

# Major League System

## Chapter 861 - 861: The Bet (1)

[User has been added to the Triple-A Team: Toledo Mud Hens]

#NEW MISSION: Triple-A Season.

Note: Tasks have been adjusted due to shorter season.

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

\*Task 2: Finish season with ERA below 2.5

\*Task 3: Finish season with greater than 70 RBIs [0/70]

\*Task 4: Achieve greater than 0.600 win rate when playing

\*Task 5: Win with best record in International-League

\*Task 6: Qualify for Playoffs

\*Task 7: Win Triple-A National Championship

REWARDS:

>Task 1 rewards - 500,000 Major points

>Task 2 rewards - 500,000 Major points

>Task 3 rewards - 700,000 Major points

>Task 4 rewards - 1,000,000 Major points

>Task 5 rewards - 1,000,000 Major points

>Task 6 rewards - 1,500,000 Major points

>Task 7 rewards - 2,500,000 Major points

Once he had finally sat down on the plane, Ken was able to open up the system, finding out that the notification was indeed for a mission. At first he had thought that it might have had something to do with Rohan, but the timing had been just a coincidence.

The first thing that he noticed was that the rewards were only Major Points. Unlike every other time that he received one of the season missions, there were no Elixirs or lottery tickets.

It felt odd.

Now that he was a professional, did that mean the system would no longer give him these types of rewards? If that were the case, then the skills and traits he had now might be all he received in the future.

But Ken wasn't worried. As it stood now, he believed that he had all the skills he needed. The only thing that he needed was experience.

'Could it also be because of the unknown system function?' He thought briefly.

After thinking about it for a while, Ken shook his head. 'It's always something...' He thought with exasperation.

He laid his head back in the seat and waited for the plane to take off. Soon enough, they shot into the air and Lake Erie came into view. It was beautiful.

Despite only being in Erie for only 4 days, Ken felt like he had benefited. Meeting Rohan had helped steel his resolve and only further ignite his determination to succeed no matter what.

'They should be packed on a bus by now, headed to Binghamton.' Ken thought.

"Ah crap!"

He quickly sat up, realizing that he had forgotten something important.

The woman next to him was jolted, looking at him with horror. Ken quickly apologized, feeling his face turn red from embarrassment.

However, he was still filled with shame. Ai was meant to be meeting him at Binghamton and staying for a few days during the week since school had not yet started.

But he had not told her that he was moved up to Triple-A...

So Ken spent the next hour of his flight stressing. As soon as he could use his phone, he called his fiance and told her the news. At first she was ecstatic, but after he admitted to knowing the night before, Ai scolded him gently.

However, it was only a little, and she quickly moved past it. He was a lucky man in this case, but they would still lose money on the cost of travel. Of course Ken could afford it, but losing money was still something that pained him.

Once again, another driver was waiting for him as he went through arrivals. Ken followed the man and was led to taxi.

'I feel like I just went through this the other day...' Ken thought with a chuckle.

Soon enough they arrived at Fifth Third Field, the home of the Toledo Mud Hens, his new team. The stadium felt larger than the one at UPMC park, which made sense.

This time, a man dressed in a gray polo and wearing the team hat greeted him as he got out of the taxi. The man looked to be in his early 40's and was rather stern-faced.

"You must be Ken." The man said, holding out his hand, "I'm Coach Dean, the Head Coach for the Mud Hens."

Ken clasped the hand and bowed slightly, "It's nice to meet you Coach. Happy to be part of the team."

"Mmm. It seems you've got some friends in high places young man. It's not often that someone gets moved up from Double-A so quickly." Coach Dean stated.

At this, Ken frowned. While it might sound like a compliment, he could tell that the guy did not mean it that way.

'Is he trying to say I only got moved up because I know people?'

Part of him wanted to react to the comment, but he kept it inside. This was his new coach. The guy could literally make his life a living hell if he chose to, there was no point in making an enemy on the very first day.

"Thank you sir. I will do my best for the team." Ken replied.

Coach Dean nodded, his eyes narrowing slightly, "Come on through. We already have your medical results so there's no need to go through that again. We'll get your uniform and you can join the morning training session right away."

And so they walked into the stadium and Ken was given his new uniform before being directed to the locker room. None of the players had arrived just yet, he was the first.

The uniform was white with some lines of black on the front. The word "Mud Hens" were prominent on the chest. It was not the worst uniform he'd worn, but it certainly wasn't the best.

As he tucked the uniform in, the door to the locker room opened. A man wearing a tank top strolled in with a bag over his shoulder. His large arm muscles were covered in a sheen of sweat, as if he'd just come from the a work out.

He turned his gaze to Ken, the only other person in the locker room and gave him a quizzical glance.

"Who are you?" he asked in a deep voice.

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

## **Chapter 862 - 862: The Bet (2)**

Ken looked at the man who had entered. He looked to be in his late twenties or early thirties with a stubbled beard and light blue eyes.

"I'm Ken. I just got called up from the SeaWolves." Ken replied politely.

"Ah..." The man replied, his blue eyes looking Ken up and down as if to evaluate him. "Wait, are you that rookie the Ligers just drafted?" He asked.

"Yes, I was drafted last week."

The guy let out a whistle, "Damn, rookies sure aren't what they used to be." He replied, strolling into the locker room and placing his bag down.

"Still, it must be nice to be the coach's grandson... Free ticket to the big leagues." He said, unzipping his bag with his back turned.

Ken instantly felt his stomach tighten in anger. Not only did the guy not introduce himself, he had insulted him right away. It was one thing to accept the words from the coach, but he didn't owe this bastard anything.

"Care to repeat that?" Ken said, his tone cold.

"Hmm? You looking to start something?" The man turned around, his eyes narrowing.

"Start something? You think I'm the one starting something?"

Ken waltzed across the locker room and stood over the newcomer. With their difference in height, he was almost a head taller.

"It would appear that way." The guy replied, not backing down.

Ken let out a harsh laugh, "It's funny, not only did you not introduce yourself, you made a nasty remark earlier. You think I'm only here because my Grandfather is the new coach of the Ligers?"

"I suggest you get out of my face." The man replied.

However, Ken was having none of it. "Why should I show you respect when you clearly have no intention of showing me any? You want me to just obediently lay down while you talk crap about me?"

"I want you to back up before I do it for you."

The two stood across from each other neither willing to back down. But it seemed that the man had had enough, he raised his hands and pushed towards Ken's chest to move him.

However, Ken saw it coming. He moved his body to the side, displacing much of the impact of the push. Yet he saw the man's hands ball into fists and knew that punches would be thrown next.

"That's enough Jeremy." A voice called from the door, its tone not allowing for rebuttal.

Both Ken and Jeremy turned their heads to see the newcomer. The man was older, possibly in his 60's and wore the same uniform that Coach Dean had been wearing.

"Coach, this guy started something for no reason." Jeremy said, his annoyance evident.

"I highly doubt that. I already heard you badmouthing the kid yesterday when we found out he was being called up to the team." He said, shaking his head with exasperation.

"You remember what the coach said, one more incident and you'll be looking for a new team."

At this, Jeremy's face paled, but he turned to Ken in the next moment, "Piss off before I change my mind."

Ken frowned. This was not how he expected to meet his new teammates. He had also not expected people to disregard his merits, saying that he only got here because of his Grandfather.

He turned to the newcomer, the one Jeremy had called Coach before heading back over to his locker. Ken didn't know what to say, but he felt a hint of sadness, would this be what it was like going forward?

"Hey Ken, I'm Coach Franklin, the batting coach." The man said, holding out his hand, "Don't worry about this idiot over here, he's known for making trouble." The guy said, sending a disparaging glance to Jeremy.

Ken took the offered hand and said some pleasantries, yet his heart wasn't in it at the moment. He understood that not every player would be accommodating, but having his merits overlooked because of his relation to the coach of the Ligers was disheartening.

At no point had the man helped him get drafted. The GM of the Ligers was not even aware that they were related until after drafting him, but no matter what he said, it wouldn't make a difference to people like Jeremy who had already made up their mind.

As if seeing his downcast mood, the older man leaned in and whispered to him.

"All you need to do is show them why you're here." He said with a smile, "Watch the doubters change their tune when you start performing well."

Hearing this, Ken's expression changed. The man was right. There was no point in getting brought down by such a thing. He knew that it was not true, so all he needed to do was prove them all wrong.

"Jeremy." Ken said, turning to the abrasive guy.

"What?" Jeremy replied, his tone full of annoyance.

"I'll make you eat your words. Whatever you do, I'll do better... Soon you'll have no choice but to acknowledge that I am better than you in every way." Ken said, his face wearing a large grin.

"Huh!? You're a real cocky one alright." Jeremy replied, but a dark smile crept onto his lips. He stood up and walked across the room and stood in front of Ken, staring right into his eyes.

"Let's make a bet, shall we? Whoever gets the most home runs and RBI's from now until the end of the season wins."

"Hmm? What are the terms?" Ken replied with interest.

"It's simple," He shrugged, "If you win, I'll apologize properly..."

"And if I lose?" Ken asked.

"Then you'll be my bitch for as long as you're on this team. That means, when I say jump, you ask how high." Jeremy replied, his grin growing wider. He thrust out his hand, as if goading Ken to accept.

"Don't listen to him Ken. The guy's apology is not worth going through so much trouble." Coach Franklin advised him.

However, Ken didn't listen. "Do you know what dogeza is?"

"No... What is that?"

"It means to prostrate in front of someone as an apology. If you agree to do this, I will accept your bet." Ken said with a smile.

After a few moments, Jeremy agreed. Only then did Ken take the outstretched hand.

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

## **Chapter 863 - 863: Sacrifice (1)**

"I'm home."

Daichi opened the door to his house and called out.

"Welcome home."

A woman appeared around the corner wearing a brilliant smile. Her hair was tied in a practical bun and she was wearing a shirt far too large for her with short shorts that could barely be seen.

"Sorry I'm late, training ran a little over tonight." Daichi said, moving forward and planting a kiss on her lips.

"That's fine, it's not the first and won't be the last." Miho replied, nudging him. "Dinner might be a little cold though."

"I'm sure it'll taste good anyway." He said, sending her a wink.

Daichi had gotten a little older, his body finally growing into his wide shoulders. He was no longer the baby-faced assassin, though his teammates still loved to use the name to tease him.

The two had been living together ever since Miho graduated at the end of last year and were now engaged. Like he'd told Ken, Daichi had waited till Miho had graduated and popped the question in a private setting.

Miho's parents and Coach Takashi were present, it had been a great celebration.

Now, Daichi had been a professional athlete for almost 3 years. He had accomplished what many people in Japan could only dream of in their lifetime, and he was only 21 years of age.

He was engaged to the love of his life and was living out his dream as an athlete, what more could he want? Of course this was only on the surface. Deeper down, there was something missing.

His mother and father—not the one's who had brought him into this world, but the one's who had chosen him. Ken, the shining light who had pulled him from the abyss and shown him that there was more to life than just existing.

His best friend and big brother.

Daichi remembered their pact all those years ago, before they even became brothers.

"Once your shoulder heals, let's aim to become pro together."

"Yeah it's a promise. Let's get to the NPB and then the Majors!"

He could still remember the big grin on his brother's face back then. They were only 15, but Ken already had his life planned out, Daichi was just dragged along behind him.

Their paths diverged when he was invited to Osaka Toin and Ken was not. Of course he had later found out that his brother had been offered a scholarship, but it was only valid if he quit pitching.

Not only did Ken bounce back, he and his team won Koshien in his freshman year at High School, beating Osaka in the semi-finals.

Then there was the U18 World Cup. Ken pitched in the final game, beating the United States to claim the trophy.

This was where he met Miho, and their paths only continued to grow further apart. It all came to a head when his father was offered a coaching job in the states. At first, the thought of going to college with his brother excited him.

After all, America was the home of baseball and the best way of reaching the Major League. But the thought of leaving Miho in Japan was too much to bear.

