Chapter 18.3: Step 1 of My Strategy

With everything handled, I went straight to bed till it was 12 AM in the morning; this time I didn't need an alarm, probably because I was waiting for this to happen—no, this *needed* to happen.

"Eugh," I let out a deep sigh. "Well, Eiya, it's time to leave

I went outside the dorms, clad in the same pyjamas I wore when I went to meet Kaneko—a black shirt with black pants with red polka dots.

I waited beside the vending machine for Yoshida and Kato to come out, but only Yoshida came.

Hmm?

"Where is she?" Yoshida asked no one in particular.

What was keeping Kato? That was what Yoshida and I thought as we stayed there for over 10 minutes before Yoshida realised that Kato wasn't coming.

"Telling me to come and still not even coming. Screw this. I'm going back to my room," Yoshida swore, going back to her room.

This is… Seems like I gotta improvise.

I followed her silently to her room. Yes, it was creepy but needed. I also put my hand in my pocket to start a voice recording on my phone.

This is not really what I wanted, but oh well.

I didn't want her to be angry, but instead needed her to be a bit volatile; however, sometimes things went out of plan, especially when you left them to chance.

I knew that, but…

Anyway, Yoshida opened her door and was about to slam it in anger when I slipped in and locked the door behind me.
“Huh?! What are you doing?!”
I took a deep breath before keeping a calm expression and suddenly pinning Yoshida by her hands to the wall, facing towards her kitchen.
“I’m here to talk,” I said in a matter-of-fact tone.
“Weird way to talk! Ever heard of a phone?! Let me go!!!”
I narrowed my eyes slightly in exasperation because of her voice. It was quite annoying when she screamed like that.
“Could you shut up?”
“S-Shut up?!” Yoshida was a bit shaken by my expression. I must have looked a bit scary. “I won’t take this lying down.”
“Just shut the hell up,” I tightened my grip on her hands, using my left hand to hold Yoshida’s hand above her head and my right index finger to gesture to her to keep quiet.
My expression remained indifferent, with my eyes looking slightly annoyed, and Yoshida looked visibly shaken.
This should work nicely.
“Y-You can’t do this to me,” she squirmed; she was scared but also confused.
She didn’t know why I was doing this to her, yet.

“I can’t? Who said so?” I asked hysterically, my tone as cool as ice. “You see, I’ve had a very bad day, and honestly, I want to let off some steam. So tell me again what I can’t do, and I’ll show you that I can do it quite easily.”
“...?!”
Of course, I wasn’t acting in anger or anything. I made sure to debunk my emotions so I wouldn’t succumb to anything of the sort.
However, I had to make her believe that. She had to believe that I was acting in rage because of what Honda did to me. She mustn’t know that I was quite calm and in control.
It was so she believed that I was tired and stressed. Oh, so tired indeed.
It was necessary so that even after this, she wouldn’t see me as a monster. That being said, the role of a monster that I was playing wouldn’t get physical.
It was just simple, unadulterated intimidation. It helped that she didn’t know the details because she could have laughed at how shameful I was, or perhaps it was shameless.
At any rate, if she knew, then maybe she wouldn’t have been scared.
“Why are you doing this?” she asked, averting her eyes from mine.
I turned her head to look at me before speaking.
“Just listen and say nothing.”
She nodded in affirmation.

Good, she's finally listening.
I resisted the urge to sigh out of relief and continued with my plan.
"Yoshida, I want to help you," I said. "But first, you'll help me. You and Kato are the ones who stole the class records, right?"
"...!" Yoshida was shocked, but this would be the first of many shocking things.
"Yumemiya told you to do it, I presume."
Yoshida's eyes widened in shock; she really didn't know how to put her emotions in check. Perhaps if she did, then I wouldn't be able to do this, but precisely because she was like this, that was why I was doing this to her.
I knew it was Yumemiya even before I got expelled—I caught her basically mentioning it when I got dumped.
I knew it was her, but what I didn't know was how Takagaki connected to all this, so because of that, I resolved to investigate him.
Before that, however, Ito said the traitor was in our class and revealed themselves in the chatroom—I didn't know why, but it didn't matter at that point.
In fact, from what Ito mentioned, there was a traitor in the class, so I more or less knew there might be other traitors.
The expressions I noticed were as follows:
Suzuki looked tense.

Arakawa grinned silently.

Matsumoto stared blankly.

Yoshida looked calm.

Innō looked uninterested.

Kato looked nervous.

