken get's married, I'll retire and we can move back to Japan."

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

## Chapter 780 - 780: Good News (2)

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By the time they arrived in New York, it was already dusk. Ken escorted Ai to her dorms and shared a long goodbye out the front, with neither wanting to let go. It was only after receiving a few beeps of the horn from the cab driver that Ken finally let her go.

"I will see you this weekend. I love you."

When he got into the cab, he resisted saying some choice words to the impatient driver and rested his head back. It had been a long but fruitful couple of months in Japan and Texas and his heart was full.

It almost felt a little disappointing to be going back to college after the break. But Ken knew that he had to face the music at some stage.

'The suspension should be up in March... It's only 6 months.' He said inwardly.

Ken could be patient, especially since this concerned his career. He could focus on other things in the meantime like his studies and perhaps networking with other students.

However, both options didn't seem too appealing when he thought further.

When he arrived at the dorm, Steve was not there despite being on the same flight as them. He had probably gone to meet up with Tara since it had been a while since they'd seen each other last.

As if to confirm his theory, he could hear muffled noises coming from the next room, causing him to let out a sigh. Feeling a little tired from the trip, he quickly got into bed and urged Mika to use sleep protocol.

The sounds became distant and his eyes grew heavy, putting him into a deep sleep after a few moments.

The next morning, Ken awoke Steve who had come back to the dorm at some point and they went on their morning run around the campus. With the start of Fall, the campus was filled with brown and orange colors from the leaves, painting a beautiful sight.

Getting into a rhythm, the two didn't speak and went their usual route before slowing down after over an hour. Shining with sweat, they stretched on one of the grassed areas on campus.

"Sounded like you and Tara had a good reunion last night." Ken said off-handedly.

"Mmm it was great. I didn't realize how much I missed her until I came back." He replied, wearing a dreamy smile.

The two were chatting back and forth when a figure appeared, "Good to see you guys are still keeping fit."

Ken turned his head and saw Coach Brown who looked to be heading towards the fitness center. He seemed bright and full of energy, as if he had also had a good night last night.

"You know us coach, we struggle staying idle." Ken said with a smile, "How was your time off?"

"It was rather gloomy at first, but things have taken a turn for the better." He said, giving a wink. "Go get cleaned up and meet me in my office in half an hour."

Without waiting for a response, he left, humming a tune and leaving the two behind.

"What do you think that is all about?" Ken asked.

"I don't know..." Steve said suspiciously, "Maybe it's about your suspension?"

Ken shook his head, "I doubt it. Tara would have been the first to let me know if any news had dropped since the media is all over it."

"Mmm, you're probably right. Well, you should hurry up and find out." Steve urged, "It has to be decent news if he's in this good of a mood."

Ken agreed and quickly went back to the dorm after finishing his last few stretches. After a brief shower and a change of clothes, he made his way to the coach's office at the fitness center.

The Academic semester started in a few days, but many of the staff were already back at campus, preparing their lectures among other things.

Knock Knock

Ken knocked upon the door and poke his head in. It seemed that every time he had done this lately it had ended badly, but seeing the coach full of smiles made him feel optimistic.

"Ken, take a seat my boy." He exclaimed merrily.

Ken obliged, closing the door behind him and making his way over.

"You seem in a great mood today coach. What can I do for you?" he asked.

"Really? Well, I guess you could say that." He replied letting out a small chuckle. "You see, we've managed to get cooperation from the President of the NCAA on your matter."

Ken's ears perked up, though he tried to not get his hopes up just yet.

The coach continued, "It turns out that the employee that handled your case has been treating many cases unjustly during his tenure. At least that's what I've been told. The NCAA has opened up an internal investigation on the employee and offered to come to an agreement with the University so as to avoid a lawsuit."

"So what does this mean?" Ken asked, his hands unknowingly clenching.

"Well, nothing is finalized yet, but President Emmerts has agreed to personally look over your case and reevaluate before coming back to us. He was rather apologetic, or at least that's what my boss said."

Ken didn't celebrate or react just yet, letting out a deep breath. "What do you think my chances are of getting a reduced suspension?"

Coach Brown smiled, "It's almost guaranteed Ken. 24 games was far too harsh to begin with, especially since you fully cooperated and even paid the cost of the tickets back to the source."

A small smile touched Ken's lips, but he wasn't fully out of the woods yet. "How many games do you think then? 20? 12? It would be nice if I knew what to expect."

"Hehe, I would be surprised if it's more than 4 games. With the 3 that you've already missed out on, you might only have to miss the opening game of next season." Coach Brown stated with a grin.

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