Daichi would not be selfish, not this time. Chris and Yuki had sacrificed so much for him, he would not let Miho do the same, not when he had the opportunity to stay in Japan and become a professional.

At first it had been difficult, but he soon got used to it. Once Miho graduated and moved in, Daichi believed that he could truly settle down. Talks of marriage and starting a family were already in action. The thought of being a father scared him, but it was also exciting.

Everything was on track, he was living the perfect life. But things changed over a week ago...

Upon seeing Ken get drafted by the Detroit Tigers, something stirred within Daichi. Something he thought he had long buried deep inside.

A deep sense of yearning struck him out of nowhere, surprising even Daichi himself. At that moment, he knew that he had not given up on his pact with his brother.

He tried to suppress it. He had a duty to his fiancée and the Hanshin Tigers, there was no room for his dreams. Daichi did not want to be labeled as selfish, nor did he wish to seem ungrateful.

This was why he had been avoiding calling Ken. He was worried that even speaking to his brother would bring those feelings to the surface.

'My life is good... I don't need anything else.' He told himself, over and over.

"Are you not hungry?" Miho asked, moving her hand to rest on his own. He could hear the concern in her tone.

"Ah sorry, I was just thinking about baseball." Daichi replied with a soft smile and began to eat his food.

The food was a little cold, but tasty. Having someone so good at nutrition was definitely a boon.

"Are you okay Daichi? You've been a little weird for the past few days."

"Hmm? I'm fine. What do you mean weird?" Daichi asked, turning to face her.

Miho shook her head, "You've been spacing out a lot lately. If there's something on your mind, why don't you just speak to me about it?" She asked.

"It's a long season, I'm just a little fatigued. Don't worry, It'll pass soon and I'll go back to normal again." Daichi said with a smile that didn't reach his eyes.

With that, the meal continued in silence until he'd finished. Making an excuse of being tired, Daichi got up from the table and left, leaving Miho by herself.

The woman sat silently for a while, as if deep in thought. Without a word, she collected the dishes and took them to the sink, washing them thoroughly.

Instead of going to bed, she grabbed her phone and opened the sliding door to the balcony.

RING RING

"Hello Grandpa... I need your help."

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

## **Chapter 864 - 864: Sacrifice (2)**

A few weeks after finding out that Ken had moved up to Triple-A, the morning started like any other.

Daichi woke up and saw that Miho was still sleeping beside him. He leaned over and kissed her on the forehead before getting up and going through his morning routine.

He left the apartment, intending to go for a run. The morning air was crisp, and summer was in full effect, but Daichi felt no joy.

He ran with no destination in mind, just going through the motions, only returning an hour and a half later. He was so out of it that he did not even announce his return home and just walked in the door.

The sweet smell of pancakes filled his nostrils.

"Daichi, we have guests." Miho called out from the kitchen.

Only now did Daichi raise his head and realize there were two people sitting at his dining table.

"Coach Takashi? Coach Hashira?" Daichi was confused. Miho's grandfather and the head coach for his team the Hanshin Tigers were sitting at his dining table, and he had no idea why.

"Sorry for intruding out of the blue, Daichi." Coach Hashira said with a smile.

"Oi, why aren't you calling me Grandpa?" Coach Takashi frowned.

Daichi bowed slightly, "Apologies Grandpa, its taking some time to adjust." He replied respectfully. "What are you guys doing here?"

"Can't a Grandfather come and meet his favorite grandson and chat over pancakes?" Coach Takashi replied, sending him a wink, "Is what I would say if your coach wasn't here." He added.

"Come, take a seat." Coach Hashira said.

"Actually, go shower first." Miho said, poking her head around from the kitchen, "The pancakes will be ready soon."

So Daichi did as he was told, all the while his mind was racing. Why would the coach and Miho's grandfather be waiting in his house so early in the morning? It didn't make sense.

Unfortunately, the longer he thought about it, the more confused he was. He rushed through a shower and got dressed, arriving at the table a few minutes later.

"Forgive me for being impatient, but can you tell me what's going on?" Daichi asked, "You can probably understand my surprise seeing you both here. Is this about the men's National Team?"

This was the only thing that he could think of. However, his grandfather only coached the U18 team, unless something had changed recently.

"Hehe, it's not about the National Team my cute grandson... Why don't you tell him already Kenji. Don't keep the boy in suspense."

Coach Hashira rolled his eyes and turned to Daichi, giving him a small smile. "You've been with us almost 3 years, Daichi. How do you feel?"

Daichi frowned slightly, feeling the question was weird. "I'm grateful that I can play the game I love for a living. I have nothing but good things to say about the Tigers."

Coach Hashira laughed, "This isn't a media interview, you don't need to hold back."

"I don't have anything else to say. I enjoy playing for the Tigers." Daichi replied. His eyes moved from the two coaches to his fiance who was bringing the pancakes over to the table.

"Tell them how you really feel Daichi..." She said, her eyes filled with concern.

"What are you talking about?" Daichi was taken aback. What was Miho talking about?

She set the pancakes down and sat beside him, placing her hand upon his arm. "It's okay honey... They already know your true feelings, you just need to say them out loud."

"What?"

Daichi's gaze moved between the 3 people present and they all held a similar expression, wearing a knowing smile. At first it was stifling, but when he took the time to calm down, he realized that his heart was beating wildly in his chest.

He moved his hand and placed it over his heart. It was banging against his ribcage, as if it wanted to escape.

"No... I am fine. I am living out my dream with the woman of my dreams. How many people can say the same thing?" He said, trying to calm down his racing heart.

He already swore to put Miho and his family first. Such a small sacrifice was nothing compared to what Chris and Yuki had done for him.

"You stubborn bastard..." Coach Takashi said, but his lips turned up into a grin, "But I can't say that I don't respect your dedication to my granddaughter."

"Daichi!" Miho yelled, tears welling up in the corner of her eyes. "I can't stand to see you like this..."

Daichi turned. Seeing his woman in such a state caused him pain. He reached out, but she pulled away. "W—What are you talking about?" he asked, his tone raw.

"Ever since your brother got drafted, you've changed... You might think you've hidden your true feelings, but you underestimate just how much I love you... You fool." Miho said, tears now streaming down her face.

Daichi's eyes widened briefly. He looked into Miho's eyes and suddenly understood that he had wronged her. He had selfishly made the decision to sacrifice his dreams without taking her opinion into consideration.

If he knew that Miho had did the same for him of her own accord, Daichi knew that he would have been livid. He suddenly felt like a hypocrite.

"I... I don't know what to do." Daichi said softly. He didn't want Miho to feel like this, but he also didn't want to be selfish, even if it meant giving up on his dreams.

"Tell them how you really feel." Miho said, wiping away at her tears.

Daichi was silent for a moment, hesitating. He feared that if he spoke it out loud, he would never be able to take it back. If he took that step and things didn't work out, he would be devastated.

The words were caught in his throat.

He looked up and saw the smiling expressions of the two men before it finally slipped out.

"I want to play with my brother... In the Major League."

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

## **Chapter 865 - 865: End of Season (1)**

THWACK!

The ball sailed into the outfield, flying through the air as if it had wings. The roar of the crowd accompanied it, growing even louder as it cleared the back fence.

A teen wearing a Mud Hens cap reached up and plucked the ball out of the air before letting out a shout of joy. He jumped up and down, showing off his new prize possession.

Ken tossed his bat aside and broke into a jog around the bases. Once he crossed home plate, he sent a wink to Jeremy who was warming up for the next at-bat.

"That makes 30. Looks like you're now 2 behind me." Ken said, enjoying himself.

Jeremy grumbled some choice words under his breath, but he soon ignored Ken and walked up to the batters box as if he had something to prove. To an outsider, it looked a little odd to see the Mud Hens so fired up since they were 10 runs ahead in the 8th inning.

It had been 2 months since Ken had joined the team and he'd fit in quite well with the others. The bet he had made with Jeremy on the very first day had become well known among the team, with many egging it on.

It was apparent right away that Ken had made the jump to Triple-A from his own merits. Even Jeremy and Head Coach Dean could see that. The problem was, Jeremy's pride did not allow him to accept the fact lying down.

So even after 2 months, the gap continued to grow between the two.

While they were close in terms of home runs, Ken had far surpassed him in RBI's.

Even now as he stepped up to the batters box, Jeremy felt a little regretful for his actions on that day. He had thought that Ken had been called up thanks to nepotism. This caused him to lash out and say some disrespectful things.

He had been on the Toledo Mud Hens for 3 years now, never getting the chance to make it into the big league. Seeing someone such as Ken arrive at the tender age of 21 had stirred his jealousy.

His pride did not allow him to believe that a 21 year old was better than him. It had to be nepotism.

So here he was in the final game of the regular season in the 8th inning. There was no way he could get the 2 home runs needed to win the bet, and there were no runners on base to record any more RBI's.

Jeremy sighed, realizing his mistake. He would apologize to Ken after this and complete whatever the hell the dogeza thing was, as part of the bet.

Sure enough, the game ended in the following inning and the Mud Hens secured their victory. With this, they had successfully finished with the best record in the Triple-A International league.

After the game, the team gathered in the locker room with an air of expectation. No one was saying anything, but everyone knew that the end of the bet had come and it was time to pay up.

Jeremy moved across the room and stood behind Ken, tapping him on the shoulder to get his attention. Ken turned, and as he expected, the guy had arrived.

"I am sorry for being disrespectful Ken." Jeremy said sincerely. "I assumed that you were only brought to Triple-A because of your connections, it is clear now that I was gravely mistaken."

Ken nodded, "I accept your apology."

By now, he had already realized the kind of person Jeremy was. He had already long forgiven the man after seeing just how hard he worked. It was also true that the additional motivation he received from the bet had allowed him to perform much better.

Therefore, in Ken's eyes, things were square.

Jeremy nodded and without warning got onto his knees. Ken panicked for a moment, he had forgotten about the terms of the bet and had been meaning to call it off.

"H—Hey, you don't have to do that." He called, reaching out to stop the guy.

"No, a bet is a bet. If you're a man, you go through with it to the end." He smacked Ken's hand away and placed his hands on the ground before lowering his head until it touched the locker room floor.

"Please forgive me for my disrespect." He said, prostrated on the ground.

It truly was a proper Dogeza.

It was to the point where Ken believed the man had likely done some research in preparation for this day. He felt a laugh forming in the back of his throat, but he managed to keep it from escaping.

Only after around 20 seconds did Jeremy rise from the ground. He held out his hand for a handshake, his eyes never leaving Ken's. "I look forward to playing alongside you in the future."

Ken nodded, grasping the outstretched hand, "Likewise."

As soon as they shook hands, the other players in the locker room began to cheer and flooded the two. Not only had they won and secured their ticket to the post season, but these two had buried their differences.

At that moment, the coach opened the door and saw the commotion. His expression was unreadable.

Everyone turned, and could feel as if something was off. If anything, the coach should have been happy they had secured their place in the post season, yet this did not seem the case.

"Can I get everyone's attention please." Coach Dean called out, walking into the locker room.

"Firstly, congratulations on the win tonight. As you know we will be competing in the post season series against the Durham Bulls in a weeks time... But before that, we have a new player that will be coming into the team." He said.

The atmosphere shifted slightly.

"But Coach, isn't it a little late for that? The season is basically over... We should play with our current players." Jeremy said.

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

## Chapter 866 - 866: End of Season (2)

His words seemed to be mirrored by the rest of the team. Whenever someone joined the team, it was either coming down from the major league, or a call up from Double-A. Either way, they were generally prioritized for playing time.

If this was the case, then someone on the regular squad would miss out.

"I have no choice in the matter." Coach Dean said, shaking his head. He turned to Thomas, the catcher and sent him an apologetic look, "Thomas, you'll be moving to back up catcher from now on."

At this, Ken frowned. He had worked with Thomas the past 2 months and got along well with the guy. Not only this, he was quite savvy with leads and had a good right arm. He was a solid catcher.

If Ken and the other pitchers had to adjust to a new catcher in the post season, who knew if they would be able to click. If anything, it could have a negative effect on their performance.

