

Major League System

Chapter 821 - 821: Hard Decision (1)

When Ken returned to the dugout, he saw the coach looking at him with mixed emotions, but he shook his head shortly after. "Go get your foot looked at quickly." He said, not even commenting on his left handed pitching.

Ken was about to argue, but Coach Brown placed his hand upon his shoulder, "I never said I was going to take you out... I just want to be safe." He added.

After a few moments Ken nodded and made his way into the dugout, searching for the medical staff. The woman directed him to sit down and then grabbed his foot, about to untie the laces.

"Don't take it off... I probably won't be able to put it back on afterwards." Ken said, wincing slightly.

Hearing this, she frowned. "I can't examine it if I don't take off your cleats. Tell me what happened and where it's hurting."

So Ken explained what had happened when he kicked the bat and pointed out the spots where he was feeling pain. He realized that he was being a little selfish and hard to work with, but his hands were tied.

The medical staff nodded and took his leg in her arms before applying some pressure to the ball of his foot. Ken inhaled sharply, feeling a wave of pain. She pressed a few other spots and watched his reaction before letting out a sigh.

"I can't be certain, but it seems like you have a stress fracture thanks to the impact of the baseball bat. If you keep putting pressure on it, you will only make it worse." She said, standing to her feet, wearing a displeased expression.

"So what are you saying?" Ken asked, trying to suppress the throbbing pain assaulting him.

"You can't play anymore. All it will take is a single slip and your foot will be broken. If the break isn't clean then you might not ever walk the same, let alone get back to your previous form." She said simply.

Ken shook his head and was about to argue, but he felt a heavy hand on his shoulder in the next moment.

"Do you not trust us brother?" Steve said, his expression serious for a change.

"What?" Ken replied in question.

"Do you think that even playing injured and with your left arm that you're our best pitcher? I didn't realize you were so arrogant." He said, his tone rather harsh.

Ken's expression darkened. At first he was completely speechless, but then he slowly understood. How selfish was he being right now? Did he think that even in this state that he would be more effective than the other pitchers on the team?

No, he realized. He just wanted to pitch against Leo no matter what.

As the realization struck him, a sense of shame and helplessness seeped into his psyche. Ken gritted his teeth and felt true frustration in that moment.

"You're right." He said, barely above a whisper. "I was being arrogant and selfish..."

At this, Steve let out a sigh. "I know it sucks man, but you can trust us." He replied, patting Ken's shoulder once more.

After a few moments silence, Ken turned to the medical staff. "You can take my cleats off now..."

"I'll tell the coach you need a replacement." Steve said, walking up to the field.

Ken didn't respond, his head lowered. He felt his left shoe and sock get removed, giving an instant release. As he looked down, he could see that it had swollen significantly.

Steve approached the coach and gave him the rundown to which Coach Brown nodded. "You did well Steve, thank you for this."

Steve shook his head, "He is a stubborn guy sometimes, but he is a good person. He would have realized it eventually and taken himself off the field."

"Before or after he crippled himself?"

At this, Steve couldn't help but laugh, "At least we'll never have to find out."

A few moments later, the medical staff approached from the dugout and gave her report.

"It's a stress fracture. We'll need to get an x-ray done as soon as we can. For now, I've iced it and he needs to keep it elevated."

"Thank you Courtney." The coach replied, letting out a sigh.

By now, Brian was in the batters box facing the pitcher and Ken was supposed to be next up to bat. The coach called for Yu Guidolin, from the dugout and told him to get ready. By now everyone on the team knew that Ken was no longer playing and a weird atmosphere overtook them.

Seeing the usually calm and confident Ken reduced to such a state was a blow to their confidence.

"Go talk to the team, I'm making you the Captain for today's game." Coach Brown said to Steve, waving him away.

"Yes sir."

Brian was struck out after fighting back brilliantly from two strikes to a full count. He looked rather annoyed, but his mood turned shocked when he saw Yu warming up instead of Ken who was meant to bat next.

The coach walked over to the umpire and announced the changes to their lineup. A minute or so later, the announcer spoke over the speakers.

"We have a substitution for the Bobcats. Yu Guidolin will be coming in for Ken Takagi in the batting lineup. Tim Michaels will be replaced by Samuel Petty."

What would be a usual substitution announcement suddenly brought chaos. Everybody in the audience was shocked at the sudden substitution. They had seen a switch pitcher and after only a single inning he was taken out of the game.

Michael and Latrell in the crowd weren't as shocked, but that didn't mean they weren't affected. After only 3 innings total, Ken would no longer be pitching.

Michael was upset, but it was because he was worried about Ken. He didn't care that he had flown from California to Florida to see him play, he just hoped the guy was okay.

"He'll be fine right?" He asked worriedly.

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

Chapter 822 - 822: Hard Decision (2)

Once Ken left the game, the Crocs went on attack. In the top of the 3rd, Leo had easily hit a home run, sparking the shift in the game. The Bobcats struggled to keep the opposition from scoring and slowly the game got away from them.

By the final inning, the score was 4-2 in favor of the Crocs. Columbia had a chance to possibly tie it in the bottom of the 9th, but an errant hit from Steve resulted in a double play, putting an end to their struggles.

For Ken who was forced to sit on the sideline, it was a tough loss to swallow. Sure if they won they still would have had to play again tomorrow, but he had wanted to win nonetheless.

He was given a crutch and made his way onto the field to shake the hands of the opposing team. Ken kept his head high despite the disappointment he felt inside. They had done everything they could in this match, so there was no point in being depressed.

As he shook everyone's hand, Leo arrived, grasping his hand tightly.

"I am disappointed." Leo said, wearing an unreadable expression.

Ken felt a flash of anger, but he quickly swallowed it down. They were the victor, there was nothing he could say to refute the man's words.

"I had hoped to show you how much I improved since the U18 World Cup, but it looks like we'll have to wait till the Major League for that." He added, glancing at Ken's foot. "I wish you the best in your recovery."

With that he walked away, leaving Ken stunned.

At first he thought the guy was disappointed that they didn't put up a fight, but it seemed this was not the case at all. It seemed that he too, wanted to duel.

Once done with the game, Ken was shipped off to the clinic to get his x-ray done. As Courtney had said, he indeed had a stress fracture. He did not need a cast or a brace, but was told rest and that the foot needed to be iced and elevated wherever possible.

Ken wasn't worried. He had the fatigue management skill which boosted recovery for his extremities. The 6-8 week time line he had been given would probably be cut in half for him.

Even though he was still gutted from the loss, Ken made sure to catch up with Michael and Latrell again while they were still in Florida. The atmosphere was a little awkward in the beginning, but it got better.

They said their goodbyes and Ken swapped contact information with Michael much to the kid's delight.

The trip back to New York was not a pleasant one. Despite the fact that the team had done their best, it did not feel good to lose two games in a row after coming so far in the post season.

And to lose the last game after a freak injury made it even harder to accept. The previous night, Ken had already booked his flight to Japan for two days later and would only spend a single night at the campus before leaving.

While he was not looking forward to the flight, he truly missed Ai.

When they arrived in New York, there was a bus to take them back to the campus. For a few of them, it would be the last time that they came back to Columbia since they had already graduated.

Ayden, Kaden, Levi and Bryton arrived back and began to clear out their dorms. It was a bittersweet process. Steve, Ken, Brian and a few others organized a dinner in the city to give their teammates a proper farewell.

By the end of the night, some tears were shed, but there was even more laughter between the old friends.

While Bryton would not be getting drafted, Ayden, Kaden and Levi were hopeful.

"Will you guys be entering the draft next year?" Ayden asked both Ken and Steve.

Ken nodded, "I think so, I can always finish my degree remotely."

"Me too." Steve said, pointing to his chest.

"I doubt you'll finish your degree." Ken said with a smirk, "If I wasn't there to make you study I think you would have failed by now."

Steve flashed him a grin, "You're probably right."

The group laughed and soon it was time to go their separate ways. Though the taste of defeat still lingered, everyone would move on with their lives, striving to get better in their own ways whether it was in baseball or in life.

Ken left the dinner feeling a mixture of emotions. Everything felt surreal. These people who he had played with for almost 2 years were suddenly gone, leaving a hole in his heart.

This was not the first time he experienced this, but it never got any easier. He still looked back fondly at his teammates over the years, especially back home in Japan.

Things changed and people moved on, Ken knew this. But for some reason, it hit a little harder today. As he laid in his bed, he couldn't help but feel empty inside.

Was it because he lost yesterday that he was feeling this? Or was it for another reason entirely. For the first time in a long time, Ken felt lost.

No part of him was excited for his next season of College ball which was surprising, especially since he would usually always be ready to play. Perhaps it was because the team would be different again next year, or perhaps it was for another reason entirely. He didn't know.

'Maybe I'll feel better when I go back home...' He thought.

Not wanting to deal with his weird mood right now, Ken asked Mika to use sleep protocol, and he drifted off to sleep.

The next morning he woke up early and went to get up to go for his morning run. But as he stood up, a surge of pain came from his foot.

'Ah damn it...' He had forgotten he was injured.

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

Chapter 823 - 823: Reinvigorated (1)

With nothing to do, Ken packed up his bags and got ready to head back to Japan. Steve was also heading back to Texas today to see his family, so they decided to head to the airport together.

The two were still a little shaken from the loss and the departure of some good friends from the baseball team so they didn't talk much along the way.

"Next year we'll win the trophy." Steve said after a long silence.

"You think so?" Ken asked, noncommittally. It was one thing making the declaration, but another thing entirely doing so. They would have to restructure the team, almost starting from scratch.

Out of the old team, there weren't many who were left apart from them and Brian.

"Damn man, you're meant to be optimistic with me." Steve said, letting out a small laugh.

"Sorry man, it's a little hard. I thought this season was our best shot at winning." Ken admitted, his tone a little forlorn.

"Yeah, you're probably right. But that doesn't mean we can't try... Who knows, maybe we'll get another super-rookie like Brian next year?" He replied.

"Oh? I better tell Brian that you called him a super-rookie. I'm sure he would appreciate it." Ken quipped.

Steve let out a mock laugh before shaking his head. "Do you blame me?" He asked after a while. .

"Blame you? For what?" Ken asked, taken aback.

Steve turned to him with a serious expression on his face, "Do you blame me for making you sub out?"

"No... You were right, I was being selfish. I wanted to keep pitching so I could pitch against Leo, not for the team... You making me sub out probably saved me from embarrassment. There's no way he would have missed my left handed pitches." Ken said.

Steve let out a sigh of relief. "You're probably right. I'm still surprised that you could throw in the 90's with your left. Why didn't you ever tell me?"

Ken shrugged, "My right is faster and I can throw breaking balls, I can't do that with my left."

"That's because you don't practice with it." Steve said. "Is it something that you would want to do in the future? If so, we can work on it when you get back from Japan."

"Honestly... I'm not sure. The only time I would probably throw with my left is if I was against another lefty." Ken admitted. "Is it worth all that work for such a thing?"

"Well, apparently almost 25% of batters are left handed in the Major Leagues." Steve added, "It might be worth looking into."

For a moment Ken was stunned. Was Steve really giving him data? And was it accurate? He looked into the guys face for a bit before realizing that he was probably telling the truth.

"Alright... I'll think about it."

Just after saying this, Ken heard the call for his flight get called out over the speakers.

"Looks like that's me." He said, standing up. Steve did the same and held out his hand for a handshake.

Ken grabbed the hand and pulled the guy into a hug. "Take care man, I'll see you when I get back." He said.

Steve laughed, "Don't worry, your mom will take care of me back in Texas."

Ken blinked a few times but eventually let out a sigh, knowing he would probably bother his parents all summer break. "Just be respectful please..."

With that, Ken walked over to the boarding area, leaving his friend behind for his flight.

When he arrived in Japan it was about 4pm. By the time he got out of customs and collected his bags, it was closer to 5. Feeling rather exhausted, Ken made his way to the train station nearby and went to Yokohama.

An hour later, he hopped off the train and went up the long set of stairs. His foot still pained him, but it was getting better even in the short few days since the game. His fatigue management skill was quite handy.

Upon leaving the station, he finally saw the woman he'd been waiting for all this time. She was dressed in a black skirt and white top, her long hair draped behind her shoulders. His heart stuttered and a smile crept onto his face unknowingly.

Ai was looking at her phone, not paying attention, so he decided to play a little prank.

"Excuse me beautiful woman, would you be interested in a date with me?" He asked in a masked voice.

Ai's face scrunched up and she turned around, looking as if she wanted to punch out at the perpetrator. However, upon seeing him she let out a laugh and moved into his arms, hugging him tightly.

"Welcome home." She said in a muffled voice.

"It's good to be back." Ken admitted.

He grabbed her chin and raised it, kissing her deeply. "I missed you." He said in a husky tone.

Ai blushed. "I missed you too, silly."

"How is your foot? Aren't you meant to be in crutches for the first week?" She asked with concern.