"Coach, are we really going to sacrifice our chances of winning to include a catcher none of us have played with before?" Ken spoke up, his expression showing some frustration.

"Look guys, this is not a negotiation. Our Mud Hens are the Triple-A affiliate for the Detroit Tigers. If they want me to put a player in the lineup, that's what I'll do. For now, go and celebrate your win. You will meet the new guy at practice tomorrow."

With that, Coach Dean left the locker room, leaving the team feeling rather downcast.

Many walked over to Thomas and consoled him. It was not fair that the guy who had worked hard all season was now being relegated to the bench for seemingly no reason.

However, this was a business. Most understood this, especially in the minor league where people came and went all the time. Those who were lucky to be called up to the big leagues would leave behind their teammates to pick up the pieces.

'This is brutal...!' Ken thought, feeling a bit melancholic. He was not sure what he would do if he was ever put into the same position as Thomas.

Things had been a little different for him because he was made the Designated Hitter, which meant that he did not technically replace anyone on the field. Of course he was also a starting pitcher, but he only played that position 2 times a week.

"Let's go out and celebrate the win." Ken announced.

Even though he had only been subjected to a little over 50 games this season, he could still feel a bit of fatigue. It would be good to let off some steam, especially for the guys who had played the full 140+ games this season.

Only a few of the players had drinks that night, Thomas being one of them. Perhaps it was because he knew that his season was over, but he did not hold back at all. Some of the older guys left early to take him home and look after him.

"Do you know anything about this new catcher?" Ken asked Jeremy who was tapping on the table in thought.

"I have no idea. He can't be from the major league since we would have heard about it already. Either he's from Double-A or they've signed someone from overseas." Jeremy replied, taking a sip from his beer.

"Overseas?" Ken thought. He didn't know much about overseas leagues, besides Japan of course. His thoughts moved to Daichi, but quickly shook his head. There was no way that the guy would be coming here.

The last time they spoke about baseball was before Ken got drafted to the Ligers. Also, with Miho now finished University and Daichi's position within the Hanshin Tigers organization, Ken couldn't see the guy leaving.

"Let's just hope he speaks English." Ken replied, letting out a sigh.

"I guess we'll find out tomorrow." Jeremy said, finishing the rest of his beer and slamming it on the table. "Well, that's enough of being depressed. I'm gonna head home, we still have practice tomorrow." He announced, getting up slowly.

"You're right. There's nothing we can do about it..." Ken replied, following suit.

Soon, he left the bar and called for a taxi to collect him. He had been staying at a motel for the past 2 months. It left a bit to be desired, but Ken did not like spending money, and it was far cheaper than getting a hotel.

After arriving, he showered and got into bed, bringing up the mission window.

#NEW MISSION: Triple-A Season.

Note: Tasks have been adjusted due to shorter season.

\*Task 1: Hit 20 home runs [30/20] [Complete]

\*Task 2: Finish season with ERA below 2.5 [Complete]

\*Task 3: Finish season with greater than 70 RBIs [88/70]

\*Task 4: Achieve greater than 0.600 win rate when playing [Complete]

\*Task 5: Win with best record in International-League [Complete]

\*Task 6: Qualify for Playoffs [In Progress]

\*Task 7: Win Triple-A National Championship [In Progress]

REWARDS:

>Task 1 rewards - 500,000 Major points

>Task 2 rewards - 500,000 Major points

>Task 3 rewards - 700,000 Major points

>Task 4 rewards - 1,000,000 Major points

>Task 5 rewards - 1,000,000 Major points

>Task 6 rewards - 1,500,000 Major points

>Task 7 rewards - 2,500,000 Major points

Ken looked at the mission with some satisfaction. They would play a best of 3 match against the Durham Bulls next week and as long as they won that, the Triple-A National Championship match would be next.

Having not fully completed the season missions for College, Ken was determined to win something this season before he made the leap to the Majors.

He closed the system window and asked Mika to use sleep protocol on him. Shortly after, his vision went dark and he entered a deep sleep.

The next morning, Ken woke up feeling refreshed. He quickly got changed and placed on his shoes, it was time for his morning run.

After doing a few dynamic stretches, he took to the road and quickly got into a rhythm. Having been here over two months now, he already had a route he frequented.

As he turned the corner, he saw a runner in front of him. The guy had a decent pace and looked to be quite fit. His competitive spirit stirred and he quickly increased his pace in order to overtake the guy.

However, it was easier said than done. The guy seemed to sense him, and increased his own pace, pulling away slightly.

Ken frowned. He rarely met people on his runs so early in the morning, let alone someone who could keep up with his pace. His stubbornness grew and he surged forward, breaking into a sprint.

Ken would not let this random runner beat him.

But the man reacted, also breaking out into a sprint. For a while, it was a battle of wills. Who could remain in their sprint long enough to eek out a victory?

However, Ken's legs were far longer than the mystery runner. After a minute, he was able to close the gap between them and finally caught up.

Ken turned his head and flashed the man a grin, yet as he saw the features of the runner, his face dropped.

"Daichi!?"

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

## **Chapter 867 - 867: Brothers Reunite (1)**

"EHHHHHH!?"

Ken suddenly felt his legs buckle in shock, almost causing him to trip and fall onto the ground below him. Thankfully he managed to slow down and stop himself from doing something so embarrassing.

But that didn't do anything to disguise the shock that he felt in that moment.

The figure slowed down his run until he came to a stop, slowly turning around and revealing the face Ken would recognize anywhere.

"Yo Ken, long time no see."

Ken blinked a few times, his mind turning blank. Without a word, he moved forward and embraced his brother, still in shock.

"What are you doing here man? Why didn't you call?" Ken asked. He had so many questions, but it didn't seem appropriate to pepper him with all of them at once.

Either way, he was happy to see his brother after so long.

Daichi stood back after the hug and smiled. For a moment, Ken thought he looked like the same 14 year old kid that he had met back in middle school, but it was fleeting.

His brother looked more mature and he had finally grown into his wide shoulders. In fact, he looked like the Daichi from his past life, but there was a huge difference. His smile was genuine, lacking the emptiness beneath his eyes from that other Daichi.

At this moment, Ken felt an indescribable happiness. He wasn't sure if it was just because he missed his brother, or if it was deeper.

Just the fact that he was in front of him, smiling in such a way was a miracle in itself. In this life, he had not used Daichi, or kept him at arms length. The man was his dear brother, someone who he now shared a family with.

'I have not let you down in this life brother...!' Ken thought.

"How about we finish our run first, then we can have a chat." Daichi said with a grin.

"Sounds good to me." Ken said eventually. It was clear that his brother was enjoying keeping his secret, so he would play along for now.

However, as they began their run, Ken's mind apparently decided to start working again.

"EHHHHH!?! Wait! You're our new catcher!?"

For the second time in only a few minutes, Ken screamed out in shock.

Daichi laughed in good humor. "Hurry up, my heart rate is dropping." He replied before increasing the pace.

Around 30 minutes later, the two began their stretches in the nearby park. It was just like old times when they were both at Seiko Middle School.

"Alright, spill the details." Ken said seriously, "I thought you were going to stay in Japan with Miho, why are you in America?"

Daichi chuckled, stretching his hamstrings slowly, "Miho is at the hotel nearby. This was actually her idea after all."

"What?" Ken was taken aback.

"That's the exact expression I made back then." Daichi replied with a grin, "She brought her grandfather and Coach Hashira over one morning and proposed the idea of me going to the states."

"But wait, what about your contract with the Hanshin Tigers? I thought there would be a lot of work involved transferring to the Majors?"

Daichi shrugged, "It happened pretty quickly. When the Tigers asked around, there were 2 clubs that showed interest. The Pittsburgh Raiders and the Detroit Ligers." He said before moving onto the next stretch.

"Of course I chose the Ligers. Not only is Grandpa the coach, my big bro is also in the organization." He replied with a wink.

Ken was silent for a while. He had no doubt that there was a lot more to the process than Daichi was letting on, but that didn't matter. The fact was, the two were now reunited and would be playing in the same organization from now on.

"Still... it seems so sudden."

"Why do you look unhappy?" Daichi asked teasingly, "Are you worried I'll steal your spotlight?"

However, Ken didn't retort. "I'm happy... almost too happy." He replied. "Part of this doesn't feel real, almost like a dream."

Daichi stood up and walked over to Ken, giving him a smile. "If this was a dream, would you be able to smell this?"

Suddenly, Daichi grabbed Ken around the neck and pulled him into a headlock. Ken's nose was forced into the guys armpit and caught a whiff of the sweat soaked shirt. He struggled hard, but his brothers grip was too strong.

"Y—You bastard!"

The two wrestled for a while and soon laughter filled the park. It was like they had returned to being kids again. Whatever worries that they had evaporated, and all that was left was happiness.

Of course Ken managed to get his revenge by the end of the exchange, but both men were left feeling happy after the workout.

As they began the walk back, things turned a little more serious. "When the team heard we were getting another catcher, they weren't too happy." Ken said.

"Yeah, I understand. I thought that they would bring me in next year, not when you guys were starting the post season." Daichi admitted.

"Don't get me wrong, I'm relieved that its you." Ken added. "It's just that the guys might not feel the same. How is your English? Have you been working on it?"

"I am a berry gud at Engrish." Daichi said, giving Ken a thumbs up.

"What the hell is that...?" Ken resisted the urge to facepalm. While it might be passable for other Japanese people who knew English, he could see that there would be problems.

"Don't worry about it. It will be easier to learn while living in America." Daichi replied, his face turning slightly red in embarrassment.

"You're right. As long as you can understand English fine, then there won't be any issues. Another thing, how is your skills? I haven't seen you play since I proposed to Ai in Japan."

"Heh, are you doubting me big bro? Let's go find somewhere and I'll catch your pitches." Daichi said with a cocky grin.

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

## **Chapter 868 - 868: Brothers Reunite (2)**

A little later, the two walked onto an empty field, carrying a bag of baseball equipment. They were still in their workout clothes.

"Maybe we should have waited till training later today." Ken said.

Daichi scoffed, already putting on his catching gear. "You were the one who questioned my abilities earlier, don't go backing out now."

Ken blinked a few times, "I wasn't questioning your skills, I was genuinely curious how much you've improved."

"Whatever, quit your yapping and put on your cleats." He said, making a shooping motion towards Ken.

At this, Ken let out a laugh and did as he was told. There was no turning back now.

As he got laced up, he decided to use Identify on his brother. It had been many years since he had last done so, so he was curious as to what sort of changes had happened.

NAME: Daichi Takagi

AGE: 21

TALENT ASSESSMENT: EX+

POTENTIAL: L

USER STATS:

>Physical Fitness: EX+

>Pitching: B

>Fielding: EX

>Game Intelligence: EX

>Mental: EX+

'Ah... What a monster.' Ken thought, shaking his head.

Daichi was the 2nd person who he'd seen with a Legendary potential, the other was Leo. Such a thing showed just how monstrous his brother was.

'It's no wonder he did so well in the NPB.' He mused inwardly.

"Hurry up, it looks like it's going to rain soon." Daichi said, getting to his feet.

"Yes yes."

Ken placed his hat and glove on before warming up his shoulders. He could feel his heart beating with anticipation. When was the last time he pitched to his brother? It had to be during the U18 World Cup.

"Almost 6 years..." Ken muttered, clenching the ball in his right hand.

As he looked towards his brother squatting down, he didn't know how to feel. A mixture of emotions rocked him, almost overwhelming.

Without a word, he threw the first warm up pitch, easily landing in the glove. The ball came back and he repeated the process another 7 times until his shoulder was warm enough to throw for real.

"The next one will be the real deal." Ken said, rolling his shoulder a few more times.

"Hit me with your best shot." Daichi called out, letting out a laugh.

Ken smiled as he got into position.

He lifted his left leg and kicked off with his back foot before striding forward. It felt a little different because he was on flat ground, but it didn't matter.

As his foot planted, Ken's arm whipped past his face, rocketing the ball through the air towards Daichi's open glove.

PAH!

The sound echoed over the empty field, entering Ken's ears. For a moment, it felt like the sound had been etched into his very soul.

"Nice pitch!" Daichi said, sending the ball back his way.

Ken smiled. This was not a dream...

His brother really was here in America. It might not be tomorrow, or even next season, but they would fulfill their pact and play on the biggest stage together one day. For once, their dream seemed so close.

As he was setting up for the next pitch, Ken a few droplets of rain fall on his arm. He was going to say something, but the words choked up in his throat.

Only then did he realize that it wasn't rain, but his tears that had fallen down his cheek and onto his arm. In that moment, all sorts of emotions hit him, causing his walls to crumble.

Ken tried to wipe away at the tears, but they kept coming. Before he knew it, Daichi appeared in front of him and placed a hand upon his shoulder.

"How about we call it quits here." He said, giving him a soft smile.

Ken nodded, he still couldn't speak. Just as they agreed, it began to rain, forcing the two to hurry and pack up. By the end, the two were laughing as they rushed to get undercover.

Some time later, the two returned to their own places, drenched from the rain.

By now, Ken had recovered somewhat from his emotional mood. He jumped in the shower and warmed up, it would not be good if he got sick just before the post season began.

After finishing, he walked into the room and sat on the bed. He was feeling a little drowsy, perhaps mentally drained after the emotional reunion with Daichi.

Ken laid down, placing his head on the pillow. For the first time in a while, he drifted off to sleep without the sleep protocol.

Everything was dark and it felt like he could hear murmurs in the surroundings. There was another sound that he couldn't quite place, alongside an incessant beep which sounded every few seconds.

Ken tried to listen to the murmurs, but was only able to catch certain pieces.

"It's all my fault..."

'Who is there?' Ken tried to speak, but no words came out. No matter what he did, he couldn't move.

"Ken... Why?"

He could hear the pain in the voice speaking, but he could not respond. All he could do was listen. Sometimes the voices were from a man, and others it was a woman.

"You should... —told me."

"... —UP!"

"—KE UP!"

"WAKE UP KEN!"

Ken sat up out of bed in fright, taking deep gasps of air. His nerves were taugth and he forgot where he was right now.

"OI, Wake up you bastard!"

Someone banged loudly on his front door, yelling at him.

"W—Who is it!?" He called out, shooting out of bed and heading to the front door.

Upon opening, he saw it was Jeremy out the front. He looked annoyed.

"Oi, you're late for practice. The coach sent me to pick you up, you lazy bastard." He said. But then Jeremy's face turned weird as he saw that Ken was only dressed in his underwear.

Ken was shocked. How long had he been asleep for?

"Alright give me a minute." Ken said, rushing back to get dressed.

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

## **Chapter 869 - 869: Joining the Team (1)**

As Ken jumped in the car with Jeremy, he felt his mind racing. Just what kind of dream did he have again? His body felt weak and he couldn't move, there was also those somewhat familiar voices that was speaking to him.

He wasn't sure what it was, but Ken did not want to experience it again, not if he could avoid it.

'I'll need to make sure to use sleep protocol in the future...' He thought.

Whenever he used Mika's sleep protocol, he would have a restful sleep with no dreams. The only time he'd dreamed was when he was sick with a fever.

"Why do you look so pale? Don't tell me you're getting sick." Jeremy said, his gaze drifting from the road for a moment.

Ken shook his head, "I just had a bad dream, nothing to worry about."

"Good. We can't have you getting sick right before our series against the Bulls. It will already be tough adjusting to the new player in the team." Jeremy replied.

"He arrived before I left. The damn guy hardly knows English, what was the organization thinking adding him so late?" He continued, a sour expression on his face.

Ken blinked a few times.

"Um, actually the new guy is my brother..."

"...Excuse me?"

"He's my brother... We share the same family and last name." Ken reiterated.

"W—WHAT!?"

Jeremy stared at Ken, his hands still gripping the steering wheel tightly. "Your brother has joined the team? And you didn't tell us?"

"O—OI, keep your eyes on the road!" Ken shouted in panic.

Thankfully, the guy quickly turned his attention back to driving, though Ken still felt his heart racing because of the scare. The last thing he needed was to get into an accident on the way to training.

Letting out a sigh of relief, Ken explained himself.

"My brother didn't even tell me. If I didn't see him early on my morning run, I would have been just as clueless as you." He said with a small grin.

"I see..." Jeremy nodded. "So tell me... Is he good?"

Ken was silent for a few moments, but he nodded. "It's been a long time since we played against each other... But he's been a pro in Japan ever since leaving High School. There's no doubt he's gotten even better since I last saw him."

"Right... I just hope he plays well next week, otherwise it will be far too cruel if he's the reason we lost."

"Don't worry, Daichi is one of the best catchers of the younger generation, I can vouch for that. After all, I taught him everything he knows." Ken replied with a grin.

Jeremy paused before responding, "and what the hell do you know about catching?"

"Ah... I mean, everything he knows about baseball."

Ken felt a little embarrassed, but thankfully the trip from hit motel to the field was not far. Jeremy parked the car and they got out, heading towards the field.

Sure enough, everyone had already finished their warm ups. Ken spotted Daichi by himself, getting a few stretches in.

"Ken, it's unlike you to be late to practice..." Coach Dean saw Ken arrive and called him out, his face wearing a frown.

"Don't be too hard on him coach, he's a growing boy after all." One of the players commented, eliciting a laugh from some of his teammates.

However, Coach Dean didn't seem to be amused.

"I've already made the introduction, but I'll make it again since you're here now Ken." Coach Dean said. He pointed to Daichi and announced, "This is our newest addition to the team, Daichi. His English still isn't great, but I expect you to get along well."

"Yo, they been treating you well?" Ken asked Daichi in Japanese in front of the whole team.

Daichi shrugged, "Well enough. Just tell them that I can understand English, they don't need to speak so slow." He said with a grin.

Those on the field went silent. Perhaps it was because Ken was mixed race, or because he spoke in perfect English, but they seemed to forget that he was not American.

The team including Coach Dean stared wide-eyed at him, apart from Jeremy who knew the details.

"He says that you don't need to speak so slow, he understands what you're saying." Ken turned to the coach with a grin.

"Wait, you guys know each other?"

This seemed to be the question on everyone's mind at the moment.

"Asking if I know my own brother... That's a little insulting isn't it?" Ken replied, seemingly enjoying the reactions of all present.

The field erupted into chaos and soon Ken was peppered with questions from everyone. It was only after a few minutes that everyone calmed down enough to move on with the training.

Coach Dean composed himself. He had indeed seen that the two shared a last name, but that didn't necessarily mean they were related.

"Wait, aren't you two the same age? How can you be brothers... Unless you're twins?" the coach said after a while. He looked between Daichi and Ken and shook his head.

One was almost 6'6 and the other was 6' with wide shoulders. There's no way they were twins.

"Daichi was adopted into our family when we were 15. But by law, we are brothers." Ken reiterated. He had expected such reactions, so he wasn't offended at all. In fact, he never thought this day would come where they would be on the same team together.

"I see... Well, I expect you to get him up to speed before the first post season match next week. Now everyone, stop messing around, it's time to train." Coach Dean said, turning to the team.

"Geez, the coach is fired up." Jeremy said, letting out a small laugh.

"I haven't seen him this excited since we took him to that club with the exotic dancers."

"O—Oi! Don't go spreading false rumors." Coach Dean called out, his face turning red in embarrassment.

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

## **Chapter 870 - 870: Joining the Team (2)**

Later that evening, Ken caught up with Daichi and Miho at a nearby restaurant.

"It's good to see you again, Ken." Miho said, pulling him into a hug.

"Mmm, you too. If I had have known you were here, I would have brought Ai along." He said, "She misses you."

"We'll have plenty of time to see each other in the future. After all, you guys will both be on the Ligers eventually, which means Ai and I will be in Detroit with you both." She replied, giving him a smile.

"You're right, I didn't even think this far." Ken admitted.

Once they sat down and caught up for a while, things started to feel normal once more. Ken couldn't help but feel like he'd been transported back in time to when they were with the U18 National team.

"Have you decided what you want to do for work in the states?"

Miho smiled, "Well, I was hoping to get a job at the Ligers. Your Grandpa set an interview with the nutritionist Brittany for next week. If all goes well I'll have a job in a few weeks time."

Remembering Brittany, the nutritionist, he slowly paled. She was both attractive and seemed to dress in a way that proudly showed off her assets.

Miho was the complete opposite. Even now when they had gone out to a restaurant she was dressed in comfortable, yet generic looking clothing.

"Never let her corrupt you, Miho..." Ken warned, sending his brother a brief look.

"Umm... what do you mean? Is she a bad woman?" Miho asked innocently.

"I wouldn't say bad... She's actually professional and knows her craft well..." Ken replied, feeling as if it was hard to say without sounding like a jerk.

"Then I don't see the issue." Miho added.

"You're right, just ignore me." Ken said with a chuckle.

"What do you think of the team?" He asked, turning to Daichi.

Daichi put down the menu and responded, "They seemed pretty nice after you showed up. It seems like they trust you a lot, that makes it a lot easier for me."

"You know that's not what I meant, little bro." Ken grinned.

Daichi was a professional player and had been since he finished High School. Ken wanted his opinion on the level of their players compared to what he was used to.

In response, Daichi grinned. "I haven't seen them in a game scenario yet, but it's clear that there's a gap between Triple-A and the NPB. If the Mud Hens were to face the Hanshin Tigers... The Mud Hens would stand no chance."

There was no arrogance in his tone, nor did Ken think he was being so. If anyone had the credentials to make such a claim, it was his brother.

"I expected as much." Ken replied after a while. "I'd think that even the top teams in the NPB would fare decently well in the Major League."

"It's hard to tell without experiencing the Majors first-hand. I'm looking forward to playing the game next week though. It will be good to catch your pitches properly and see how much you've improved." Daichi added, sending him a nudge.

Ken nodded. "It just sucks you came so late in the season. Apart from these few games remaining, we'll have to wait an entire 6 months before the new season starts."

"Well, it could have been sooner if someone wasn't so stubborn." Miho interjected, sending a glare to Daichi next to her.

Daichi lowered his head, "Stubbornness comes with the Takagi name... You will experience that soon enough." He said.

Ken let out a laugh. The guy wasn't wrong.

"Ah, I forgot to tell you. We'll be having our wedding once Ai graduates in March next year." Ken added, as if just remembering an important detail.

"Oh how wonderful." Miho said with a brilliant smile. "Are you having it in Japan?"

"That's the plan. We're hoping that the cherry blossoms bloom early. If we push it to April, then it doesn't leave much time for a honeymoon before the new season starts." Ken said helplessly.

"When are you guys looking to tie the knot?" He asked.

"We haven't really spoken about it yet." Daichi replied, "With the move here, we want to settle down a bit before spending money on a wedding."

Ken nodded. While the NPB was a professional league, the minimum salary paled in comparison to the Major League. Even Ken's signing bonus was far more than Daichi had made in his 3 years as a professional.

That wasn't to say that Daichi was poor, just that there was quite a difference between the remuneration for each league.

"Well, if you need a loan just let me know. It might be some time before you're earning decent money. The minor league contract is rather small after all."

Daichi laughed, "First it was father and now you. I'm an adult now, I can afford my own things." He replied with a grin.

Ken shrugged, "We're family, we look after each other. Anyway, the offer is always there." He said, turning to Miho. "I don't trust this guy to come to me if he's in trouble, so I'll leave it up to you, Miho."

Miho smiled and saluted, "Yes sir!"

The 3 laughed. This is what Ken had started during his time in the U18 National Team, the tradition had continued even though he had never been back after his first year of High School.

The food came and the three chatted away the night, picking up where they left off.

Even as Ken went home that night, everything still felt surreal. His brother was here in the states and they were both working towards their dreams.

Feeling a little tired, Ken jumped in the shower and went through his nightly routine. He talked with Ai for a while and found out that Miho had already filled her in.