Ken shrugged, "I heal really fast, I don't need crutches."

"Alright, well I hope you're hungry. Mom has been cooking for most of the day since she knew you were coming." She said.

Ken held his stomach for a moment before nodding, "Good, I'm starving. Let's head there now before it gets dark." He said, wrapping his arm around her.

He went to start walking in the direction of her house, but Ai stopped in her tracks. "I drove here."

"EH!? You drove?" Ken was flabbergasted.

"Yep! I got my license when I came back. Are you proud of me?" She replied, sending him a wink.

Between New York City and Japan, the public transport was expansive and the traffic equally as bad. Many Japanese people would opt to take public transport instead of driving or even owning a car. To hear that Ai had gone out to get her license was quite surprising.

Even he had yet to get his license despite being 20.

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

Chapter 824 - 824: Reinvigorated (2)

But true to her word, they walked to the car park and there was Tetsu's car. She motioned him to get in and started the car. As she put it into first gear and went to drive off, the car stalled, causing it to stop in its tracks.

Ai's face went bright red and she quickly went to start the car once more.

"S—Sorry, I'm still a little new at driving." She stammered.

Fortunately for both of them, it didn't happen again, though a few times the sound of grinding gears could be heard when she shifted.

They got back to the house around 5 minutes later.

"You did well, I'm proud of you." Ken said, feeling his legs a little shaky as he finally touched solid ground. Thankfully, he had the excuse of his injury in case she asked why he was walking weird.

Ai blushed a little, "Thanks. I still need to practice, but dad says I'm getting a lot better."

Ken got his things out of the car and walked up to the house with Ai in front. As the door opened, he was greeted by Naomi and Tetsu.

"How's my future son-in-law!?" Tetsu said, pulling him into a deep hug and lifting him off the ground. The guy's strength was almost superhuman, causing his ribs to groan under the pressure.

Naomi also hugged him, though she was far more gentle.

Tetsu grabbed his bags with ease, mumbling something about taking them upstairs for him because of his injury. It was like a whirlwind the moment he stepped into the house.

However, instead of making him feel weary, it actually lifted his spirits quite considerably. Ai grabbed him by the arm and led him inside to the dining room where food was already laid out on the table.

It was a Japanese curry with a side of fragrant miso soup.

"Make sure you save room for dessert, Yuki sent me her cheesecake recipe." Naomi said, taking a seat at the table.

Tetsu appeared in the room a moment later and sent Ken a familiar look. When he was behind his wife he mouthed something.

'Don't eat the cheesecake.'

Suddenly, Ken remembered the cookies Naomi had baked last time that had been hard as a rock. He shuddered briefly and nodded, turning his attention to the food on the table.

"Itadakimasu."

As he dug into the food, Ken felt rather mystified. How could a woman who could cook meals so well be so bad at cooking desserts? Even when it came to baking it was Tetsu who did it all.

Ken found himself relaxed within 15 minutes of getting here. It truly reminded him of how things used to be back home, to the point where he was beginning to feel a little nostalgic.

"So Ken. When are ya gonna join the big leagues? I wanna start braggin' to all the customers that my son-in-law is a superstar." Tetsu said, his mouth half full with food.

Both Ai and Naomi looked at him curiously, as if they also wanted to know the answer.

Ken cleared his throat, "Well I still wanted to talk to Ai about it, since it's not just about me anymore. If I enter the draft next year, depending on which team I go to, we might be across the country from each other."

"Hmm... That's tricky." Tetsu said, digging in his bowl of rice.

Ai placed her hand on his arm and squeezed it gently, "Do whatever you need to do, I will support you no matter what." She said, sending him a small smile.

Ken felt his heart thump and a warmth enveloped him. "I still need to think about it. There's still one more season left of college ball before I can officially be drafted anyway. Let's see how it looks by then." He answered.

Once this topic was covered, the next inevitable one was marriage. The two had been engaged for almost a full year now, but the wedding date had not been set. Ken didn't really feel like talking about it right now, but Ai had some words.

"I won't be getting married until I graduate." She said, digging her heels in.

It wasn't often that Ai turned stubborn, but when she did, there was no way of changing her mind. Even her parents seemed to be aware of this fact, so they quickly dropped it.

"Okay, we can live with that." Naomi said, clearing her throat. "But you'll be having the wedding in Japan right?" She asked.

Ai turned to him, as if to confirm. Ken nodded in response. By then, he should already be on a decent wage and could afford to bring over a few people from the states that he wanted to attend. Steve, Grandpa, Santiago.

Thinking of the last two names, Ken faltered. He had not seen them in such a long time, though he regularly spoke to his grandfather.

Ken finished the meal and suddenly felt a wave of fatigue. Even though it was barely 7pm, the long flight and lack of sleep had caught up to him. He and Ai excused themselves and headed up the stairs to bed.

It had been almost a month since they'd seen each other, so when they got to bed, they just cuddled, enjoying each others company.

Ai ran her fingers along the palm of his hand, it was quite soothing.

"How are you holding up?" She asked in a soft voice.

"Hmm? I'm fine."

"Don't lie to me Ken... I know that something is bothering you." She said, though her words lacked judgment.

Ken was silent for a little while before letting out a sigh. He talked about the game and his selfishness at wanting to pitch against Leo.

Ai listened silently until he was done, then she interlocked her fingers with his own. "You're always selfish when it comes to pitching Ken, that will never change. You want to hog the mound to yourself every single game that you can."

Ken blinked a few times, not expecting such words. 'Wasn't she meant to be cheering me up?' he thought.

But then she continued, "You can't change this, it is who you are, at least when it comes to baseball. But while you might be thinking that it's a bad thing, this selfishness is the reason why you're always trying to improve. You want to be the best so that no one can take your spot on the mound."

"Eh? Really?" Ken mumbled. The way she was explaining it made it not feel so bad.

"Yes... This drive and determination is what made me fall in love with you..." She said, her words trailing off.

Ken felt his heart melt. He pulled her close and kissed her deeply, savoring the moment. With just a few words, she had dug him out of his rut, making him feel much better in the process.

"I'm also selfish in other ways." He admitted.

"Hmm? How so?"

"I want you all to myself." Ken replied.

Ai giggled and moved in for another kiss, "You already put a ring on it, of course I'm all yours." She said kissing him deeply.

After some back and forth, things got serious once again. "Will you enter the draft next year?" Ai asked curiously.

Ken nodded, "I think I'm ready to make the next step." He admitted. "My draft stock should also be at its peak by the end of next season, as long as I play well. I don't want to miss my window."

"Mmm, I think you're ready too. No matter where you go, I'll follow you after I graduate." Ai said.

Ken's heart was full. He had the love of his life in his arms and a plan in place for the future. His dreams were so close that he could almost reach out and grab them.

Everything that he'd been through in this life, it was all converging into the ultimate goal of joining the Major League.

'Just one more year...'

-End Volume 5 Student Athlete.

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

Chapter 825 - 825: New Beginnings (1)

Ken walked into his dorm room and saw the space where he'd been staying for the past 3 years. As usual, half the room was messy with clothes and items strewn about, while his side was neat and tidy.

He stood still for a few moments taking in the sight. Though he had often given Steve a hard time about his messiness, he couldn't help but smile seeing their space. Without a word he moved to his closet and grabbed his suitcase.

One by one he took down his clothes and packed them. Many had been given to him directly from Nikey as part of their endorsement deal. With the assistance of Tara and her mother, they had signed a 1 year deal.

Since he was entering the draft in a month, his valuation would increase significantly, allowing them to sign an even better deal in the future.

"I'm gonna miss this room." A voice called out from the doorway.

Ken turned his head and saw Steve decked out head to toe in Nike sports apparel. The sight was almost comical, but Ken was used to it by now.

"I won't miss your mess." Ken said with a small grin, though it quickly disappeared. He had been both looking forward to and dreading this moment for the better part of 3 years.

His best friend Steve would also be entering the draft, meaning they would likely not see each other often in the future.

"Are you sure about that?" Steve replied with a mischievous grin, "It looks like you're about to cry."

"Shut up before I make you cry." Ken quipped lamely, turning his attention back to packing his bags. He had not expected to be this emotional, especially not in front of his friend.

Steve shrugged and made his way into the room, beginning to round up his own things. "Have you been invited to any pre-draft workouts?"

"Too many..." Ken replied, remembering all the offers he'd received ahead of the draft next month.

"I got one later this week with the Texas Riders."

"Eh? That's awesome man." Ken exclaimed. He remembered that Yu Tanaka was one of the starting pitchers for the organization. If Steve was drafted by Texas, he'd be close enough to his family as well.

"Yeah, I'm hoping it goes well. It would be nice to be close to home." Steve admitted.

There was some silence between the two as they continued to pack their things.

"Sometimes it doesn't feel real... I'm almost afraid that this is all a dream and that one day I'll wake up and go back to reality." Steve spoke up, revealing his insecurities.

Impostor syndrome wasn't uncommon, especially for young athletes about to make it big. In fact, Ken had this feeling all the time. He worried that his real body was in a coma in the hospital after his overdosing in his previous life.

Every time he thought of this, his body would begin to shake in fear. If this truly was the case and he was returned to his previous life, Ken would be crushed.

"Y—Yeah, I know how you feel." He said after a while, trying to throw his fears to the back of his mind.

"Well, even if this is a dream... Then I won't ever forget you man." Steve replied suddenly.

Ken froze, feeling a lump in his throat. He turned only to see Steve's face looking as if he was about to cry. In any other circumstances he might laugh since the guy had such an ugly crying face, but not today.

"You too man..." He replied, moving forward and embracing his friend. There was no awkwardness, only the love one would have for their brother or a close relative. Their friendship had grown stronger over the years, to the point where they were almost inseparable.

Yet now as they entered adulthood, they would have to go their separate ways. It was tough, but this was a part of growing up.

"Every time we play against each other, we need to catch up okay?" Steve said patting him on the back.

"Only if you pay for dinner." Ken said back, causing both of them to laugh.

Once the moment passed, both men felt a little better. They got to packing their things and soon left the dorms. Steve was flying out to Texas while Ken was headed to Pittsburgh in Pennsylvania to attend a pre-draft workout with the Pittsburgh Raiders.

As they made the walk to the front of the school, the two reminisced about their past 3 years. Everything felt like it had flown by so fast.

A figure was waiting for them, his red hair and freckled face sticking out.

"You two weren't going to leave without saying goodbye right?" Brian asked, a hint of annoyance in his voice.

"Psh, we said goodbye last night at the dinner." Steve quipped in mock annoyance.

Brian sent him a brief glare and turned to Ken. "We'll miss you guys..."

Ken let out a small laugh, placing down his bags and wrapping an arm around the guy, "I've got no doubt you'll be able to hold down the fort... Captain."

"No matter how many times I hear it, it still sounds weird." Brian said with a nervous laugh.

"Hey excuse me. Can you please take a photo of us?" Steve asked someone walking by. They obliged, prompting him to drop his bags and stand next to Brian, wrapping his arm around the guy.

"Okay get ready." The person said.

The trio smiled. Even Ken who was bad with photos in general felt a genuine smile creep onto his face. After a few moments the person lowered the phone and was about to give it back.

"Ah, one more please." Steve said.

Just as the guy was about to take another photo, Steve moved his hand and began to give Brian a noogie. Because the guys arms were tied up, he could not fight back. Soon everyone was laughing besides Brian.

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

Chapter 826 - 826: New Beginnings (2)

After saying their goodbyes, the two made their way to the airport once more. The last time they did this is was summer of the previous year after a devastating loss to the Florida Crocs.

Back then, they at least knew that after summer ended they would see each other back at Columbia again. But now, things were different.

Ken felt older for some reason. If he included his previous life and how long it had been since he regressed, he would be over 30. Of course his current body was only 21, so he had no excuses.

"Well, I guess this is it man..." Steve said.

"Yeah, I guess so."

"Good luck at your workout."

"You too man..."

The atmosphere was a little heavy, but no one tried to diffuse it. The two guys hugged it out for a few moments before saying their final piece and heading in their own directions.

They didn't know when they would see each other next, but if Steve was drafted to Texas, he could always visit him when he visited his parents. Ken hoped that this was the case.

He made his way to the boarding line for the plane, taking a look back at his friend walking in the opposite direction. Funnily enough, Steve didn't turn to look until Ken had turned away.

As Ken got into his seat, he felt a sense of melancholy. Apart from Ai and his parents, Steve was the person he was closest to in America. He was in mixed minds about the next year, but he knew that it was going to be tough.

Ai had gone back to Japan 3 weeks ago so they had already said their goodbyes. He of course could not travel back since he would be busy before the upcoming draft.

The flight was only an hour and a half and he soon arrived in Pittsburgh. There was a driver waiting for him at the airport who took him to the Residence Inn Hotel, just across the road from PNC Park.

Seeing the large stadium up close made him feel a sense of anticipation, removing some of his earlier melancholy.

It was around 12pm and the workout didn't start till the following day so he had a lot of time to himself. After dropping off his bags in the hotel room, Ken got changed into his workout gear and decided to go for a run and do some exploring.

Placing the newest Nikey shoes on, he walked out of the hotel and looked both ways before deciding to go left. At first he got into a small jog and took in the sights, but soon he was up to a decent running speed. The wind touched his skin, cooling the sweat that had begun to form.

Around 30 minutes in, he had already forgotten most of his worries. The river was on his right, hiding behind a mass of trees along the path and it was long enough that he didn't have to make any turns.

Eventually he decided to turn back around and head back towards the hotel, picking up his pace. Due to his size and running pace, many people sent him curious glances along the way, but he was used to this.

As he came back to the stadium, Ken began to slow his run, checking his heart rate and distance traveled on his fitness watch. This had been a gift from Ai for his 21st birthday and he used it every day.

He was able to track his workouts on an app. It had been a little annoying at first, but now that he had worked out all the kinks, it was rather beneficial.

'8 miles... I'll have to head to the gym to finish the rest.' He thought.

While looking at his watch, Ken bumped into a man who walked onto the path in front of him. He sent the guy stumbling forward a few paces.

"Ah! Sorry." Ken said, bowing slightly in apology.

The man who looked to be in his 30's turned around with an angry expression on his face and spoke back in broken English, "Watch where you going."

With the way he spoke and his appearance, Ken recognized that the man was probably Japanese. He bowed and apologized profusely, this time in Japanese.

The Japanese man was surprised and took another look at him, as if to evaluate Ken further.

"You are Japanese? What are you doing here in Pittsburgh?" The guy asked curiously, his anger already gone from his face.

"Ah, I'm here for the pre-draft workout tomorrow." Ken replied.

"Eh!? You're Ken-senshu? What a coincidence." He said smilingly.

Ken tilted his head in question. The guy looked a little familiar, but he couldn't place him.

"You look like your father... Chris wasn't it? He was a good guy." The man said.

"Eh? You know my father?" This time Ken was surprised. He assessed the man in front of him once more. "Did you used to play for the Warriors?"

"Hehe yes. But I play in the MLB now."

Ken's mind was spinning, trying to remember the name of the player in front of him. The man himself seemed to be enjoying his plight, not helping him at all.

"Ah! Yoshi Tsutsugo-senshu." Ken exclaimed, quickly bowing. "It is nice to meet you sir."

"The pleasure is all mine." He said with a smile, "I will also be taking part in tomorrow's workouts."

"Really?" Ken was surprised.

"Yes, I was waived by LA not long ago. My agent told me to come to Pittsburgh and try my luck."

"Wow, maybe we will be teammates in the future." Ken said with appreciation. Having another Japanese player on the team would be great.

"Hehe, we will see." Yoshi said. "Anyway, I have some plans so I will see you tomorrow. It was good to meet you Ken-senshu."

Ken bowed and watched as the man left. If he remembered correctly, Yoshi indeed played for the pirates in his previous life, but was released the following year. He would then play for Toronto then a few minor league teams before heading back to the NPB.

He was a journeyman full of experience.

Ken returned to the hotel and sought out the gym, wanting to finish his workout. Tomorrow he would need to be in good shape to make a good impression.

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

Chapter 827 - 827: Fever (1)

That night, Ken laid in his bed looking at the ceiling like he often did. For the first time in a very long time, he was alone in the room. At the dorms, even if Steve was not there, he was next door with Tara.

Ken was truly alone.

He let out a sigh, feeling a little angry with himself. "Why are you getting sad... You lived alone for 4 years in your last life." He told himself.

However those 4 years were not good years. Perhaps he was remembering the pain and suffering he went through back then, or maybe he was just nervous for tomorrow's workout. Either way, he was not in a great head space.

To try and take his mind off his weird mood, he opened up the system.

SYSTEM LEVEL: 5 (904,880/1,000,000 Major points to level up)

NAME: Ken Takagi

AGE: 21

TALENT ASSESSMENT: EX

POTENTIAL: EX+

MAJOR POINTS: 904,880

USER MENU:

-STATS

-MISSIONS

-SYSTEM SHOP

-LOTTERY

-IMAGE TRAINING

-IDENTIFY

-TRAINING PLAN

-MENTOR

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: EX

>Pitching: SSS+

>Fielding: A+

>Game Intelligence: SSS

>Mental: EX-

>Skills: 25

>Traits: 4

PHYSICAL FITNESS: (Avg. EX)

Balance and Coordination: EX

Agility: EX-

Strength: EX

Stamina: EX+

His eyes drifted over the grades and marveled at just how far he had come since he first got the system. He could remember just how bad his physical fitness was, yet now he was close to the peak.

Ken had used his EX-Grade physical elixir once his foot had healed last year and even after doing Mika's training plan this past 12 months, he had not fully adjusted yet. Knowing this made him realize just how in shape Leo was.

Unfortunately, the Bobcats were knocked out in the Super Regionals once again this year, this time against Oklahoma. Their team was worse than the previous year since it lacked truly experienced players like Ayden, Kaden and Levi.

This meant that he had missed out on the Mental Elixir and a Diamond Lottery ticket. However, he did get to choose a trait.

Ken moved to his traits menu and looked at the newest addition.

Trait: Insightful

Description: User possesses an extraordinary ability to perceive and understand the emotions, intentions, and behaviors of others. This heightened emotional intelligence allows him to connect deeply with teammates, anticipate opponents' moves, and adapt his actions accordingly.

Effects:

Empathy: Improves communication and teamwork by allowing user to understand his teammates' feelings and needs.

Opponent Reading: Enables user to detect subtle tells and patterns in opponents' actions, giving him a tactical edge.

Social Adaptability: Enhances user's ability to navigate social situations and build rapport with others.

Conflict Resolution: User excels at defusing tensions and resolving disputes among teammates.

The benefits he'd experienced from this trait were intangible, yet he felt like a much better person. He could understand his teammates better and empathize with others, allowing him to be far more accommodating than he was.

'Maybe this is why I've been so emotional lately...' He thought to himself.

His relationship with Daichi and his parents had been further strengthened since he finally realized what kind of son and brother he'd been. Ken's issue was that he focused too much on himself, forgetting to contact those close to him.

Not only this, much of his awkwardness in social situations had been dispelled, making meeting others a lot easier than before.

"I should probably get some sleep..." He muttered, feeling his eyes getting heavy.

'Hey Mika, please use sleep protocol.' He asked nicely.

[Confirmed, using sleep protocol.]

As Mika's voice entered his mind, his eyes closed slowly and he entered a deep and restful sleep. He dreamed of standing upon the mound in front of thousands of fans, pitching against Leo.

Neither of them were wearing their college uniforms. Leo was in his Yanks uniform and Ken was wearing a suit and tie. He frowned, feeling as if something was odd.

Hearing the roaring of the crowd, Ken shook his head and looked towards home plate. Daichi was behind the plate, wearing his Hanshin Tigers uniform. He called for a fastball on the inside to which Ken nodded.

He lifted his left leg and kicked off the pitching plate, taking a large stride forward. As he cocked his arm and went to throw, a sharp pain assaulted his shoulder, causing him to drop the ball.

Ken grabbed at his right shoulder and looked up in despair. His expression turned confused when he saw that he was no longer in a stadium. The ball which he had dropped was now an empty water bottle bouncing along the ground towards a rubbish bin.

Another flash of pain assaulted his shoulder and he sucked in a sharp breath.

Before he knew it, he had already walked forward and collected the empty bottle before placing it in the bin. Ken returned to his office bag and collected it off the ground before stumbling down the road.

A feeling of despair and loneliness assaulted him, but there was a haze of confusion.

As he walked up the stairs to his apartment, he fumbled for his keys and unlocked the door. He walked in, placing his bag down and taking off his shoes before stumbling inside.

"Have you been drinking again." An annoyed voice called to him, causing him to freeze in his tracks. Ken turned, only to see Ai sitting at the dining table with her arms crossed, wearing a scowl.

In her face he saw none of the affection he was used to, only a cold almost hateful glare.

"Ai—Honey... I've missed you." He said, stumbling towards her in order to embrace the woman he loved.

"Don't touch me!" She squealed, backing away from the table.

Ken froze, confusion in his face. "I... I don't understand?" He said, his words filled with sorrow.

His thoughts were interrupted by the sound of crying from the apartment. He turned and walked towards the sound.

It was then that Ai moved swiftly, standing in front of him. "Don't you dare come any closer." She said, ready to throw herself at him.

Ken stopped, his heart breaking. That was when he saw the figure of a small child poke her head out the door.

"Papa?"

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

Chapter 828 - 828: Fever (2)

Ken shot up out of bed, breathing heavily. His whole body was soaked in sweat and his right arm was dead. The sensation of pins and needles ran up his arm as the blood circulated once more.

His mind tried to process what he'd just experienced, but he had no words. The hurt that he felt was real, even if it was just a dream, seeing Ai look at him like that had all but broken him.

The appearance of the child who looked just like her was also shocking.

"Was this an alternate reality? Or was it the future?" Ken asked, hoping that it was neither. His throat was dry and his body was wet with sweat, he felt gross.

'Mika, what is happening to me?' He asked.

[User currently has a 102 degree fever.]

"A fever!?" Ken cried out.

This was the most important workout of his life so far, there was no way that this was happening. Even as he stood up, Ken felt light headed.

"Isn't there anything you can do Mika?"

[Answer: Drink plenty of fluids and get rest.]

Ken blinked a few times, not even bothering to respond to such a thing. He had been feeling fine the night before, so why did he have a fever all of a sudden?

'How long will it take for this fever to go away?' Ken asked.

[Answer: Approximately 1 to 2 days.]

'And can I work out during this time?'

[Mika recommends that you do not.]

"Damn it!"

Ken was already in a bad state of mind after the dream, but now his body was failing him. To think that he would get sick on the day he was meant to work out for a major league team.

"I'll just have to do it..." Ken mumbled, making his way over to the shower.

He took a lukewarm shower and began to shiver. Quickly washing himself, he hopped out and got dry before it got any worse.

Ken got dressed in his baseball pants and wore a Nikey top, grabbing his bag and leaving the room while he still could. As he made his way down the elevator to the bottom floor, he was going through the workout schedule.

'The batting is first which should be fine. The pitching and the physical drills might be the hardest part.' He thought, debating on whether he should tell the coaches.

Once he left the hotel, he walked across the road to the stadium. After handing over the pass that he'd received from the coaching staff weeks before, he was let into PNC Park.

On another day he might have admired the grounds, but he was too busy trying to remain on his feet. Ken took a few gulps of room temperature water and looked around for the coach.

A man in his early 40's was nearby. He had a clipboard and a whistle around his neck with a short well-maintained beard that suited his face.

"Hi coach." Ken called out, making his way over.

The man turned to him and his expression lit up, "Oh hey, you must be Ken. I'm Mitch Hague, the hitting coach." He said, extending his hand.

Ken grabbed the hand and shook it firmly letting out a small smile.

Coach Hague frowned slightly, "I guess you must be nervous." He said, taking back his hand and wiping it on his pants.

'Ah crap... My hands are sweaty.' Ken realized too late.

"Er, yeah sorry about that coach." He said wearing a sheepish grin.

However, the coach looked at him closely, narrowing his eyes, "Man, you don't look so good. Are you okay?"

Ken froze, "Haha, yeah I'm fine. Just had some trouble sleeping you know..."

The coach didn't respond right away, giving him a suspicious look. "Well okay. Why don't you head over to the batting cages so we can test out your swing." He said.

"Sure thing coach." Ken replied, letting out a sigh of relief inwardly.

It wasn't until he was halfway to the cages that he realized what he was doing. Why didn't he just admit that he had a fever? Wouldn't whatever results he got here affect his overall score?

"Um, coach." Ken called out.

"Yep, what's up?"

"Um, actually I have a bit of a fever, that's why my palms were sweaty. I figured I should probably disclose that before we start the drills." Ken admitted.

Coach Hague turned around and looked at him. "Thanks for telling me the truth... You know your body best, do you think you can still go through with today's drills?"

Ken nodded, "I think I might be okay with batting and pitching, but ideally I'd stay away from the physical drills. Or, if you like I can come back in a few days and do everything."

The coach considered it for a few moments before nodding, "Let's check out your swing and get some metrics for your pitches. If you're struggling let me know and we'll reschedule."

"Thank you coach." Ken said, letting out a sigh of relief.

He was then led to the batting cages where a camera was set up. It was similar to the one that he'd seen at the Perfect Game Showcase which measured hitting form efficiency and exit velocity.

Back then he had scored a lousy 58% but his exit velocity was quite high for a High School player. Now that he had tightened up his form, Ken had high hopes.

As he stepped into the cage and looked at the tee-ball. He grabbed a nearby bat and waited for the go ahead from the trainers behind the laptop.