After saying goodnight, Ken remembered to use sleep protocol this time. He did not want to have the same dream as earlier that day. Thankfully, he did not.

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

## Chapter 871 - 871: Good Result (1)

"You ready?" Ken asked, draping his arm over his brother's shoulder.

"Heh, I've been doing this for over 3 years. What do you think?" Daichi replied, giving him a grin.

"You're right. Just go play how you usually do then." Ken said with a laugh.

Daichi adjusted his chest protector, ensuring it was tight enough. "I was hoping my first game would be catching your pitches, but it looks like I'll have to wait."

"Don't worry, I'll probably be closing out the game. Make sure we're ahead by the end of the 7th inning." Ken said, sending him a wink.

With that, Daichi and the others made their way onto the field for the first game of the post season against the Durham Bulls. It was a best of 3 series to decide the winner of the International League. As long as they won, they'd face the winner of the Pacific League and be crowned the National champions of the Triple-A.

While it didn't have anywhere near as much prestige as the World Series, it would still be an achievement to be proud of.

Upon being announced over the speaker, Daichi's name sparked some confusion. By now, the crowd was used to hearing Ken's name called out, so to hear someone with the same family name was odd.

However, with no context or explanation, they could only make their own conjectures.

Ken watched on as his brother took control of the match. Despite lacking English skills, he spoke to the pitcher through his actions, leading him intuitively.

Seeing such a thing made Ken think of Daichi's nickname... The Maestro. He was like a conductor behind the plate, directing both the pitcher and the batter and taking hold of the game.

'This is true talent and experience...' Ken thought.

Having been a part of a professional team for 3 years, Daichi was able to use his experience as an anchor. Not only did it give him insight into the game, but it also allowed him to play at his full ability.

There were no nerves. Even when he gave up a hit, Daichi was unflappable.

In the 3rd inning, he finally got a chance to head up to the plate with the bat in his hands. The guy had always been the better batter between him and Ken, at least when they were younger.

Ken's eyes narrowed as he watched his brother go to work.

The pitch came on an outside and low course. It was at a tricky angle and would probably still be called a strike.

Yet with fluid movements, Daichi loaded up. He planted his foot and sent the bat hurtling through the air.

WHOOOOOOSH

THWACK!

The ball was slogged into the air towards right field, its stitches trembling from the impact. If the crowd were unsure about the Mud Hens newest player before, they certainly were not now.

The crowd cheered in triumph and called out Daichi's name as he jogged around the bases.

Ken noticed that the atmosphere in the dugout had shifted too at that moment. Quite a few of the players who had been upset about Thomas being benched for the finals began to accept the organization's decision.

It was clear that Daichi was more suited to be on the field, even though the timing sucked.

As Ken watched Daichi round the bases, he couldn't help but grin from ear to ear. The guy entered the dugout and the rest of the team gave him a warm welcome and celebrated his first home run as a Mud Hen.

"Nice homer." Ken said, holding out his fist.

Daichi shrugged, "I've hit bigger." He replied with a wink, bumping the outstretched fist.

"Keep that up and we'll be sent to the Majors in no time."

The game continued with the Mud Hens securing momentum. Ken and Jeremy both managed to hit big and the score soon got out of control.

At the top of the 8th, the score was 10-1 in favor of the Mud Hens. Only now did Coach Dean bring Ken into the game. However, he didn't mind. As long as he got to pitch to Daichi, Ken didn't care how far ahead they were.

Standing upon the mound, he took a moment to experience the sensation. How many times had he envisioned this moment?

They might not be in the Major league right now, but it was as close as ever. It felt like all of his dreams were coming true.

As he rolled the rosin bag around in his hand, Ken heard some murmuring. He turned, but the closest person was on 2nd base, and they weren't even looking at him.

Ken frowned briefly before returning his attention back to Daichi and waited for the lead. When he called for a fastball on the inside, Ken couldn't help but grin.

He nodded before lifting his leg and kicking off his back foot. His long leg strode forward and planted onto the ground before his arm whipped past his face.

WHOOOOSH

PAH

Behind the plate, Daichi felt pins and needles from the impact of the pitch and couldn't help but shake his head in exasperation.

'Even after all this time, his pitches hurt more than ever...!' He mused inwardly. However, he couldn't remove the big smile planted on his face.

'Let's see what else you've got.' Daichi said in his heart, throwing the ball back to Ken on the mound.

As he crouched down, he asked for a slider and placed his glove toward the outside.

Sure enough, the slider came in the next moment. It's speed and break was out of this world, to the point where even Daichi knew that he would struggle to predict its course.

However, he didn't even have to move his glove.

PAH

The ball spun inside his glove for a while before he brought it under control, making Daichi feel incredulous. His heart surged.

Ken had improved a lot since they last played together, there was no doubt.

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

## **Chapter 872 - 872: Good Result (2)**

A week later, the Toledo Mud Hens were crowned as national champions of the Triple-A league. After defeating the Durham Bulls in two straight games, they faced the winners of the Pacific league and easily overcame them.

With the emergence of Daichi, Ken and Jeremy, their performances had catapulted the Mud Hens to the top and into the spotlight.

Many of the Detroit Liger fans online were campaigning for their call-up to the team. Of course Ken did not think that it would happen, at least not yet. It had only been 3 months since he'd been drafted.

At the very best, he would probably get called up to the majors in the middle of the following season, provided he could keep up his performance.

So with the end of the season, the off-season now began.

Ken didn't really have any plans. He could stay in New York, but he was worried about distracting Ai from her final exams at college. She was set to graduate in January which was only a couple of months away, he could wait until then.

"So, what are your plans?"

As if reading his mind, Daichi asked. They had just gone for their morning run and were stretching in the park. They had restarted the ritual, just like old times.

"Haven't really thought about it. I might go stay with mom and dad for a month, what about you?" Ken asked.

"We will probably do the same before heading back to Japan to stay with Miho's Grandpa for a while."

"Oh cool. I'm sure mom will be happy to have us both in the house at the same time." Ken stated with a smile. His mother had always complained that the house was empty, she would surely be thrilled upon finding out.

"Have you told her yet?"

Daichi shook his head, "I was going to ask her later today."

Ken grinned, "How about we surprise her?"

"Are you sure? Won't she get mad?" Daichi didn't seem too keen on the idea.

Ken waved his hand dismissively, "She'll be fine. Steve comes round unannounced all the time, mom's probably used to it by now."

Thinking of his friend Steve, Ken smiled. They hadn't spoken in a little while, he would need to catch up with him when he returned back to Texas.

"Steve?" Daichi tilted his head in question.

"Ah, I keep forgetting you two haven't met before. I played with him in High School and College, he's been my catcher for 5 years now."

"I see... And he visits mom and dad often?" Daichi's expression was unreadable.

Ken felt that something was a little off, but he didn't pursue it further. "He's in Texas, so he comes round every now and then to check on them."

"Mmm..."

"Anyway, did you want me to book the flights to Texas?" Ken asked, changing the subject.

"Sure, thanks. That would help."

Ken nodded. "I'll book them for tomorrow, that okay with you?"

"Sounds good."

And like that, the two decided to head back to Texas to surprise their parents. The next day, Daichi found out that Ken had purchased business class tickets for himself and Miho, only when they were checking in their baggage.

"Ken... It's only a 2 and a half hour flight. Why would you waste money on a business class seat?" Daichi asked in confusion. The Ken he knew was smart with his money.

"It wasn't as expensive as you think. I have a frequent flyer card since I fly a lot." Ken replied with a grin. "Once you go business class, it makes it hard to go back to going economy also."

Daichi was still a little reluctant, but Miho accepted the gift graciously. .

A few hours later, they arrived at Austin and caught a taxi all the way to Chris and Yuki's place. Upon arrival, a red silverado was parked out the front, causing Ken's heart to surge.

As they got out of the cab, they could hear laughter coming from the house.

"Mom, we're home." Ken called out as he reached the door.

"Kenny?" Yuki's voice called in shock.

"KENNNNNN! I MISSED YOU!"

Before Yuki could come over and hug him, Steve shot up out of his chair and lunged towards Ken, wrapping his arms around him.

Ken laughed, happy to see his friend once more. "Hurry up and get off me, we have other guests too."

"Hmm? Other guests?"

At this, Daichi and Miho walked in the door, "Hi mom, sorry to barge in."

"Daichi dear! Miho. Oh my goodness, what a surprise." Yuki exclaimed, a bright smile appearing on her face. She waltzed forward and grabbed them into a hug, pulling them tight.

Ken took the opportunity to hug her afterward, planting a kiss on her cheek. "Hope we haven't come at a bad time."

"Of course not." Yuki balked, "Your father is just at the shops getting some groceries, he'll be back soon. Come inside quickly." She motioned.

"Oi Ken, who are they?" Steve said, nudging Ken. They had been talking in Japanese so Ken understood why the guy would be confused.

"Steve, this is my brother Daichi and his fiance Miho. He just joined the Ligers organization and is currently playing for the Mud Hens alongside me." Ken said, introducing the two.

Steve's expression turned solemn, as did Daichi's. The two looked at each other, as if sizing one another up.

Steve held his hand out, "I heard you play catcher... You any good?"

Daichi let out a small grin and seized the outstretched hand. "I amu best catcher, Japan."

"Oho? Seems like you're confident. How about we have a match?" Steve said, his mischievous grin creeping onto his lips.

THUD

"OW~"

"Be respectful, I won't let you two start a fight." Ken said after sending a Karate chop to the top of Steve's head.

Steve rubbed his head, grumbling a few words under his breath.

Yuki laughed, covering her mouth with her hand. "My my, some things never change. Come, I'll serve us a few snacks while we wait for your father."

"Yay, snacks!" Steve's attitude did a complete 180 at the mention of food.

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

## **Chapter 873 - 873: Graduation (1)**

"Alright, tell me what's up?" Steve asked, leaning on the railing outside.

Daichi, Miho and Ken's parents had gone to bed already, leaving Steve and Ken alone after some time. They had moved to the front porch in order to not wake anyone.

"What do you mean?" Ken asked, trying to brush off the question.

"Bro, we've known each other for ages. I know when something is bothering you. Is it trouble with Ai?" Steve asked with concern.

Ken let out a sigh, debating whether or not to speak his mind. He had been rattled ever since experiencing that dream the other day. Every now and then he would hear murmurs, as if there was someone talking close by.

It made him feel like he was hallucinating.

But how would he explain that to his friend, wouldn't he just sound crazy? The last thing he wanted was to be sent to the doctor for such a thing, it might even hinder his trajectory to move up to the Majors.

However, this was Steve, his best friend besides his brother Daichi. If there was anyone who would have his back, it was this man.

"Do you ever feel like none of this is real?" Ken asked, "Like its some kind of elaborate dream."

His words were met with silence. Steve's face morphed into one of deep thought, which, judging by his expression, looked like it caused him some level of physical pain.

"Sometimes, I guess?" He replied, tilting his head. "When I first got drafted, it didn't feel real. I never knew that I could feel so much happiness..."

Steve paused before turning to Ken. "But then I remembered how hard I worked to get here. Surely if this was a dream everything would be easy? Couldn't I just make myself the best player in the world at once? Why would I have to work my way up from High School to College and the minor league."

Steve's words washed over him. Some of it made sense, but Ken wasn't entirely convinced.

If he knew it was a dream, then wouldn't he just wake up? What if the dream was intentionally elaborate so that he would not be suspicious?

As his mind theorized this, the murmurs began to grow louder in his mind.

BEEP

BEEP

Ken's face went pale. He had a sudden urge to scream.

That was when he felt a firm hand on his shoulder, causing him to flinch. He looked up, only to see Steve staring at him.

"And so what if it is all a dream?" Steve stated, a small smile pulling at the corner of his lips. "I'll live my life the way I want to without any regrets, that way, even if it's a dream, I can look back and be happy with how it ended."

Ken felt a shock wave run through his body at that moment, stunning him into silence.