"When you're ready Ken." They said.

He gave them a thumbs up and stepped up to the plate. He performed his usual ritual before getting into position. He still felt rather crap, but this was no time to pull any punches.

WHOOOOOSH

THWACK!

"Okay, very good. Let's get a few more for comparison please." One of them directed.

Ken nodded and retrieved the ball.

WHOOOSH

THWACK

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

Chapter 829 - 829: Long Rest (1)

Some time later, Ken left PNC park and made his way back to the hotel across the road. He had only been able to pitch a few times before losing all of his strength. The coach promptly dismissed him and said that they would be in touch.

Ken managed to make it into his hotel room and shrug off his clothes before collapsing onto the bed. He began to shiver and got under the covers, feeling fatigue.

'Damn it...'

He felt as weak as a newborn baby right now, and there was nothing that he could do about it. His stomach growled and his throat was dry. Worst yet, the feeling of the sheets on his skin was grating.

[Mika recommends user drink some water.]

Ken groaned. No part of him wanted to get out of bed, but she was right. He needed to get some fluids into him, otherwise he might be in danger.

He staggered out of bed and grabbed two of the bottled waters on the bench before jumping back in bed. He downed one before turning over and curling up into a ball.

Ever since getting the system, he had never been this sick before.

'Mika... please use sleep protocol. I want to sleep off this fever.'

[Are you sure?]

Ken's mind was too fuzzy to understand her meaning, so he just grunted in response.

[Please drink another bottle of water first.]

With great difficulty, Ken rolled over and grabbed his water, drinking all of its contents. "Happy now?" he said with some sass.

[Activating sleep protocol]

Like that, Ken drifted off to sleep. Thankfully he did not experience any dreams like before.

After an unknown amount of time, Ken woke up groggily. He felt uncomfortable and his stomach grumbled loudly in protest. The bed was wet with his sweat, causing the sheets to stick to his back.

"Urgh..." Ken sat up and tried to clear his head.

Apart from having a bit of a headache and being starving, he felt decent.

"Am I better now?" He mumbled.

He got up and walked over to the window, pulling back the blinds slightly. The night sky greeted him, along with the lights of the streets below. Ken had gone back to bed around 10am, so he had slept for majority of the day.

Letting out a stretch, he decided to go have a shower. He would need his sheets changed, otherwise there was no chance of getting any additional sleep tonight.

He moved over to his phone and checked it, only to see lots of missed calls and messages.

"Huh? What's this?"

As he scrolled through them, he realized that many were from his agent, Barry Hart. This was the guy who both his Grandfather and the chairman of the WWBA, Rob Fisher had recommended.

While he had yet to meet the man in person yet, from their correspondence he was quite capable.

He was going to call back but he saw a message.

"The Raiders have said not to worry coming to the next workout, they have all the information they need."

Ken's heart sank. Did that mean he bombed the workout?

"I don't understand... Couldn't they have waited at least a day?" Ken mumbled, still in disbelief.

He then moved to the messages from Ai. His eyes widened as he saw there were over 10.

"How did the workout go?"

"Are you okay?"

"Why aren't you answering?"

"Ken I'm worried..."

This went on and on until there was a long message that basically grilled him for being so inattentive. He blinked a few times in disbelief.

"What is happening?" he mumbled.

It had only been a few hours, did he miss something?

Yet upon looking at the date on his phone, Ken paled.

"Saturday? That can't be right..."

[User has slept for 30 hours to recover from the fever.]

Mika's monotonous voice entered his mind, causing him to freeze on the spot. 30 hours? Was such a thing possible?

"You made me sleep 30 hours!? What the hell!?" Ken was suddenly assaulted by a stomach cramp and it growled loudly in protest.

[User wanted to sleep the fever off. Mika only did as she was asked.]

"..."

There was no use in complaining so he quickly did some mental calculations before calling Ai. It should be 9am on Sunday in Japan, so hopefully she would pick up.

"H—Hey, sorry I missed your messages."

"Are you actually sorry?" Ai replied, her tone sharp.

He quickly explained that he'd had a fever and had been in and out of sleep for the past day or so. Ken couldn't come out and say that he had slept for the past 30 hours, since no one would believe him. Hell, even he didn't believe it.

Her tone quickly turned softer and she seemed to believe him. They chatted for a while before Ken's stomach felt like it was about to eat itself.

"I'm pretty weak and haven't eaten in over a day. I'll talk to you a bit later. Love you."

She reciprocated the words and he hung up the phone, finally breathing a sigh of relief. With one fire put out, Ken decided it was time to leave the room and finally get some food, hopefully then he would be able to think.

He quickly called the front desk and asked if they could change his bedding before leaving his room and heading down to the restaurant on the 2nd floor. He ordered a few things and helped himself to the free water.

He was due to check out tomorrow but had planned to extend his stay if needed. But it seemed that the Raiders did not require him to come back for another workout.

This could mean one of two things. Either they were not happy with the one he did, or they were satisfied enough with the info they had from his college days.

Either way, this just moved up his plans to meet his agent and Grandfather in North Carolina.

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

Chapter 830 - 830: Long Rest (2)

Once he was done with the food he made his way back up to the room and breathed a sigh of relief upon seeing that the bedding had been changed. He wasn't tired by any means, but the thought of laying in his old sweat was gross.

He opened his laptop and booked his flight tickets and sent his Grandpa a message letting him know of the details. He was looking forward to seeing the man once more, it had been far too long.

And so, Ken went to the hotel gym and worked out after his food had settled, returning to his room shortly after. Even after showering he was not tired which was unsurprising.

With nothing else to do, he got into bed and went into the Image Training.

Once the familiar scene of Koshien Stadium greeted him, Ken let out a contented sigh. No matter how many times he saw this place, it would never get old. The older he got, the more he missed his time in Japan alongside his teammates.

He had two ongoing missions at the moment within the Image training, both were ridiculously difficult and could take years to complete.

#PITCHING MISSIONS:

- > Pitch 100,000 strikes - 5,000,000 Major points + Skill: Striker
- > Pitch 100,000 breaking balls - 5,000,000 Major points + Skill: Breaker of Balls
- > Throw pick-offs 100,000 times - 5,000,000 Major points + Skill: Pick-off Practitioner
- > Pitch 100mph 100,000 times - 7,500,000 Major points + Skill: Over the Speed limit

> Strike-out AI (upgradeable) - 10,000,000 Major points + Diamond Lottery ticket

#BATTING MISSIONS:

> Hit 100,000 bunts successfully - 3,500,000 Major points + Skill: Bunt Aficionado

> Hit 100,000 balls into outfield - 3,500,000 Major points + Skill: Double Trouble

> Hit 50,000 foul balls - 1,500,000 Major points + Skill: Foul Demon

> Hit 100,000 sliders - 4,500,000 Major points + Skill: Slider Demon

> Hit 100,000 curve balls - 4,500,000 Major points + Skill: Curve Demon

> Hit 100,000 fastballs - 4,500,000 Major points + Skill: Fastball Demon

> Hit 50,000 home runs - 10,000,000 Major points + Diamond Lottery ticket + Skill: Home Run King

The numbers were hard to look at, and even after almost 6 months of trying, he was not even 5% of the way to completing them. What made it even more difficult was that this was on the toughest difficulty; Major League.

'One step at a time...!' Ken thought, diving right into the pitching missions first.

Around 5 hours later, Ken was spent. The drain on his mental facilities while in the Image Training was far too burdensome to last for much longer.

Upon returning to the present, he let out a sigh of relief and got out of bed to use the bathroom. He checked his phone and replied to Ai before getting into bed and using the sleep protocol once more.

'You won't make me sleep another 30 hours right...?' He checked with Mika. Ken had a flight tomorrow morning so he did not want to miss it.

[Mika will wake the user up at 5am as usual.]

Only then did he ascent, slowly falling asleep.

The next morning, Ken packed his gear and made his way back to the airport, catching a plane to Raleigh, the place he would be meeting his grandpa.

After another uncomfortable flight, Ken departed the plane and collected his bag, only to see Mark Williams his grandfather after walking through the arrival doors. The man looked to be in great health, even better than when he'd last seen him 2 years ago.

The two locked gazes and Ken smiled brilliantly.

"Kenny! You're looking fit, fine and in shape." He said with a grin, pulling him into a hug.

"I could say the same for you Grandpa, are you sure you're not aging backwards?"

"Hehe, don't jinx it. I might not look old, but I'm still approaching 70. Come, come, I've been waiting all this time for you to visit me, let's not waste anymore time." He said, motioning for Ken to follow.

The two walked to the car park and got in Mark's car before heading to the house. It took around 30 minutes, but there was not a dull moment during the trip.

When they arrived, Ken saw the gates that led up to a two story house. At a glance it looked cozy, lacking the modern aesthetic that many houses these days had.

Mark parked the car and they went inside. There was a large set of stairs at the front of the house which they climbed and Ken put his bags away in the guest room.

"Those are some pretty harsh stairs, are you sure you should be living here?" Ken asked with some concern.

While his grandfather was indeed healthy, he wouldn't be forever. Just remembering how weak the man was when he had cancer was enough to bring up the concern.

Mark shrugged, "I won't be staying here long..."

"What do you mean?" Ken asked, a little confused.

"Go take a seat, I'll make us some tea." He said, pointing to the brown leather couch in the lounge room.

Ken frowned slightly but did as he was told. The couch was comfy and he sunk into it, waiting for his Grandpa to finish dabbling in the kitchen.

He returned a little later with some tea and sat down on the chair opposite him.

"So, what did you mean by you won't be here long?"

Mark took a sip of his tea, slowly placing it on the coffee table. "I got an offer recently, and I've already taken it." He said.

"Hmm? What kind of offer?"

"A head coach position..." Mark replied, a small smile creeping onto his face.

"Wow, that's amazing. Is it the Under 18 team again?" Ken asked curiously.

However, Mark shook his head, "It's a little more prestigious than that." He said with a chuckle.

Ken frowned, "So at a college? Or... Major League Team?"

His grandfather nodded, "Have you heard of the Detroit Ligers?"

"EH!? Really?" Ken almost spilled his tea in excitement. "Congratulations Grandpa, that's amazing." He said, genuinely happy.

"Hehe, thank you. We have the 3rd pick in the upcoming draft... I have heard rumors they are thinking of selecting you, as long as you're not selected before then."

"Huh?"

Ken's mind was blown.

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

Chapter 831 - 831: Grandma (1)

"The Ligers want to select me? Wouldn't that mean you would be my coach in the Majors?" Ken didn't want to get his hopes up, but being so close to his Grandfather would be a dream come true.

Mark smiled, "We've got the 3rd pick in this draft, only behind Pittsburgh and Washington. As long as they don't take you, then you're basically guaranteed to go to Detroit."

But he continued, his smile retreating, "I know that Pittsburgh are looking for a pitcher, so you shouldn't count your chickens. How did the pre-draft workout go?"

Ken wore a pained expression, "I got a fever, so I barely managed to hit a few balls and only pitched twice before I had to leave. I was going to stay another night and reschedule, but they told me not to worry about it." He explained.

Mark nodded, "I see... Well you played college for 3 years, they would already have a lot of data. We will see what happens on the day."

"Yeah... Hopefully they'll pass me up so I get picked up by the Ligers." Ken said, feeling a surge of excitement.

At this, his grandfather laughed and sat back into his chair. "Unfortunately I have no say in the matter, it's entirely up to the GM. As for joining the team, it may be some time before you actually get to play in the Major League."

"Yes, I assume I will be working my way up through the minor leagues." Ken replied. He was aware that even the top picks in the draft would have to spend time developing before they could reach the big leagues.

However, this suited him just fine. He was hoping that he would receive another mission from the system, since the minor leagues were a level higher in competition than college. Of course this was just speculation, but if it were the case, he might be able to improve even further with the rewards.

Mark nodded, taking a sip of his tea. "Santiago was drafted last year, but he's yet to make his debut in the majors."

"Eh!? Santiago was drafted?" Ken was shocked.

"Didn't I tell you this already?"

Ken shook his head vehemently. If the man had, he would have definitely remembered something like this. Santiago was a year older than him, but he assumed that the guy would have finished college first before getting drafted.

"Mmm... Well he's playing for the Rochester Red Wings, the triple A affiliate team for the Washington Natives. I'm surprised he hasn't been called up yet since they haven't been playing well of late." Mark replied, sipping his tea once more.

"They have the 2nd pick in the draft this year right?" Ken asked.

"Pittsburgh have 1st pick, Washington 2nd, Detroit 3rd and Texas 4th. I don't think you'll fall further than 4th, it's not every day a switch pitcher comes into the league." Mark replied, sending him a wink.

Ken laughed, "I only pitch left to lefties. Even after training for a full year, I can't get past 95mph with my left."