Steve was right. Why was he questioning everything when he had come so far? Not only had he saved Daichi, he'd also bagged the girl of his dreams. Ken's father had his dream job and Ken himself was on the cusp of making it to the Major league.

While it might sound unbelievable, he had worked hard for it.

"You're right... Sorry, I guess I just got a little carried away." Ken replied, giving his friend a smile. Without warning, he pulled the guy in and embraced him.

"Thank you, bro."

Steve was a little taken aback at first, but he smiled and gave Ken a few pats on the back. "That's what friends are for man."

"Mmm..."

\*\*\*

Ken, Daichi and Miho stayed at their parents house for a full month. During that time, the trio of Ken, Daichi and Steve trained together. At first, the two catchers clashed, but soon enough they warmed up to each other.

They quickly became both friends and rivals, much to Ken's surprise. Daichi and Miho's English had also improved considerably, helped by the fact everyone spoke the language at his house.

At the end of the month, Daichi and Miho returned to Japan, leaving Steve and Ken in Austin. He stayed for another month before heading to New York to see Ai.

By then it was already the start of December and therefore the winter break for college.

Ai had already received enough credit to graduate, but would have to wait until January. So, the two decided to stay in the states and spend some time together before graduation.

By now, Ai had fully grown into her figure. Paired with her fashion, she turned heads everywhere she went. Ken wasn't sure if this made him happy, or a little self-conscious.

However, it was a fact that she only had eyes for him. Everywhere they went, she would be stuck to his side, hanging off his arm as if she never wanted to let go.

He thought back to the time when they first got together. After Ken had returned from the U18 World Cup, he found out that Ai was moving to Tokyo to enter Joshibi High and pursue her dreams.

They walked around the streets of Yokohama and reminisced about how they met. Looking back at it now, Ken couldn't fathom why he had been so reluctant to date her until then.

Of course he had his issues with her father Tetsu, but that wasn't the deciding factor. No, he had been worried that their mental ages were too far apart. After all, he had been a 24 year old in his previous life.

Yet even now as they walked side by side, it was clear that Ai was far more mentally mature than he was.

Ken let out a sigh, shaking his head incredulously.

"Hmm? What's wrong?" Ai asked, probing him.

"Oh nothing... Just remembering how dumb I am sometimes." Ken replied with a small laugh.

Ai giggled, "That's what I'm here for, silly."

"Mmm. And in just a couple of months we'll be married." Ken added.

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

## **Chapter 874 - 874: Graduation (2)**

The time trickled by and before they knew it, Christmas had already passed and the new year was upon them. The date of Ai's graduation came and Ken attended.

While the speeches were happening, Ken disappeared outside the venue and saw a taxi arriving. He opened the door and two familiar figures appeared.

"I hope we're not late." A woman spoke in Japanese, the worry evident in her tone.

"Don't worry Naomi, there's still a few more speeches left until she accepts her degree." Ken said with a smile. He leaned in and gave her a hug, "Thanks for coming."

Tetsu was dressed in a navy blue suit, wearing a trench coat over the top. He would have looked like a mob boss if he didn't have tears at the corner of his eyes.

Without a word he stepped forward and threw his arms around Ken, pulling him in close. "Thank you..." he muttered.

Ken was a little taken aback, but he smiled. He had decided to fly Tetsu and Naomi over to witness their daughter graduate. He knew that it would mean a lot to them all, and it wasn't like he couldn't afford it.

"Alright, let's go. I'll tell you where to stand so that she can see you after getting the degree." Ken said, leading Ai's parents back into the venue.

He directed them to the other side of the stage. They would be out of sight during the ceremony and only be seen as the graduates walked off.

After saying a few more words, Ken returned to his earlier position. It was just as well since Ai turned from the group and sent him a cute smile. She was looking beautiful in a red gown and cap.

He smiled back, sending her a wink. Ai had no idea that her parents were here, so he couldn't wait to see her face upon seeing them.

The ceremony proceeded and soon it was time for the names to get called up so they could receive their degree. It took over 20 minutes, but soon it was the moment of truth.

"Ai Koyama."

Ken felt his heart soar and he watched his fiance walk up the stairs to the stage and receive her degree. After accepting it, she shook hands with the University President for a photo and made her way down the stairs.

By now, Ken had already relocated to the other side of the stage to watch the next part.

Due to his height, he was the first person that Ai spotted. She flashed him a brilliant smile which made his heart jump. As she approached, Ken grinned, gesturing with his head towards her parents.

Ai raised her eyebrow in confusion before following his lead. She turned and saw her mother and father nearby, almost dropping her degree in shock.

"Mom, Dad!" She yelled, running forward and embracing them.

Ken could feel himself getting a little choked up, but he kept himself composed. Tetsu on the other hand had tears and snot running down his face, looking like a child who had just been scolded.

"I—I'm so proud of you... my girl." Tetsu said between sobs.

"Honey, you're going to get snot on her gown." Naomi complained, pulling out a tissue and wiping away at his face. The scene made Ken chuckle.

Ai on the other hand, turned to him and puffed her cheeks. "I didn't expect to cry today, you'll have to deal with the consequences later, okay?" She said to him in mock anger.

Ken laughed, pulling out some tissues and handing it over. "Don't worry, seeing you this happy is worth any consequences." He replied.

Hearing this, Ai moved forward and pulled the back of Ken's neck down to her level, kissing him deeply. It was much more PDA than she would usually show, but she didn't seem to care right now.

"Thank you, Ken... I love you." She whispered, giving him another kiss.

By now, both Tetsu and Naomi were feeling a little embarrassed, but they didn't say anything.

The rest of the graduation ceremony seemed to drag on, but when it finally came time to an end, everyone was in the mood to celebrate.

Having planned this for a long time, Ken had reserved a nice restaurant for the four of them to attend that night. He had booked a whole month in advance.

"Whoa, this place is crazy." Tetsu said in awe, looking at how fancy the place was.

He leaned into Naomi and whispered, "We can't afford to eat here..."

"Don't worry, of course I will treat my future mother and father-in-law." Ken said. He was looming behind them and happened to catch what Tetsu said.

"Ahem... That's very good of ya." Tetsu replied feeling a little embarrassed.

The group were stopped at the reception area where Ken gave his name for the reservation.

"Um, please wait a moment." The woman quickly walked off, disappearing from view.

'Hmm?' Ken thought it was odd, but waited patiently.

A few minutes later, a man appeared alongside the woman from earlier, he looked to be the floor manager. "I'm terribly sorry sir, it seems that your reservation has been misplaced. Unfortunately, there are no spots available tonight."

Ken frowned. If his reservation had been misplaced like he said, then why didn't the woman tell them there was nothing reserved under his name?

"I think you're lying to me." Ken said, feeling annoyed. "Show me the reservation sheet."

"Excuse me?" The man replied, clearly not expecting to be challenged.

"Ken, it's okay. We'll just find somewhere else." Ai said, grabbing his arm.

However, Ken shook his head. "Some big shot probably came in, so they scrubbed our reservation to cater to this person, it happens all the time. So who was it? A movie star? An athlete?"

Judging from the man's expression, he was bang on the money.

"I will have to ask you to leave now sir." The man said, his voice growing louder.

"Just tell me who it is that stole my reservation. I'll take it up with them personally." Ken stepped forward, his huge height towering over the employee.

"Ken, is that you?" A voice with a New York accent caught his attention from the other side of the restaurant.

'Huh?'

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

## **Chapter 875 - 875: Celebration & Work (1)**

Ken blinked a few times, not expecting to see such a familiar face in the restaurant.

"Alex?"

Alex Cole, one of the pitchers for the New York Yanks grinned and walked up to Ken, pulling him into a hug. It was a little unexpected, but he still went with it.

That was when he noticed another figure at the table behind Alex. His eyes lit up in delight.

"Ma-kun!" Ken called, practically shoving Alex out of the way to go talk to one of his idols. The Japanese pitcher Masaru Tanaka, a legend in Japan was currently seated at the table close by.

"Kenny boy, what a surprise." Masaru said with a wide grin. The two shared a grand handshake, looking much closer than Ken and Alex beforehand.

"It's good to see you. You remember my fiance, Ai." Ken said, gesturing to her, "And this is her mother and father, Naomi and Tetsu."

"M-M-Masaru Tanaka!?" Tetsu's jaw dropped, not believing his eyes. Even he, who hadn't followed baseball in a long time knew who this man was.

"It's nice to meet you two." Masaru said, coming over and greeting them both.

Tetsu was having a fanboy moment, struggling to speak proper words.

Nearby, Alex was wearing a wry smile, upset that Masaru was more well-known than himself. He let out a sigh and placed his hand on Ken's shoulder, "Let me introduce you to our new catcher..."

Alex turned and gestured to the final person seated at the table. Only now did Ken notice the person sitting down casually. The chiseled jaw, symmetrical face and sandy blond hair were striking, he would never forget this face.

"Leo..." Ken's expression turned solemn and his hands subconsciously balled into fists.

"It is good to see you again Ken." Leo stated, sending him a nod. "We were just leaving, you guys can have this table." He said, getting up from the table and walking past the group.

Ken's eyes followed him as he left the restaurant. It was an odd interaction, and only when he left did Ken realize he'd tensed up so much.

"Eh? You guys know each other?" Alex asked with confusion.

"We've played against each other a couple of times." Ken replied.

"Right, of course. Anyway, it looks like we're interrupting something, you can have the table, we'll see you around." Alex added patting his shoulder.

He turned to leave but then froze, "Ah, wait. I still owe you some money." He said, fishing into his wallet and counting through the large wad of cash inside.

"...I've only got 2 thousand on me." He said awkwardly before thrusting it into Ken's hand. "Dinners on me, I'll pay you back the rest when you get called up to the majors."

Ken accepted the money blankly, and watched him leave the restaurant.

"Enjoy your dinner, it was nice to see you again Ken." Ma-kun pat him on the shoulder on the way past and followed after Alex, leaving the group standing inside the restaurant.

Without missing a beat, Ken turned to the male employee who had been trying to get rid of them earlier. "Can we take this table? Or are you going to take that away from us too?"

The man paled. It was clear that his mind was racing, not expecting Ken to be known by the famous Yanks players.

"N—No, of course not. Please wait a moment while we clean the table for you." He stammered.

Ken nodded, deciding not to make the man's life too difficult. Meanwhile, Tetsu still seemed star struck, and he began to ask rapid-fire questions towards Ken over the next few minutes.

When the table was finally ready, they took a seat and were soon brought menus.

"Ya didn't tell me you knew Ma-Kun..." Tetsu was still caught up in meeting a Japanese legend, so that's all he could think about.

Ken explained the story of what happened in Central Park that day, reminiscing the events. Of course the VIP tickets had caused him to be suspended during the post season, but it felt so long ago that none of it mattered now.

All that remained was the connection he built with Masaru and Alex of the New York Yanks.

Yet seeing Leo sitting amongst them had stirred something within him. The guy had been drafted by the Yanks the same year where the University of Florida had beaten Columbia in the post season.

The fact that he was already in the team showed just how much they valued Leo Cameron as a player.

Ken himself didn't have any complaints. After all, he'd seen Leo's stats after using identify, the guy was practically at max stats, it was only a matter of time before he made it to the big leagues.

But even now, Ken was a little jealous.

It was then that he felt something warm on his hand. He turned to see Ai smiling at him, "Should we get a drink to celebrate?"

Ken smiled, seeing his beautiful woman and nodded. He shouldn't be thinking about such things, they were celebrating Ai's graduation after all. If he started to brood, it would just ruin the atmosphere.

"You can get anything you want, we're celebrating tonight." Ken announced with a grin.

"We can't read English..." Both Naomi and Tetsu said, looking at the menu in confusion.

"Ah... That's right." Ken thought for a while before deciding to order for them.

He got an expensive whiskey for Tetsu and a white wine for Naomi before ordering a variety of pricey items from the menu. At least for tonight, Ken wasn't shy about spending his money.

After all, what was the point in having so much if he couldn't spend some of it?