Mark almost choked on his tea, giving his grandson an incredulous look. Many pitchers in the Majors could not pitch above 95 even with their dominant arm, yet this kid was complaining about doing so with his left.

He was sure that if a major league pitcher heard his words, they might just beat him up.

"Are you okay Grandpa?" Ken asked with concern.

"I am fine... How about we play some chess? I have an old set that was your Grandmothers. She was a lousy player, but she did love the game." He said, his face full of reminiscence.

"Sure." Ken replied. He did not really like chess, but it was hard to refuse when his grandfather gave such an expression.

"Can you tell me about Grandma?" Ken asked as the older man was setting up the chess board.

"Are you sure you wish to hear it? I could speak all day about her..." He replied, letting out a small chuckle.

Ken nodded. He could tell that the man truly wished to speak about her and that he missed her dearly. Before a few years ago he had barely seen his grandfather, let alone his wife who had passed away when he was a child.

Mark was silent while he set up the chess pieces on the board. Ken didn't interrupt him, letting the old man find his words while he waited patiently.

"Your Grandma... She had the biggest heart out of anyone I've ever met. We first bumped into each other when I was studying at college. The moment I laid eyes on her, I was infatuated." He said, his eyes turning distant.

"At the time, she was still learning English, but that didn't stop me from trying to get closer to her. She had a sort of magnetism that drew people in. Her velvety laugh was like music to my ears... Sometimes I can still hear it now."

"What was her name?" Ken asked.

"Yumi Takagi." He replied softly. "After college, we moved in together and quickly got married. I was playing in the minor leagues back then, but I could never get into the majors, no matter how hard I tried."

"But she was my shining light, the one to pick me up whenever I would fall." Mark said, his voice trailing off.

"We had your father and we were as happy as could be. But with my small minor league contract, we struggled to make ends meet. I needed to work, so I took up coaching. At first it was just little league, but after some years, I was offered a position at a college."

"I wasn't ready to give up my own dream of becoming a professional just yet, but I had to make a decision for my family..." He said.

"I was both young and selfish back then... I took the job so that we could afford to live, but I resented both Yumi and Chris for it." Mark said, lowering his head in shame.

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

Chapter 832 - 832: Grandma (2)

Ken was silent, waiting for his grandfather to continue. The man fiddled with the chess pieces in front of him, his eyes showing sorrow.

"I started drinking after work and I was barely home. I pushed them both away, keeping them at arms distance. When your father was in elementary school, Yumi left me and returned to Japan, taking Chris with her..."

Ken was shocked. His father had never spoken of this before. The only thing that he knew was that Chris had gone to High School in the States before coming to Japan for University.

"I don't blame her, Ken." Mark said, seeing the expression of his grandson. "It was only after she left that I realized how much I had wronged her and your father. Of course I was far too stubborn to say this right away, something that I regret deeply."

"I threw myself into work and aimed to become the best coach that I could be. Before I knew it, my son was ready to start High School. He called me up and we had a good talk." Mark smiled, remembering it fondly.

"Your father... He has a way with words. You should have heard how he scolded me, the little devil." He said, chuckling.

Ken smiled. He could imagine his father laying into his grandfather and the thought improved his mood.

"He told me that Yumi was lonely and missed me dearly. She cried almost every night, and had not seen anyone new all these years, as if she was waiting for me to win her back."

"This was a wakeup call for me." He said, "So I booked the first plane to Japan and got the biggest bouquet of flowers I could find and went to her house. It was a small apartment, far too small for how much money I was sending her each month. The sight hurt my heart."

He paused briefly, "I knocked on the door and stood nervously holding the flowers. Once she opened the door and saw me, she rushed into my arms. Nothing else mattered at that point in time."

Ken felt his heart flutter. Seeing the usually stoic man in front of him so emotional felt surreal.

"I begged for her to take me back, and she agreed. We moved back to America and got a bigger house, and your father went to High School. He returned to Japan for University where he met your mother Yuki. We were thrilled."

"Once I found out I had a grandson, we rushed to Japan to meet you. I still remember the day you peed on Yumi when she tried to change you." He said, letting out a laugh, yet tears were at the corner of his eyes.

"Everything was well... Until Yumi started getting sick." Mark said, his expression dropping.

"At first they were migraines, but it just started getting progressively worse. Your Grandma was a tough woman, she never complained, not unless it was really bad." He said.

"We eventually went to the doctors who did an MRI scan on her brain..."

At this point, Ken reached forward and placed his hand upon his grandfather's. "It's okay Grandpa, you don't have to keep going." He could feel the man's sadness. Even after all these years it seemed that it still affected him greatly.

"No, it's fine..." He shook his head, wiping the tears from the corner of his eyes. "The tumor was too large to operate on, so we tried a few other methods. The radiation was the worst, it sapped her strength so quickly."

"One night, she asked me to play chess. She looked so tired... We played a few games and she asked me to take her to bed. We laid together for a while and talked, remembering all the great moments we had together."

"Yumi told me that she knew I would let her win at chess." He said, letting out a small laugh, by now the tears had started flowing down his face. "She told me that she loved me and shortly after, she slipped away in my arms with a smile on her face."

The old man began to sob, the old wounds had been reopened, exposing their vulnerabilities. Ken stood up almost immediately and went to comfort the old man. He couldn't imagine such a thing, it was a surprise that he was still functioning properly after such an event.

As he hugged his grandfather, he pat his back slowly and said some soothing words.

"Thank you for telling me about my grandmother... I would have loved to have met her when I was older." Ken said softly.

"Mmm... She would have loved that." He said, recovering slightly.

He pulled away from the hug and wiped the tears from his face. He cleared his throat and let out a self deprecating laugh, "Sorry, if Yumi saw me crying over her again I think she would scold me."

Ken shook his head, "You do not need to apologize to me grandpa. I feel closer to grandma thanks to your story."

Mark nodded, trying to compose himself. He reached for his tea on the coffee table and took a sip. "Ah, the tea is cold... I'll brew us another one." He said, grabbing Ken's and leaving towards the kitchen.

Ken sat back in his chair and let out a small sigh. He had not expected such an innocent question to end in such a way. It was obvious that his grandfather both loved and missed Yumi dearly.

It was now apparent why the man had not remarried, or at least entertained another woman after her departure from this world.

Ken felt the same about Ai. He had never loved another woman before, nor did he want to.

The story about his grandfather drinking and his vivid dream the other night seemed to overlap. It was odd. Ken had no idea if it was related, or a coincidence. Either way, he would not make the same mistakes as his grandfather.

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

Chapter 833 - 833: Agent (1)

The atmosphere returned to normal when his Grandfather got back. The man had put on a brave face for over 15 years, his earlier slip was likely because it had been so long since he'd talked about it.

Ken didn't press the issue, he could feel that the man was still hurt.

The chess match went as expected, he lost miserably. Ken knew the basics of chess, but had never actively studied the openings or such in his lifetime.

"You make some daring moves, Ken. But your follow ups are a little passive." His Grandfather said, stroking his chin in thought.

Ken scratched his head a little in embarrassment, "Sorry, I'm a complete newbie in chess. I learned the rules, but this is probably only my 3rd ever game."

"Huh? Really?" Mark's jaw lowered slowly in shock.

"Yes. This is why I stick to baseball." He replied with a small chuckle.

"R-Right..."

Mark's eyes flashed in wonder. He had studied chess after the passing of his late wife since it had made him feel closer to her in a way. Online he was rated 2200, yet some of the moves that Ken had made were brilliant and had caused him to think deeply.

'If he had some training...'

However, Mark shook his head in the next moment. Ken would have no time for such things, perhaps later in his life the man could take it up as a hobby. For now he was close to being drafted into the Major League.

"So, are we meeting my agent tomorrow?" Ken asked, changing the subject.

"Yes, Barry is an old friend of mine. He's a little... peculiar, but he is one of the best in the business." Mark replied, nodding.

His Grandfather didn't seem to want to elaborate, so Ken left it. He would have the opportunity to see for himself tomorrow what made the man so peculiar.

The two spent some quality time together for the rest of the day, talking about everything under the sun. This was the first time that he had stayed with his grandfather one on one, but it was not awkward at all.

In fact, the two were very similar.

The next morning, Ken went for a run and explored the area. His grandfather's house was around 5 miles from downtown, so he decided to make his way there. Since it was so early, only some coffee shops were open. Aside from some ongoing construction, it was rather peaceful.

The streets were lined with trees, a welcome sight for Ken who had spent so long in New York. Central Park was beautiful, but often crowded with people. Raleigh seemed to have a charm that New York did not.

Of course Ken still preferred Japan, but he was biased.

After making the run back to his grandfather's house, he had worked up quite a sweat, however a smile was on his face. Ken had now fully recovered from his fever, improving his mood.

Even though it was only for 48 hours, it had made him feel weak. Only now did Ken feel like his power and explosiveness had returned.

"Morning, how was your run?" His grandfather asked with a smile.

"Good, I went downtown. It is quite nice there."

Mark nodded, "It is a nice place. Now go shower while I make us some breakfast. We'll be meeting Barry at 9 this morning."

Ken did as he was told and soon returned. Breakfast was a true American favorite. Pancakes with bacon and maple syrup. Of course this was not something that he usually ate, but it was quite delicious.

As someone not from the states, this breakfast made no sense to him. Pancakes were meant to be sweet, and bacon was meant to be savory. They should not work so well together.

"I used to make this for your father every Sunday." Mark said with a grin, seemingly enjoying the sight Ken eating heartily.

"Mmm." Ken who was voraciously chewing his food nodded, "Itsh good."

Mark laughed, helping himself to his own pancakes.

After breakfast, the two jumped in the car and headed off to meet with Ken's agent. He was a little nervous, but in a good way. The draft was only a couple of weeks away, seeing an agent now made everything feel real.

They soon arrived at an office complex and exited the car. The buildings were 3 stories high with paned windows and looked rather modern. Judging by the amount of car spaces, there were quite a few people who worked here.

"Is this whole building my agents?" Ken asked in wonder.

Mark looked at him weird for a moment before letting out a laugh, "Gods no. There are probably 10 or so companies in this building alone. You will see soon enough." He said eventually.

They walked in the doors and saw a directory on the sign at the entrance. It showed which business was on which floor. While many had great business logos fitting the professional theme, there was one logo that stood out, and not for good reasons.

It looked like someone had written on a piece of paper and placed it into the spot.

"Barry Hart..." Ken mumbled. He could have probably written it better with his left hand. He turned to his grandfather with a face full of disbelief, as if to question if they were making the right decision.

Mark chuckled, "Barry was never much for theatrics. He said that one's work ought to be the merit he is judged by."

"R—Right..." Ken replied, but inwardly he was skeptical. It wouldn't have taken much effort to get a logo designer, especially if the man was an accomplished agent, he should have plenty of money.

He suddenly remembered the card that Rob Fisher, the chairman of WWBA had given him of Barry's. It was literally just his name and number on a card.

"You will see when we meet him." Mark said, beginning his walk up the stairs and gesturing for Ken to follow.

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

Chapter 834 - 834: Agent (2)

They went up two flights of stairs and reached the 2nd level. Mark led the way and they eventually arrived at the office at the very end of the floor.

This time there was a name plate with Barry Hart written in simple text.

Mark opened the door and the reception greeted them. Ken cringed, it reminded him of a doctors clinic with the chairs set up and the old magazines on the table beside them. No one was present at the desk, but there was a bell.

Ken walked to the reception desk and saw a note, written in the same scribble as the sign downstairs. It read, "Ring bell for assistance."

He took another look at Mark who was still wearing a smile before ringing the bell.

DING

At first there was no response, so Ken rang it a second time.

"Alright alright, I'm coming." The sound of a grumpy man entered there ears. He appeared from the office at the rear, dressed in a blue suit. He was short, maybe 5'5 and wore a kippah on the top of his balding head.

Barry was clean shaven and had a long hooked nose, his eyebrows were thick and there was some grays mixed in, hinting at his age. He was grumbling under his breath, but Ken couldn't catch it.

"Barry my friend, it's good to see you." Mark said with a grin.

Barry looked up and saw Ken, his brown eyes lingering on his face before moving up and down Ken's tall frame, as if evaluating him.

"You must be Ken." He stated, completely ignoring Mark.

Ken frowned. He was not a fan of the man disrespecting his grandfather like this.

"Barry! Hello~ it's me!" Mark half-shouted, waving his arms trying to get the guys attention.

Only now did the smaller man seem to notice Mark. "Mark, my old friend!" Barry exclaimed, waddling forward and taking the man into an embrace. It looked rather comical with the foot in height difference, but Ken did not laugh. He was still confused at what was going on.

"Barry, this is my grandson Ken. I hear you two have already spoken a little." He said, his voice louder than usual.

"It's nice to meet you." Ken said, placing his hand out.

Barry took the hand, though his handshake was soft, making Ken feel a little uncomfortable. The man turned and made a waving motion, "Come into my office, let's have a chat."