"Holy crap this is smooth!" Tetsu exclaimed, his eyes widening as he looked at the whiskey in his hands.

"How much did this cost ya Kenny? Must have been a pretty penny..."

"Don't worry about it. It's a special day after all." Ken replied with a smile.

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

## **Chapter 876 - 876: Celebration & Work (2)**

With Ai now graduated College, she had plenty of time up her sleeves. Ken encouraged her to go sightseeing with her parents while they were in the states.

Although they were in the off-season, Ken was not completely free. In fact, on this day he made his way to Yank stadium to meet with some people.

Upon trying to enter the stadium, he was stopped by a few of the security guards who looked to be on high alert.

"The stadium is restricted to the public." One of them said, holding out a hand in front of Ken. The man was around the same height as him, but with much larger shoulders.

Ken didn't take any offense, "Sorry, I have an appointment with Sharon, the marketing director for Nikey."

The man raised his eyebrow in response, "Your name?"

"Ken Takagi."

After hearing his name, he motioned for Ken to wait for a moment and walked off, saying some words into his ear piece.

Ken waited around for a little while, feeling a bit awkward. A few minutes later, the man returned, "Thank you for your patience Mr. Takagi, please follow me."

His tone was much more respectful, so Ken simply nodded and followed him. Ken wasn't so vain to think that everyone would know him, but he thought that the security for the event he was attending would at least know his name.

"Ken! It's good to see you again." A voice called out, grabbing his attention.

The woman who spoke up was Sharon Blake, the marketing director for Nikey. They had met a few times during his endorsement talks once the NIL deal had been struck, but Tara had been alongside him back then.

She was in her mid-to-late 40's yet her face still held a natural beauty apart from some laugh lines. Yet, this only added to her charm.

Ken smiled, "Pleasure to see you as always, Sharon."

"Oh stop it, you'll make this old girl blush." She replied with a wink. "Thanks for coming so early, we've got a lot to shoot today and our director is rather eccentric. If he doesn't get the shot he wants, we might be here for a few days."

"It shouldn't take that long to do photos right?" Ken asked incredulously.

"Photos? Honey, this is a commercial. We sent the agreement over to your agent, didn't they tell you?" Sharon said in confusion.

"Oh... No problem, it must have been a miscommunication on our end." Ken stated, yet inwardly he was sighing. This was the first proper commercial he'd be doing, so he was a little nervous.

"Head over to the home locker room and get yourself changed. The hair and makeup girls will sort you out after that." Sharon directed, shooing him away.

Ken knew how to take a hint, so he did as he was told and headed to the locker room.

"Ah, your co-stars should be in there already." Sharon shouted behind him.

'Co-stars?' Ken questioned. He was curious as to who it might be, but inwardly he was relieved. As long as he wasn't the star of the show, there would be far less pressure.

Upon walked into the locker room through the home dugout, Ken was met with chaos. People were running around everywhere frantically, as if he'd just stepped into an ants nest.

His eyes moved to the two figures sitting on chairs getting worked on, but before he could see their identities, he was whisked away.

"Ken, hurry up and get changed. We need you in the makeup chair as soon as possible." A woman he did not know urged, pushing him into the changing room.

With the door closed behind him, Ken saw brand new Nikey gear hanging up. The shirt was black and long-sleeved and the pants were the usual white baseball one's he wore.

But what was most exciting was the Nikey cleats. They were a sleek black and white, matching with his outfit. Ken had never seen them before, so they looked to be a new product.

He quickly got changed after hearing a knock on the changing room.

When he emerged, he was basically dragged towards the makeup chair and forced into it. He turned, and was surprised to see a familiar face.

"Steve!?"

"Hey man, took your time getting here." He said, flashing him a grin. However, the makeup artist grabbed the guy by the chin and forced his head straight.

The situation caused Ken to chuckle in amusement, but he was soon subjected to the same treatment as they began to cake foundation onto his face.

It made sense why Steve was here. The guy was also signed by Nikey and they had the same agent, Tara. But Ken did not get to see the other guy in the next chair over. He had curly brown hair that looked like an afro.

After drawing a blank, Ken decided not to think about it any longer. Judging by the fact both he and Steve were here, Nikey were likely using rookies for the commercial.

The good thing about this was that they didn't have to pay them as much, and could focus on putting more budget into the shooting itself. If Ken or Steve were to emerge as an outstanding player shortly after, the commercial would easily pay for itself.

After going through the unfortunate process of makeup being caked on his face, Ken looked in the mirror and almost did not recognize himself. The only part that he was happy with was his hair.

"Alright, head upstairs. The director has been waiting for you." The makeup lady said, shooing him away.

By now, Steve and the other person had left, so he moved through the Yanks lockers and arrived back onto the field.

His eyes scanned the field and he saw Steve and the curly-haired person talking to a short man nearby. After making his way over, he apologized for being late.

"Ken, I'm Julian Chavez, the director for today's shoot." The short man stated. He had a brown man bun with some bleach blond hair streaked through it and his fashion looked to be state of the art.

"Nice to meet you." Ken replied, bowing slightly.

"These two are your co-stars for today: Stephen Adams from the Texas Riders, and Carlos Toro from LA Evaders. We'll be shooting a commercial for our new cleats, the one's you're wearing now." The man explained.

However, Ken froze when he heard the second name before his head snapped to the curly-haired person.

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

## **Chapter 877 - 877: Old Rival (1)**

'Carlos Toro? From Shuei High? No way...'

Ken stepped forward until he was right in front of the curly haired man, his eyes blazing.

"Carlos? Is that you?" Ken asked in Japanese.

The man's expression faltered briefly, as if not expecting Ken to speak Japanese. He looked him up and down for a few moments with confusion.

"You look familiar... Do I know you?" He asked suspiciously.

'It is him!' Ken was gobsmacked, he had not seen this guy in almost 7 years. Back when they played against each other in his first year of High School, he'd received the showdown skill.

After graduating, the guy had disappeared off the face of the earth.

"It's me, Ken. I used to play for Yokohama High." He said, pointing to himself.

"EH!? Ken, what are you doing here?" Carlos's eyes widened in shock.

"Um, guys. We have a lot of things to do today, can you leave your chit-chat for afterwards?" The Julian, the short director stated.

"Of course, my apologies." Ken said, bowing slightly.

"Okay good. Ken, you go up to the mound, we're going to first get some tape of you pitching." Julian said, making a shooing motion.

Steve was directed to the plate and Carlos stood back while he watched the proceedings.

So after warming up his arm, Ken was told to pitch as usual. Nodding, Ken got into position and fired off a fastball, almost knocking the nearby camera guy over.

"No no, that's too fast." Julian said, shaking his head. "Go slower. Remember we're showcasing the shoe today. When you plant your foot, I want to see some dirt fly up."

So, Ken spent the half an hour being yelled at by Julian as he went through many adjustments. Just as he was starting to get pissed off, the short man decided that he had gotten enough footage and moved on.

Ken breathed a sigh of relief. If he had to keep pitching differently, he was worried that he might lose his normal form.

They then went over to the dugout where Julian directed Carlos to go through some moves and walk onto the field. Surprisingly, the guy only had to perform it two times before the short director was satisfied.

Ken grumbled in annoyance, but kept watching. The sooner this was over, the quicker he could leave this place.

Carlos went through some impressive bat tricks, his curly hair bouncing unabashedly in the breeze. He was charismatic, without a doubt.

"Ken! Go stand on the mound and look serious." Julian barked, clicking his fingers.

Ken's face darkened, but he did as he was told. He tried to calm himself a little, this was part of his endorsement deal, so he couldn't exactly complain right now.

Once Carlos stepped into the batters box, the camera panned from him to Ken on the mound. But the annoyed sigh of Julian broke through the silence.

"Ken for god's sake man, where is your intensity?"

'Intensity?' Ken's anger surged.

'You want intensity, you bastard? Stand still for me...!' He thought, gripping the ball in his hand tightly.

"Yes! That's it. Looks like you're not useless after all. Now, let's try again."

'This is fine... everything is fine...!' Ken chanted in his mind, trying to calm down the urge to injure this man.

They went through the scene a few more times before it was Steve's turn to be in the spotlight. It made Ken feel a little better to see his friend also struggle with Julian. He was barked at for 20 minutes before finally getting it right.

"Alright, next scene. Ken, I want you to pitch down the middle, and Carlos you hit a home run." Julian stated, "Let's go."

Ken froze. 'He wants me to throw a meatball?'

Just the thought of such an action hurt him. What would it be like if he actually went through with it...

However, it didn't seem like he had a choice in the matter. Letting out a sigh, Ken got into his pitching action and threw it right down the middle, granted, the ball was still at 80% of his power.

WHACK

Carlos managed to hit the ball, but it only went as far as the outfield.

"Why are you pitching so fast Ken? I told you to give him an easy one down the middle." Julian frowned. .

"With all due respect, director. If I throw slow, I would have to lob the ball in the air. This will be obvious in the video." Ken explained.

"He's right. It needs to look believable." Carlos said, before Julian could respond.

After a few moments, Julian finally agreed. With Ken's level of pitching and Carlos's batting prowess, the two dueled for over 10 minutes before the latter was finally able to get a decent shot at the ball.

THWACKK

Carlos crunched the ball into the stands, to the point where everyone could only sit back and appreciate the hit.

Ken grinned. While it didn't feel good to have a home run hit against him, he had already struck the guy out 3 times before this. If it was a real match he'd probably also be using showdown on him too.

'I can't give away all my secrets.' Ken thought, letting out a chuckle.

From then on, the director took them through some more shoots which lasted another couple of hours. By the time Lunch came around, they were given the all clear to leave.

Ken let out a sigh of relief. When Sharon had told him the shoot could take days, he'd been a little uneasy. But apparently they did well enough to get an early mark.

Now that things were over, Ken could finally catch up with Carlos. As they made their way back to the locker room, the two decided to go out for lunch.

Steve being the kind of extrovert he was, decided to tag along, regardless of if he was invited or not. Not that Ken would have an issue with it.

The trio went out to a nearby restaurant for lunch.

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

## **Chapter 878 - 878: Old Rival (2)**

"What's been happening man? You pretty much dropped off the face of the Earth after High School." Ken asked curiously.

Carlos smiled, brushing his hair from his face. His expression looked as if he was reminiscing on good times. "After you knocked us out of the prefecture tournament, I was pretty lost..."

Steve was sipping on his water, listening intently. He didn't know much about Ken from before he came to the states, so seeing that Carlos was an old rival, he kept quiet.

"My mom sent me to Dominican Republic to live with my dad after High School. There I began to learn what I was missing." Carlos said, his voice trailing off.

Ken nodded, he had expected this much, but he did not interrupt, waiting for the man to continue.

"I took a year to work with my father in construction. It was tough, grueling work, but everyone treated me as part of their team... It was then that I realized how selfish I had been back then." He said.

'So that's why he didn't play in the U18 World cup...' Ken thought to himself.

"A year after I moved to Dominican Republic, my father finally said that I was ready to return to competitive baseball. I joined the Tigres del Licey team and played there for almost 5 years."

"I had thought that I would play my whole career there, but then an opportunity came up to join the Evaders through free agency at the end of last year... So I took it." Carlos said, giving Ken a smile.

"That's amazing, congratulations Carlos. Who would have thought that we would meet again in America of all places." Ken said, feeling genuine happiness.

"Well, I think that I wouldn't be here if you didn't beat me back then... So thank you, Ken." Carlos said sincerely, thrusting out his hand.

Ken laughed, "It's not often that people thank me for beating them, but I will accept your gratitude. I am looking forward to facing you when I make it up to the Majors." He stated, grabbing the outstretched hand and shaking it firmly.

After this, the three chatted over lunch for a while before going their separate ways.

Soon enough, Ken returned back to the hotel where Ai was waiting for him. Her parents would be flying back to Japan the next morning, so it was the final day of their holiday.

This would also be the last night that Ken and Ai stayed in New York. Since the two of them were not attending college anymore, there was nothing tying them here.