Ken's eyes caught the sight of cochlear implants as he walked past. Things suddenly made sense. It seemed that the man was hard of hearing and Ken had just misunderstood something.

Mark brought his arm around Ken's shoulders and led him to follow Barry. "He's a bit of a character, but he's one of the best in the business." He assured him.

Ken nodded, he would trust his grandfather, he had no reason not to.

They arrived into the man's office, which thankfully did not look like a doctors clinic like the reception. There were two comfortable chairs in front of the mahogany desk, of which Barry gestured for them to sit.

Once they did, Barry's face turned into a frown right away.

"Ken, why did you not answer my calls the other day? The Pittsburgh GM was not happy. There's a good chance that you lost the opportunity of getting selected first in the draft." He said.

Ken's eyes widened for a moment and he got a little defensive. "I had a fever and slept for most of the day." He replied, feeling attacked.

"What?"

"He had a fever!" Mark repeated. "Are your ears on?"

"Hmm?" Barry was thoughtful for a moment before reaching up to his cochlear implant and fiddling with it for a moment.

"Say that again."

"I had a fever and slept most of the day." Ken repeated.

"Ah, wonderful. Looks like I forgot to turn them back on again." Barry said with a laugh.

He opened up his laptop and placed his glasses upon his face, "It is no matter. Although you'll miss out on the large signing bonus, it might be a blessing in disguise. The Pittsburgh GM is notorious for being a cheapskate."

Ken raised an eyebrow. The small man's demeanor had suddenly changed with his glasses on. No longer did he look like a tottering old man, but a shark.

"The Natives have the 2nd pick, but they're still light in the outfield, I doubt they'd be looking for another pitcher this year. Speaking of which, your son Santiago should be due to get called up after the all-star break." Barry turned to Mark and said.

"Oh, that's wonderful news."

Ken nodded too, happy for Santiago.

"Does that mean Detroit will likely pick me at 3rd?" Ken asked seriously. He did not want to get his hopes up, but playing under his grandfather would be like a dream come true.

Barry smiled softly, "It is looking that way, though the front office haven't exactly been transparent with me. Perhaps it was fate that you came down with a fever when it was time to workout with them."

Ken felt that might be the case. Inwardly he thought that the system itself might have been pulling the strings in the background. But if he was to be selected by the Detroit Tigers, it would all be worth it in the end.

"Of course, you'll miss out on a fair bit of money by dropping down to the 3rd pick." Barry continued, his expression a little annoyed.

"How much are we talking?" Ken asked. He had accrued quite a bit of money in this past year with Nikey, and could almost afford to pay back his grandfather for the loan.

"About \$1.5 million USD."

"HUH!?"

Hearing such a sum, Ken's jaw almost landed in his lap. That almost 10 times more than the amount he'd made this year, all lost because of a damned fever.

Before tears could manifest, Mark placed his hand upon Ken's shoulder.

"Don't be too upset, the signing bonus will still be around \$7.5 million for 3rd pick."

Ken blinked a few times, feeling faint.

'So much money...'

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

Chapter 835 - 835: Surreal (1)

"Mark is right, you will still get a sizable sum. As for endorsements... I remember you saying that you had another agent who secured you a deal with Nikey?" Barry said, sending Ken a sharp look. The man looked annoyed.

But Ken wasn't worried, in fact he was a little excited.

"Yes, Tara. She's a friend from college. She managed my social media accounts and is the main reason why I was able to get to 500,000 followers at all." Ken replied matter-of-factly, "I was actually hoping that you might take her under your wing once she graduates."

Barry raised his eyebrow. It was clear that he was not keen on the prospect, and seemed to be looking for excuses to decline already.

"Look Ken, I'm sure that she has a knack for social media, but this is no industry for the soft-hearted." He said, adjusting his glasses, "You see, I've been in this line of work for over 30 years..."

The man suddenly broke out into a monologue about the harshness of being an agent, dealing with brands and teams, the finesse required and the like.

Mark leaned into Ken and asked him in a hushed tone, "Would this Tara happen to be pretty?"

Ken raised his eyebrow, "Objectively, yes." He responded truthfully.

His grandfather grinned, "Do you have a photo of her? If so, show it to Barry."

Ken was a little taken aback, but he nodded, going through his phone. All the while, Barry was still giving his monologue.

Unfortunately, Ken was not really one to take photos, so he did not have any of the woman. But thankfully he remembered that she was likely on his on instagram.

After opening her profile, Ken paled. There were some photos of her in a bikini on holiday just a few weeks ago. He showed his grandfather, not sure if this photo would suffice, but the old man gave him two thumbs up.

"Ahem..." Ken coughed, interrupting Barry's monologue.

"This is my friend here, perhaps she could begin as an intern while you teach her the ropes." Ken said, turning the phone towards Barry to show the photo.

Barry looked annoyed to be interrupted, but he turned and adjusted his glasses, looking at the photo. He paused for a moment and then his jaw dropped. His face turned bright red and he quickly looked away.

"Ahem... She seems to be a capable person. I will consider it."

Ken stifled a laugh, putting his phone away. He had not expected the guy to completely change his mind after seeing a photo, but he was thankful that his grandfather's plan had worked.

'I just hope he's not sleazy or anything...' Ken thought.

Barry soon got back on track. "Your Nike contract ends next week, I have reached out to a few other companies for endorsements. They will get back to me with a pitch soon, so you won't have to worry about it until after the draft."

Ken nodded. Tara and her mother had helped him with the last endorsement, thankfully they had advised him to only sign a 1 year deal. His worth would increase significantly after he was drafted, and even further once he played his first Major League game.

"Speaking of the draft, where will you be? The network will want to bring a small camera crew to film your reaction."

"I will probably be at home in Austin with my parents." Ken admitted. Ai would be coming back to the states in the next week to be with him when he got drafted.

Barry was thoughtful for a moment, "How many people? Just you guys?"

"I won't be able to make it." Mark said, his face showing some regret.

Ken placed his hand on his grandfathers arm, "It's alright, we'll see each other a lot in the future if Detroit drafts me." He said with a grin.

"It will just be my parents and fiance." Ken replied.

"That's not many people..." Barry said with a bit of a frown.

"Well most of my friends are back in Japan." Ken shrugged.

"Very well, it's not a big deal. But if you can get a few more people to share it with you, it would be for the best." He said.

"Now, we need to go over a few more things." Barry added, turning his body and facing Ken. "There's a good chance that whatever team you're in will put you into their single-A affiliate team. With your skills it shouldn't take you long to be called up, but I still need to let you know."

Ken nodded, "I had expected as much. As long as I'm signed, I'll work my way up to the major league, don't you worry about that." He said confidently.

"Mmm, I believe you." Barry replied.

"Another thing, what are your plans in the unlikely event that we can't come to an agreement with the club who wants to draft you?"

"Hmm? What do you mean?" Ken inquired.

"Well, if they try to give us a bad contract, or the terms aren't agreeable or in your favor, I will suggest not to sign it. Of course their can be revisions made, but only if the club agrees. I will work on getting you the most favorable deal possible, but some clubs are notorious to deal with." Barry added.

"Of course this is an unlikely scenario, but we need to have a plan just in case. Will you go back to school if it doesn't go through?" He asked.

Truthfully, Ken had not thought of this scenario. Just the thought of going back to Columbia for another year made him feel stifled. It would be like taking a big step back in pursuit of his dreams.

"Ideally I wouldn't go back to school. If anything, I would probably move back to Japan and train for a year, if not, join the NPB." Ken had blurted this out, but had surprised himself. Was this not an even bigger step back?

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

Chapter 836 - 836: Surreal (2)

He had attended college instead of joining the NPB to begin with, now he was talking about heading back to Japan?

"Okay... Well, if it comes to that then fine." Barry said, he also seemed a little surprised. "Perhaps you could join another overseas league that doesn't require you to play for an extended period of time instead..." .

"How about we talk about that only if it comes to it." Mark interjected, seeing that Ken seemed to be a little out of sorts. "My contract was great from Detroit, so I doubt they will try and screw you over." He added.

"Let's hope so." Barry replied. "Well, I don't think there's anything left to speak about for now. I'll send over the details to the network and let you know if I hear any word from other teams interested in drafting you." He said, standing up from the desk.

He extended his hand and Ken shook it, this time it was a little firmer.

"Thank you Barry." Ken said respectfully. His grandfather was right, the little man was a little peculiar, but he certainly knew what he was doing.

Once they left the building, Ken and Mark returned back to the house. He was staying for another night before heading back to Texas. The draft was in 6 days and everything still felt rather surreal.

Ken felt like at any point he would wake up from a dream. In fact, he had been feeling like this for longer than he could remember.

He was still no closer to understanding where the system had come from, nor how he was able to regress back in time to when he was in middle school. The worst part was, Ken was unable to speak to anyone about it, at least not directly.

Ken and Mark were sitting in the lounge room in companionable silence for a while as they sipped their tea.

"What's on your mind?" Mark asked finally, seeing that Ken was acting a little off.

"Do you ever feel like you're living in a dream?" Ken asked, not expecting himself to ask such a question.

Mark did not answer right away. Some might laugh off the question, but not him. He could tell that his grandson was being serious.

"I can't say that I've felt that way, Ken. Though sometimes when I sleep, I still dream of my Yumi. Sometimes I wish that I could live in that dream world forever, even if it isn't real..." He replied seriously.

Ken felt his body shiver for a moment. He turned to his grandfather and gazed into his eyes, they were earnest.

It had been weighing on him for a while. But what would he do if this was all a dream? A trick of the mind while he was recovering from his overdose in his previous life.

A sense of pain and loss quickly drove into his heart like a dagger. The thought of losing everything that he'd worked hard for dawned on him. Ai, Daichi, his family, his friends... Even his Grandpa who had already died from the cancer in his previous life.

Ken's body began to shake and his breath hitched. Suddenly he was struggling to breathe, as if his airways were closing on him. His eyes went wide open and he grasped at his neck, panicking.

Mark shot to his feet with shock.

"C—Calm down Ken. Try and breathe slowly, in through your nose and out through your mouth." The tea had been spilled onto the ground, but he didn't look to care. He grabbed Ken by the shoulders and held him firmly. "You're having a panic attack, you need to calm down."

Ken struggled, trying to control himself. It was so sudden that he had not been able to see the signs. He tried to follow his grandfather's instructions, but failed at first. Only after a few minutes was he able to calm down.

He laid back against the couch, exhausted.

"S—Sorry... I don't know what came over me." Ken said, not knowing what to say. He could see the concerned expression in his grandfather's face and felt bad for making him worry so much.

Mark was silent for a moment before nodding, "It's okay. Stay here while I clean this up."

As the man left, Ken's mind was elsewhere. He did not know what had overcome him in that moment, but he had been filled with despair.

'I should not think of such things in the future... I just need to live my life as normal.' He thought.

After Mark cleaned up the broken mug and the tea that had spilled, he returned to the lounge and gazed at Ken, some worry in his features.

"Tell me what you were thinking about before the panic attack." He said.

Ken didn't answer right away. He couldn't tell his grandfather about regressing, or the system. There was no way that the man would believe him and even if he did, there was nothing that he could say that would make Ken feel better.

So he had to lie, as much as it pained him.

"I was just thinking about what would happen if I did not get drafted... The thought of not being able to achieve my dream after all the hard work that I put in made my chest tense up..." He replied.

Mark frowned, suspicion in his gaze. However, he let out a sigh and answered, "It is normal to have fears Ken, but they rarely end up in a panic attack. I know you said that it feels like a dream, but you have sincerely worked hard to get where you are now."

"I saw it back in the U18 National Team, and even more so now while you were in college. You have improved by leaps and bounds, all off the back of your hard work. If anyone deserves to get into the Major League, it is you my boy." He said, placing a hand on Ken's leg reassuringly.

"Thank you Grandpa." Ken felt bad, but he still smiled.

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

Chapter 837 - 837: Draft Night (1)

The next day, Mark saw Ken off as he went back to the airport to head home. Ken hoped that it would not be long before he saw the man again, but it would all depend on where he got drafted in a few days time.

The trip went by quickly, something the Ken was thankful for. Perhaps it was because he was deep in thought the entire time, or maybe he had just gotten used to flying by now.

He caught a cab back home and grabbed his bags, wheeling them up to the front of the house. Ken could smell something delicious coming from the kitchen. Just imagining his mom cooking up a storm like always put a smile on his face.

"I'm home." Ken announced, opening the door and heading inside.

"Welcome home Kenny!"

Before he could place his bags down, Yuki rushed forward and embraced him tightly. "I'm so happy to see you sweetie, it's been too long." She said. With their height difference, the woman's face was buried in his chest.

Ken felt a little bad, over these past three years he would only visit for a week at a time during Summer break. He hugged her back tightly, "Missed you mom."

She didn't let go for a long time, only relenting when she realized that Ken was still carrying his bags. Yuki pulled back and evaluated him, a smile forming on her face.