So, the next day they took Tetsu and Naomi to the airport and said their goodbyes before getting on a plane themselves to Detroit. After a short flight, the two made their way to a hotel and dropped off their things.

"Are you ready?" Ken asked Ai, sending her a warm smile.

"Of course, I've been waiting for this moment for a long time." Ai replied excitedly.

As they left the hotel, a man in a suit met them. "Mr. Takagi, Miss Koyama, I'm Edward, it's nice to meet you." He said, bowing slightly.

This was the real estate agent that his agent Barry Hart had recommended to look for a house in the Detroit area. From appearances, it was clear that Ken would likely be spending quite a bit of money.

However, seeing the excited expression on his fiance's face made the situation not seem so painful.

They were taken into a luxurious car and driven away by the real estate agent. Today they would be looking to buy a house in Detroit. The idea was that Ken would likely be brought up to the majors this season, so getting a house was a priority.

They arrived at the first house in downtown Detroit, a 3-story apartment.

Almost as soon as he saw how big it was, Ken knew that it was going to be expensive. However, he had promised Ai that he would keep an open mind.

They were led into the house and through the main floor. Not only was it spacious, Ken didn't feel cramped even with his 6'6 frame. The kitchen was modern, and the space was open, the large windows bringing natural light into it.

Moving up the stairs was the bedrooms and even a sauna, much to Ken's delight.

"The place comes fully furnished, so you won't have to worry about getting your own beds or couches, unless you wish to change them." The real estate agent explained.

He was good at explaining the advantages of the property, while also leaving Ken and Ai enough room to chat about the place. It was clear from a glance that the guy was experienced, and knew what he was doing.

After going through all 3 floors and seeing outside, Ai was already talking about all the changes she would make, or what they could do with guests over.

Ken locked eyes with the agent and made a gesture, wanting to speak to the man alone for a moment. He whispered something to Ai before walking into another room with the agent.

"Edward, give it to me straight. How much?" Ken said, he didn't want to jump through all the hoops. It was clear that Ai really liked the place, and it was in a prime position downtown.

As if sensing this, Edward smiled, "It's 1.6 million."

Ken felt his heart almost jump out of his chest. '1.6 million!? That's like a 3rd of my signing bonus...' However, he soon calmed down.

"Let's bring that down to 1.5 million and I'll pay directly. No need for any banks to get involved." Ken said, holding out his hand.

Edward's expression changed briefly, "I would have to check with the owners before making a decision."

"1.5 million and I'll throw in some signed merchandise. Make the call, but don't take too long, or I might change my mind." Ken said, patting him on the shoulder before making his way back to Ai.

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

## **Chapter 879 - 879: Reality (1)**

Some hours later, Ken and Ai were sitting in a restaurant in downtown Detroit. Ken had had enough of looking for houses after being shown 8 places today.

He reached across the table and grabbed Ai's hand, it was soft and slightly cold. Though spring was just around the corner, there was still snow outside.

"What did you think?" Ken asked plainly.

"I still think the first apartment was the best." She replied promptly. "I can see us raising a family in that place." Ai's cheeks reddened slightly, causing Ken's heart to skip a beat.

"Y—Yeah, me too." Ken replied, feeling a little embarrassed. They had spoken very little about starting a family, but he could understand why Ai was bringing it up now.

If they were going to settle down in Detroit, it was better to get a place for the long term.

"Is it something we can afford?" Ai asked with some concern. "If not, there were a few smaller houses that we can look at that are still close to downtown."

Ken couldn't help but smile. "We can afford it, don't worry. Once I sign my Major League contract we'll have more money than we can possibly spend in this lifetime." He said squeezing her hand gently.

"Ken... Are you sure? We don't need anything overly expensive. I wouldn't want you to be stressed about such things, especially when you should be focusing on baseball." Ai said sincerely.

Suddenly, Ken felt a warmth deep inside him.

"Nonsense. My number 1 priority is providing for you and our future family, baseball is just a means to that end." Ken said.

As he said this, Ken heard the sound of shattering glass in his mind. His vision began to swim and he started to feel light headed, his face instantly turning pale.

"Ken!? What's wrong." Ai shot up to her feet in panic, her arms reaching out to steady him.

The feeling persisted for a moment before he recovered. However, a bone-deep tiredness appeared.

"I—I'm just a little tired." Ken said, giving her a small smile. "How about we head back to the hotel to get some sleep? It's been a long day."

Ai didn't seem convinced, but since Ken didn't want to speak about it further, she just nodded. Linking her arms through his own, she walked him out of the restaurant and down the street towards their hotel.

The two walked in silence, and Ken struggled to keep his eyes open.

'What is happening to me?'

His thoughts were sluggish and he struggled to walk properly. If it wasn't for Ai leading him all this way, he probably wouldn't have made it.

By the time they arrived at the room, it took all of his focus to make his way to the bed and collapse into it. Ai was speaking to him throughout, checking if he was okay.

"Just going to nap for a while..." He muttered.

'M—Mika...'

Ken tried to call out to Mika to use sleep protocol, but it was too late.

Things went dark and the familiar sound of beeping entered his ears once more. Ken was scared, worried that it would be exactly like last time where he couldn't move.

The murmurings began yet again, unintelligible, as if they were coming from beyond the walls of his consciousness. He could hear crying, the sound wrenching at his heart.

'I don't like this...'

'I DON'T LIKE THIS!'

Ken screamed, but no sound came out.

"This is the result of your own doing, Ken." A voice spoke out, startling him.

"Who is it? Who is there!?" Ken yelled, his fear palpable.

"Who am I?" The voice replied, before letting out a harsh laugh. "I am you... Well, the you that has been cast away and left for dead."

Suddenly within the darkness, a figure appeared. He was dressed in a black suit, clutching a suitcase in one hand. He was tall but skinny, and his sunken cheeks made him look sickly.

It was Ken from his previous life. Looking at the figure now, it was almost unrecognizable.

"What do you mean...? Why are you doing this?" Ken tried to back up, but he couldn't move.

A frown appeared on the figure's face. He dropped the suitcase and began to massage his right shoulder, "Have you forgotten what you did to me? What you did to your so-called family and friends?"

"No... You're not me. You're lying!"

The figure grinned, yet it was tinged with madness. "You think that you can just go live out your dreams after what you've done? This isn't a fairy tale Ken, you don't deserve a happily ever after."

Just as he was about to retort, Ken felt his right shoulder flare with pain. He let out a groan as the agony spread. Just when he thought that he couldn't take it anymore, the pain relented.

His eyes darted to the figure who was still wearing the same smile as earlier. All he could feel was dread when looking at this person who used to be himself.

"Come, let's see how your actions have affected those you call your loved ones."

The darkness which once clouded his vision began to disappear, like the fog clearing. Before long, a scene appeared in front of him, haunting him to his bones.

He saw a hospital room with the curtains drawn, the familiar sounding beep playing rhythmically every few seconds. A feeling of dread overcame Ken, and he wanted to do nothing more than leave this place.

The figure of his past self walked forward and turned to him, letting out a smile.

"I don't think you need to guess who is behind this curtain, do you Ken? Deep in your heart you know exactly what's going on." He said, raising a hand towards the curtain.

"No... That isn't me. You aren't me... This is all a dream." Ken said, shaking his head.

"Hehe. Oh how I wish it was." He replied, drawing back the curtains in one swift motion.

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

## **- Chapter 880 - 880: Reality (2)**

### **Chapter 880 - 880: Reality (2)**

The gaunt figure of his past self was laying silently on the hospital bed, a feeding tube inserted through his nose. There was an IV and various other bits of equipment on his body, painting a grim sight.

Ken tried to close his eyes, but for some reason he could not. In fact, he was dragged closer to the comatose version of himself, not even allowing him to look away from the sight.

"This is you... Well, us I guess." The figure said, his tone lacking the madness from earlier. "After you overdosed, you entered a coma. If it wasn't for your best friend finding you that night, you would have died."

"Best friend? You mean Daichi?" Ken muttered in disbelief.

The night that he had overdosed, Daichi had won the NPB Championship with the Hanshin Tigers. Why would he have come to see Ken? Especially when all he'd done was push him away ever since getting injured back then.

The figure did not reply. With a wave of his hand, the surroundings began to change briefly. It was now during the day and the sun crept in through the window.

At the foot of his hospital bed, a figure with wide shoulders sat on a chair.

"Why Ken? Why didn't you just talk to me..." The figure's shoulders trembled and tears began to fall from his face onto the blankets below.

"Weren't we best friends? How could you do such a thing to yourself... Damn it!"

It was Daichi. Ken could feel the pain in his voice and saw the tears running down his face unabashedly. His heart began to ache and he tried to reach out to his friend, but he had no arms in this form, he was merely a spectator.

"How am I going to do this without you Ken?" His voice cracked and the tears began to fall once more.

The door to the hospital room opened in the next moment, but Daichi did not react.

"Daichi, it's time to go." A deep voice called out.

Ken froze.

He saw Daichi's body stiffen before he slowly stood up and took a final look at Ken in the hospital bed. Then he turned, heading towards the door.

Ken turned as well, feeling his whole being tremble as he saw the figure who had come to collect Daichi.

It was Tetsuhiro Suzuki, the man who had put them all through hell.

'Why is he here? Did he find Daichi in my past life?' Ken's mind raced. Since they had not adopted Daichi back then, it wouldn't be too far fetched to assume that Tetsuhiro eventually found out about his nephew after he had become famous.

Seeing his dejected best friend leave the room with such a man left him feeling horrible.

"The answer to your question is yes, Ken. Now before you continue your line of thought, I have another scene to show you." The figure of his past self said solemnly.

"No, I've had enough..." Ken replied emphatically. Seeing his brother and best friend Daichi in such a state had rattled him, he did not want to see any more.

"Who said you had a choice?" The figure replied frostily.

Once more the scene began to shift. Two people appeared by his bedside, their expressions causing his heart to ache.

"Kenny... We miss you." Yuki said. Her hand was placed upon his own and she spoke softly to him, as if he was just taking a nap.

His father Chris stood silently, his arms upon his wife's shoulders. The look of pain and sadness on his face was enough to break Ken's heart. He had never seen his father like this before, nor did he ever want to again.

Ken dropped to his knees, feeling despair take root in his chest. Seeing his family grieve for him threatened to break his psyche. If this was really him in the hospital bed, then what had he been doing for the past 7 years?

Had he really just dreamed everything while in a coma? Was the system just a manifestation of his imagination?

'Ai, Daichi, Steve, Grandpa... Was it all just in my mind?'

"Have you realized it now?" His past self asked solemnly.

Ken didn't reply, he couldn't.

If everything was a dream, then what would happen when he finally woke up? Would that world that existed in his dream cease to exist? Would he just lose everything that he had worked hard for all this time?

The thought of losing it all caused Ken to let out a cry of anguish.

He felt a pat on his shoulder. His past self was wearing a solemn expression, as if to console Ken. The situation was bizarre, but Ken had no time to think about this.

"Wake up."

"What?" Ken looked up in question.

"Wake up... WAKE UP!"

"KEN!"

Ken's eyes suddenly shot open and he gasped for breath. For a moment he was disorientated.

"Oh thank god..." A feminine voice called out.

Before he could reply, the figure threw herself onto him, hugging him tightly. The warmth of her body and the fragrant scent of her hair calmed him down almost instantly.

It was Ai.

Ken wrapped his arms around her, as if he was afraid she would disappear if he let go. Warm tears began to fall down his face as he hugged the woman he loved.

The woman who might only exist in his dreams.

Just the mere thought of this caused his heart to ache. If what he had just been shown was real, then this was indeed the case. All he could do now was enjoy it, before it all went away.

How long did he have?

Would he wake up in a few years? A decade?

Or maybe he didn't even have that long. Maybe the next time he went to sleep, he would wake up in hospital after being in a coma.

'I don't understand... Ai feels so real, how could this be a dream?' he thought, fighting back the tears.

'Wait...'

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