"You've grown taller again... You need to stop growing." She said firmly.

Ken laughed, he had indeed gotten taller over this past year. He was now over an inch taller than his grandfather who was 6'5. It was rather confusing since he had only grown to 6'3 in his previous life.

Perhaps this growth could be attributed to the system.

"I don't have control over it mom." He said with a smile.

"I know... Go put your bags away, your father will be home soon."

"Yes ma'am."

Ken did as he was told, taking his bags to his old room. It had not changed since he'd last been here, but it was spotless with no dust around. His mother was very thorough with her cleaning, so he was not surprised.

Ai would be arriving tomorrow from Japan and staying for a little while for the draft. Ken had considered some other people to invite over, but most of his friends were in Japan, and he had lost contact with others.

'I guess this is what happens when I prioritize baseball... ' He thought, feeling a little wistful.

"Wait, can't I invite Steve?" Ken muttered.

Steve would also be in the draft, if they were to watch it together, wouldn't it be for the best? The moment the thought entered his mind, Ken brought out his phone and dialed his friends number.

As it began to ring, he heard a familiar ring tone nearby.

"Yo! I'm at your house, why you calling me?"

Flabbergasted, Ken hung up and left his room, peaking out the front door. Steve was walking up the driveway, his red silverado parked on the street.

"Bro, why are you showing up unannounced?"

"What do you mean? I was invited to dinner." Steve said, his expression showing confusion.

"I'm home~" He announced, opening the door himself and walking in.

"Welcome home Steve." Yuki said, flashing him a smile.

Ken blinked a few times before letting out a sigh. However, a small smile crept onto his lips, he shouldn't complain about having such a good friend who could just show up when he wanted and be welcomed.

"Oh hey, I was thinking we do the draft thing at your house. I don't really want to do it at home since my dad is basically a hoarder. It would be too embarrassing to be on National TV in that house." Steve said off-handedly.

"Ah... Yeah sure." Ken said eventually. He was planning to ask Steve to come here for the draft anyway, so everything seemed to work out.

"Sweet! Oh, only if that's okay with you Yuki." Steve turned to the woman in the kitchen and asked, finding his manners.

Yuki smiled sweetly, "Of course, you're also family. Bring along your mother and father too, maybe even that girlfriend of yours too."

"You're the best Yuki." Steve said with a grin.

"So how many people will that be then?" Ken asked.

"Well, including me that should be 4 people. My brothers and sisters are on the other side of the country, so I doubt they'll make it."

Ken nodded. It wasn't a lot of people, but it would be enough.

With that out of the way, Ken and Steve sat at the dining table and chatted away for a while. Around an hour later, the man of the house arrived, still wearing his Texas Shorthorns polo shirt.

"I'm home." Chris called.

"Welcome home."

3 voices called out at once, causing Chris to double take. "Ah, Ken, Steve, you're back."

Ken smiled and looked at his father. The man looked a little older from the last time he'd seen him, his laugh lines more pronounced. Yet this only added to his charming and amiable look.

He stood up and approached the man, taking him into an embrace. He was now a few inches taller than his father, but to Ken, the man would always be the foundation of this family.

"It's good to see you again." Ken said patting him on the back.

"You too my boy." Chris said, stepping back and holding him at arms length. "Did you grow even taller? Man, you need to stop growing, what have they been feeding you?"

"Right!? The guy gained like 4 inches in college. I'm surprised he doesn't trip over his feet all the time." Steve chimed in with a grin.

Ken ignored his friend, "How did your team go?"

"Knocked out of the Super regionals unfortunately." Chris replied with a wry smile. "I thought we would make it to the playoffs again, but it wasn't meant to be."

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

Chapter 838 - 838: Draft Night (2)

Once Chris arrived, he also joined in on the festivities. Before long, dinner was served and laughter rang out in the house unabashedly.

It was moments like these that made Ken forget about all of his worries. Though there was an undertone of sadness knowing that this wouldn't last forever. In a few days, Ken and Steve would be drafted to different teams. While their friendship would remain, moments like this would be few and far between.

A few hours later, Steve stood up from the table and grinned. "I better be getting home, I've gotta pick up Tara early in the morning from the airport." He stated.

Ken walked his friend out to his car. It was already dark outside and the sound of crickets could be heard, singing their song.

"I'll see you in a few days." Ken said, holding out his fist.

Steve scoffed. "I'm bringing Tara over for dinner tomorrow night, I'll see you then." He said, bumping the fist and jogging off to his car.

"Eh?"

"See ya tomorrow!" Steve said with a big grin. He started his car and drove off, leaving Ken with a confused expression.

Ken let out a dry chuckle. 'Give him an inch and he takes a mile.' He mused, smiling.

As Steve said, he did indeed arrive with Tara the following night for dinner, and the night after that. Ai arrived the day before the draft and spent most of the first day in bed thanks to jet lag.

As the big day approached, Ken began to get nervous. He had received a few messages from Barry, labeling the teams that had interest in him. Detroit had still not given a definitive answer, which did little to calm his nerves.

Having his fiance and family close by made things a little easier, but when the actual day of the draft arrived and the camera crew showed up at their door, the anxiety reached its peak.

"B—Bro... Is this really happening?" Steve said beside him, looking pale.

Ken turned and saw that his friend was just as nervous as him. This made him feel slightly better. He lifted his arm and placed it around the guy's shoulder, "This is it man. Today we will take a step closer to playing in the Majors."

Steve nodded, his usual mischievous smile nowhere to be found. There was around an hour till the broadcast was meant to begin and Ken helped himself to some of the snacks that his mother had placed on the table.

Ai stuck close to him, reassuring him the whole time. It certainly helped.

In all honesty, he had no idea why he was so nervous. Perhaps it was because his dreams were finally about to be fulfilled.

The next hour felt like it dragged on for months. He was getting messages from his agent Barry Hart non-stop, referring to interest shown by a few teams, yet none of them were Detroit.

The TV was on, showing the pre-draft program where many analysts were going over the prospects in the draft. Ken heard his name called and he approached the lounge room, taking a spot next to Ai on the couch.

"We've got an amazing pool of talent this 2022 MLB draft class, but I think we can all agree that there are a few that stand out."

"Yes Jason, you're right. The 21 year old pitcher from Columbia, Ken Takagi is a generational talent that we haven't seen before. He came into the college scene throwing bombs, but only in the last year has he truly shown his talents. He's the first switch pitcher we've seen since Venditte."

"AND he throws at least 10 miles an hour faster. If I'm the raiders, there's no way that I'm passing up the opportunity to take him with the first pick."

A few of his highlights were played on the TV, showing him pitching both left and right on the mound. Ken felt that it was surreal to be on national TV, but he was still nervous. He felt a firm pair of hands on his shoulders, it was his father comforting him.

"When we're talking about Ken, we can't forget his partner in crime Stephen Adams. The guy is a dynamic catcher and is money with the bat, leading Division 1 in home runs for two years straight."

As they said this, Steve's highlights went up on the TV, showing him bombing some hits into the stands. His quirky reactions to the hits were what made the highlights even better.

"It's not often we get two top prospects from the same school, let alone somewhere like Columbia."

"You're right. I wouldn't be surprised if they both get selected in the top 5."

The TV changed and all of a sudden Ken could see his face now on TV. He was surprised, almost forgetting that the camera crew were currently in his house. At this moment, he didn't know what to do or how to react.

Thankfully the camera guy moved over to Steve who was on the other side of the couch. The guy gave two thumbs up to the camera, but he looked stiff and out of place, causing Ken to almost burst out into laughter.

"Looks like that two teammates are together for the draft. It just shows how close they are."

"Well you've got to remember Jason, these two first met in High School and won a State Championship in Texas together with McCallum High. They also won the annual WWBA national Tournament together."

"Yes yes, I'm almost certain that these two will find themselves drafted tonight. Speaking of, the first pick is in from the Pittsburgh Raiders. Please stand by the for the announcement."

Ken's nerves suddenly came to a crescendo as he stared at the TV.

'Please don't pick me... don't pick me...' He chanted in his mind.

He saw a man walk out onto to the stage and stand at the pedestal.

"With the first pick of the 2022 MLB draft, the Pittsburgh Raiders select... Peter Skenes, right handed pitcher from LSU."

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

Chapter 839 - 839: Drafted (1)

Ken felt his body relax subconsciously. He had been so worried that the Pittsburgh Raiders would select him, despite everything that Barry had told him. Now that it was confirmed, he would have to hope that he would fall to Detroit.

"Peter Skenes is a great pick out of Louisiana State, I think the Raiders have a bright future ahead as long as he can continue to develop."

"You are right, though I'm a little confused since I don't believe he is the best pitcher in the draft. If I was the Raiders, I would have picked Ken without a doubt." The TV commenter said.

"This is why we're on the broadcast team and not in the front office Jason. Perhaps there were some things about Peter that the organization liked more, we will never know. There are 4 minutes remaining for the Washington Natives to make their decision, could we see our projected number 1 picked up next?"

"I doubt it," Jason said, "The Natives already have a great and young pitching roster. I daresay they'd be looking for someone in the outfield to pair alongside their previous draft pick Santiago Williams who should be joining the main squad in the latter half of this season."

Ken's attention was locked onto the TV, listening to them discuss the next pick in the draft. Highlights of a few the potential outfielders played and the commentators seemed convinced that Ken was not going to be picked next.

This gave him a little relief, but nothing was certain until the decision was made.

As the clock ticked down, Ken felt a hand squeeze his own. He turned to see Ai smiling at him reassuringly. "It will all work out, don't stress so much." She said.

Ken nodded, but it was easier said than done. Ever since finding out that his grandfather would be the coach of the Detroit Ligers, he wanted nothing more than to join the team alongside him.

It might be a little selfish, but what was wrong with that? The man was his family. His phone began to buzz violently, causing his heart to leap into his throat.

He had heard from Barry and his grandfather that a team would call prior to the pick being televised, letting the player know they would be drafting them. In that moment, he truly felt sadness, but he needed to be professional about it.

Ken let out a deep breath and composed himself, answering the phone.

"Hello, this is Ken speaking." He said, much calmer than he had expected.

"Hey Ken! Long time no speak, what are you up to man?"

Hearing the familiar voice speaking to him in Japanese, Ken frowned and looked at his phone. His earlier stoicism fractured, replaced by anger.

"SHIRO YOU BASTARD! I'm waiting for an important call, don't call me back!" Ken screamed at the phone in Japanese before promptly hanging up.

Ai beside him began to giggle, doing her best to hide it. Ken looked up and saw her, but instead of getting annoyed, he felt much better.

"And it looks like the pick from the Washington Natives are in."

Ken's head snapped to the TV, feeling a bit of tension. Since he hadn't heard from the Natives, he shouldn't be getting drafted by them, or at least he hoped.

"With the second pick of the 2022 MLB draft, the Washington Natives select... David Crews, an outfielder from LSU."

"And there you have it, David Crews is taken directly after his teammate Peter Skenes. I really like this pick, the man is dynamic and quick on his feet. He has plenty of speed and great awareness."

'Oh thank goodness...!' Ken felt relief. Perhaps he was one of the only draftees who didn't wish to be taken earlier in the draft, but he didn't care.

However, now that the first two picks had passed, the nerves really began to sit in. His eyes moved to the timer in the bottom left corner of the TV which tracked how long the Detroit Ligers had to make their decision on who to take.

Barry had received no confirmation from Detroit about their intention to draft him, so all Ken had to go off was what his grandfather had told him.

"I'm calling it, Detroit will be the one drafting Kenny." Chris announced, causing the entire room to turn towards him. The camera crew turned their attention to him, capturing the moment.

Ken felt warm inside. He sent his father a small smile in response.

BUZZ BUZZ

Ken's phone started to vibrate like crazy in his hands, causing him to flinch. He looked down and noticed that it was not a number he recognized, but at least it was not a Japanese number.

He swallowed hard, not wanting to get his hopes up. "Hello, this is Ken speaking."

Everybody in the room including the cameras looked at Ken with anticipation.

"Ken, it's Geoff Greenberg from the Detroit Ligers." A voice spoke from the other end.

Instantly, Ken felt his excitement peak. "H—Hello Mr. Greenberg."

"I wanted to be the first to congratulate you. We're going to draft you at pick #3, you're about to become a Liger." He replied.

A sense of relief and accomplishment ran through Ken's body. He instantly felt a lump in his throat. "Thank you sir... Thank you so much." He replied.

Before he knew it, the relief brought tears to his eyes. This was something that he had worked his whole life towards. Years of hard work and dedication were finally paying off in this moment.

"Well the city of Detroit is excited to have you. Celebrate with your family and we'll see you in a couple of days." Geoff said.

"Thank you again sir. I can't wait."

Once he hung up the phone, the entire room was waiting for an answer.

"I'm going to be a Liger." Ken announced.

"That's my boy!" Chris slapped him on the shoulder, his face filled with pride. He was only the first, everyone came around Ken and congratulated him and cheers soon filled the room.

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

Chapter 840 - 840: Drafted (2)

"With the third pick of the 2022 MLB draft, the Detroit Ligers select... Ken Takagi, a switch pitcher from Columbia University."

Once his name was announced, the TV showed his reaction. Thankfully by that moment he had been able to regain his composure, he would hate to be caught crying on national TV.

He celebrated with his close family and friends. Even Steve whose name had yet to be called had set aside his anxiety and sincerely congratulated him on being drafted.

Yuki was crying happy tears, her head buried into her husband's chest after hearing the news. Seeing her son achieve his dreams filled her with indescribable pride and joy.

Yet not even a minute after the pick announcement, Steve received a phone call and had to step away. Since many were still focused on Ken being drafted, only Tara and Ken saw what was happening.

They happened to lock eyes and each could see the other's excitement.

Ken quickly told everyone to be quiet and pointed to Steve who was on the phone. The room went to silence and only now could they hear Steve talking.

"Thank you sir, I won't let you down."

Steve hung up the phone and almost dropped it. He stood in utter disbelief, his eyes moving to Ken who was nearby.

"Well?" Ken asked.

"That was the Texas Riders GM... They're picking me at number 4." His tone showed his disbelief, as if he felt like this was just a dream.

Ken rushed forward and hugged his friend, seemingly more excited than his own name being called. He knew just how hard Steve had worked alongside him to get where he was today, of course he would be excited.

"You did it man... I knew you would."

"I... I did it." Steve said.

"I DID IT!"

"I'M GONNA BE A MAJOR LEAGUER!" He shouted as tears threatened to spill from his eyes.

Tara and Ai joined in on the group hug and celebrated together. It was a joyous occasion and these 4 friends enjoyed it together.

Once he got some space, Steve's parents came over and congratulated him. His father was short and round with curly black hair, his roots clearly had some Asian descent. By his side was Steve's mother who was from England, they were an unlikely pairing, but they truly seemed happy in that moment.

Sure enough, the pick was announced and once more the room broke into celebration. With Ken being selected by Detroit and Steve set to remain in Texas, the two young men were set for the Majors.

The celebrations lasted well into the night and was filled with joy and happiness.

At some point Ken's phone began to blow up from some friends and acquaintances. He only took a single phone call from Daichi, letting the rest go to voicemail.

It was truly a wonderful night. Ken was aware that the following day they would all go their separate ways. Ai and Tara would return to New York, and Ken would head to Detroit, but he didn't let it affect him.

Tonight was a night for celebrations, tomorrow's worries were for exactly that, tomorrow.

People only started to leave just before midnight, leaving only Ken, Yuki, Chris and Ai remaining in the house. By now, Ken's social battery had been heavily depleted, but he couldn't remove the smile from his face.

He had been drafted by the team coached by his Grandfather like he wanted. Of course he would have to work his way up through the minor league to get there, but it was not something that he was afraid of doing.

In fact, Ken looked forward to making an impact at once.

"Are you happy?" Ai asked as she snuggled against him in bed.

"Mmm. This is the second happiest moment of my life." He admitted, wrapping his arm around her.

"Second? What's the first?"

"When you agreed to my marriage proposal." He said sincerely. This was in no way a lie. While he had been working towards the goal of being drafted and getting into the Majors, Ai was even more important to him than this, something he had realized since starting college.

Ai nudged him, "Don't go sucking up to me." She said, letting out a small giggle.

Ken shrugged, "I'm not lying. If I could only have you, or baseball... I'd choose you."

Ai was silent for a while. She brought up his hand to her lips and kissed it gently, "I believe you." She whispered. "Well thankfully you don't have to choose. You can have both."

Ken smiled genuinely, shifting his body and kissing her deeply. "I will miss you..." He said, some sadness in his tone.

They would have to spend a year apart. Of course during the off-season he would have some time to come and see her, but Ai would still be at college during this time and no doubt he would be training hard to get better.

"I will miss you too, but it is only temporary. We survived a year apart when you first moved to America, we can do it again." She assured him.

"Yeah but it sucked..." Ken complained.

Ai giggled at this since Ken sounded like a child. "No complaints. Once the year is over, I'll follow you to wherever you are. When that happens, you won't be able to get rid of me no matter how hard you try."

Ken laughed in good humor, "Why would I ever want to get rid of you?"

"I was just being completely transparent." Ai replied squeezing his hand. "Maybe once everything is settled we can start our own family..."

Ken gulped, suddenly remembering his dream the other day. There was definitely a child, and she had called him papa. For a moment he felt dread. Was the dream really of his future? If so, why did Ai look so scared of him?

"Hey, are you okay? I'm sorry I brought it up on your special day..." Ai replied meekly.

"No, I'm sorry, my mind drifted a little. I think we should definitely talk about it after we settle in a years time." Ken said, kissing her once more.

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

Chapter 841 - 841: Welcome (1)

The next couple of days went by like lightning. Ken felt like he had hardly spent any time with Ai or his parents before he was sent off to Detroit to start the next part of the process.

He soon arrived at Comerica Park and was instantly enamored by the statue of a Liger outside the entry. The detail was magnificent and the pose dynamic, as if it was going to claw at something.

The ballpark itself was even more impressive. In fact, it reminded him of Rodgers stadium where he had played the U18 World Cup all those years ago.

Ken was ushered in and taken directly to a room to begin a physical exam with one of the team's doctors. They went through a range of mobility tests and gave the all clear rather quickly.

He was then taken into the offices to meet with some of the executives.

"There he is!" A fit man who looked to be in his forties dressed neatly in a suit exclaimed. He had a wide smile and a receding hairline, but it suited him well. He was flanked by two others, a shorter man and someone that he easily recognized.

Ken smiled. He wanted to go and greet his grandfather, but that would be rude in front of the General Manager, his boss.

"Mr. Greenberg, thank you for having me." Ken said, bowing slightly.

"Haha, nonsense. We're glad to have you aboard. In all honesty, I was surprised when you were still available by the time we picked you." Geoff said, he extended his hand and they shook.

"This here is Cheryl, she's the head of public relations for the organization. She handles anything related to the media, good and bad." He said, gesturing to his left.

Ken bowed slightly, saying a few words of greeting.

"And this is our coach, Mark Williams. This might be his first year with us, but I can assure you that he has much experience." Geoff stated, pointing to the tall man beside him.

Ken grinned and walked over to his grandfather, wrapping his arms around him for a hug.

"Congratulations my boy, I'm so proud of you." Mark said, patting him on the back. He was a tad emotional, but one could hear the pride in his tone.

Both Geoff and Cheryl were taken aback and shared a look. They stood awkwardly while the two men hugged each other, only speaking up once they stood back.

"It seems that you two are acquainted?" Geoff said, looking unsure.

"Haha, Ken is my grandson." Mark said with a grin.

"Oh?" Geoff was silent for a while, as if contemplating something. "Well that's good." He nodded. "Welcome to the organization Ken, shall we move to the meeting room? I believe your agent is already inside waiting."

"Thank you sir, please lead the way." Ken replied respectfully.

The four walked through the halls and eventually arrived in the meeting room. There was a man with a camera, likely to record the moment that he signed the contract.

Barry was seated on the couch and stood up when everyone arrived.

"Good to see you again Barry." Ken said with a smile.

"What?" Barry replied, obviously having not heard him.

Ken stifled a laugh and pointed to his ears.

"Ah, damn it."

Soon enough, the details were agreed upon by everyone in the room and Ken took the moment to sign on the dotted line. With his signature he would officially become a Detroit Liger for the next 3 years.

After some back and forth, the organization decided that it would be best to place Ken in the Double-A affiliate team the Erie SeaWolves in Pennsylvania. However, he would not leave until the day after tomorrow.

"Excellent! Welcome to the Ligers, Ken." Geoff said with a wide smile. The two shook hands and exchanged pleasantries.

"We have a home game tomorrow against the Raiders, would you mind throwing the ceremonial first pitch?" he asked.

"Sure, I don't see why not." Ken agreed. He didn't see any issues in giving the crowd a taste of what he would be bringing in the future, even if it was just a ceremonial pitch.

"Wonderful."

"We shouldn't keep the media waiting." Cheryl said, standing up from her chair.

"Media?" Ken asked in confusion.

"Oh right, we've just got a small press conference organized, it's nothing big." Geoff said, waving it off as if it were nothing out of the ordinary.

Ken gulped. Thankfully he had made sure to dress nicely, otherwise he would have been mortified. Still, he was feeling a little nervous.

Interviews on the field after a game were one thing, but a press conference was another thing entirely. Up until now, he had not participated in one.

His grandfather pat his shoulder on the way past and flashed him a smile, "Good luck out there."

Ken nodded and followed Cheryl to the designated room. The moment he entered he saw over 20 people and various cameras set up, all pointing towards the front of the room. There was a backdrop with the Ligers logo and other various sponsors.

When he arrived, the chatter died down quickly and the flashes of photos began to snap, almost blinding him. Cheryl led him to the front and directed him to one of the chairs where he would sit.

Geoff sat down on one side and his grandfather the other.

What happened next felt like a bit of a blur. He was peppered with loaded questions basically asking how excited he was to become a Liger, what his plans were and the like.

Ken basically answered on autopilot. There were no questions with substance, making him confused as to why he was required to attend the press conference in the first place.

Towards the end, Ken was prompted to stand up alongside the coach and GM. He was given a white Detroit jersey with his name on it and held it up.

"Welcome, number 13, Ken Takagi."

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

Chapter 842 - 842: Welcome (2)

After another hour or so, Ken found himself back at the hotel he'd been booked in at. These last couple of days had flown by, to the point where it didn't feel real. He would be staying in Detroit for two nights before flying to Erie.

He wasn't sure how long he would be playing in Double-A, but he hoped that it would not be for long. Originally Ken had wanted to be placed in Triple-A right away, but his grandfather talked him down.

Everyone had to go through this process, so there was no use in rushing. With only half the season remaining this year, it would be better if he focused on improving before being called up to the Majors.

And so he agreed.

He checked his phone and saw a message from Tara. Apparently his instagram following had increased after the draft and was now sitting at almost 800 thousand. She also said that Barry had reached out to her to help work on the new endorsement deal from Nike.

Ken smiled. With Barry helping out Tara, he felt at ease. The woman had helped grow his brand, so he felt that he owed her at least this much.

He decided to call Ai. It had only been a day, but he missed her already. They had only seen each other for a few days and the first didn't even count because she had been jet lagged.

The two spoke for over an hour before hanging up. Ken planned to have dinner with his grandfather and the time was approaching.

They caught up at a local steakhouse and had a great dinner. Now that the draft was over, Ken was feeling much better. He had been anxious for what seemed like an eternity, but it had all worked out in the end.

Their conversation was light, though the older man had warned Ken that just because they were related, it didn't mean he would go easy on him.

The next night, Ken arrived at Comerica stadium and was ushered through the players area and introduced to the team in the locker room. There were many people he was introduced to, but not many seemed that interested in him.

'Is it because I'm not a part of the team yet?' Ken thought. He couldn't blame them, he was technically on a minor league contract right now. Many of the people in the locker room might not be here by the time he crawled up to the Majors.

One player stuck out, James Rogers the catcher. He had a thick mustache that looked like it was going to crawl off his face in the next moment. He was a bit shorter than Ken, but was still likely around 6'2.

He was nice, but seemed rather nonchalant about the meeting.

Ken stuck around in the locker room but was largely ignored. Perhaps if he was younger and more immature he might be upset about this, but it didn't affect him.

Instead, he was busy using Identify on all of the players, his eyes sparkling. He had missed out on doing this to the Yanks players, there was no way he would miss out on this chance.

He was a little surprised to see that quite a few of the players were below him in physical stats. It was mostly the pitchers and a few baseman in particular.

Ken frowned. This didn't make sense.

If they were worse than him, then why were they in the majors?

However, his eyes lit up in understanding in the next moment. He had theorized before that experience played a tremendous part of a players ability to play the game. While the system did not seem to have an experience grade, he had no doubt this was also a huge factor.

'Mika, why does the system not show a players experience?' Ken asked.

[Answer: Experience is too variable to quantify into grades.]

Ken thought for a while on the answer. At first he didn't think it made sense. The system was able to quantify essentially everything, so why not experience. But as he continued to ruminate, it started to make more sense.

Experience came in many forms on the battlefield. Unless one were to give each aspect of baseball an experience grade, the result would be far too inaccurate. For example, if a player was EX grade in 3 out of the 10 categories, but C grade or below in the others, the average would be shockingly wrong.

Forgetting experience, at least he compared better to a lot of players when it came to raw grades, making him feel a little better.

His thoughts were interrupted with the arrival of his grandfather into the locker room. The old man looked amiable, but his face changed when he began to speak to the players.