Kagura looked anxious.

Yumemiya looked outside the window.

Inoue looked angry.

Ito looked calm.

The people who stood out to me were Kato and Yoshida; they didn't act like they normally did, especially Yoshida, who even acted out of character before that.

They acted like the complete opposite, in fact, though that wasn't the only clue I had.

I still investigated Takagaki, but nothing came of it that would motivate me to continue investigating him; however, something solidified Yoshida's and Kato's parts.
It was when I happened to overhear Yoshida and Kato, and while they didn't finish mentioning the person's name, it was obvious that it was Yumemiya.
The question was why Yoshida and Kato were working for her.
"No need to nod; I'm quite sure about what I said."
"...Nakamura, can I speak?"
Well, you're already speaking, but oh well.
"Go on," I said.

“How do you know all this?”
“It was quite obvious, wasn’t it? I know everything going on.”
A very blatant lie.
“I-I see,” Yoshida believed me for a second before going back to doubt. “So, what do you want?”
“Do not ask me questions.”
“...” She nodded—she still seemed a little scared of me.
“Now tell me. Why would you help her for that reason? Even dragging Kato into it.”
I was bluffing—or rather, I was bullshitting. I had no idea what I was saying, but maybe I could get the answer through Yoshida.
It was bait to see if she would reveal more information
“It’s not that. I may have lied to Kato to make her join, but it was for her own good.”
Yoshida fell for the bait.
80% of the time, people say it was for someone else's good; it was actually for their own good, especially in the case of a confession—it was because most people hated to be seen as bad people.
“Why are you still lying?”
“But didn’t she still enjoy it?! She got 50,000 Rp, didn’t she?! She should be happy.”
Hmm.
Yoshida frantically and utterly believed what she did was good; well, not completely, but she at least wanted to force me to believe it.

Of course, I knew that Kato didn't quite enjoy this; it was evident when I overheard their conversation.
"Is that right?" I asked sarcastically. "You lied to your friend and put them in a compromising position because of your selfish wish."
"That's not fair. What else could I have done? I've been friends with Aiya-chan for over 2 months, yet I'm still not close in popularity. It's not fair when bitches like Honochi get it with no work while I bust my ass off," Yoshida narrowed her eyes, but not at me—she glared toward the ground.
She's really angry about this, huh.
Well, this was interesting, but it brought my mind to her file.
This would lead me back to what I came here for, but for now, I had to understand everything that happened.
"Did you even ask Yumemiya why she wanted the class's records?"
"N-No."
I didn't even need to ask to know that—it was obvious that someone as brash as her was just lured by the prospect of being above Honda, though I thought Yoshida was popular enough.
I'm useless at that too, so maybe that's why.
"Yet you used your own aunt. You *do* know that she could get fired."
"I had no choice! What else could I do? How else could I fulfil the job?"
I see.

From her perspective, it may have seemed like the most logical and optimal choice under the guise of how to move forward socially. You see, she was risking her aunt, but that could be seen as a calculated risk.
I wasn't sure how Yumemiya would be able to grant that, but regardless…
"...That's really selfish…and stupid."
At any rate, I got the basic gist of what had happened—Yumemiya needed to get the student records and allied with Yoshida, but needed someone else, so Yoshida got Kato into the mix.
The thing that worried me was why Yumemiya chose Yoshida specifically. It meant she knew that Yoshida was someone close to Jackson-sensei.
That was the only reason she would choose her, because Yoshida wasn't exactly the most… intelligent; after all, for the surprise maths test we took, she got a 6, though Yumemiya got a 9, so perhaps she wasn't exactly the best judge of character.
Anyway, my working theory was that she had access to Yoshida's information—it also explained how she could manipulate her into joining her side.
Though maybe it was just because she knew her for a term.
I couldn't tell which.
Yet.
Anyway, it was time to get what I really came here for; what I did before this was just to lay a foundation.

I planned this foundation for this moment, for step 1 of my plan—I checked the walls to see if they were soundproof.
They were, but some sound still travelled, so I met her by 12 AM because that was when she would leave her room.
I knew it would affect her psyche when she would meet Kato, and everyone would have entered REM sleep—meaning they wouldn't hear us even if some sound travelled, provided she and Kato weren't neighbours.
Well, if they were, she wouldn't hear because I made sure I didn't put Yoshida at the wall between her and her neighbour.
I could have waited for her in her room, but then I wouldn't have known how things went when she met Kato; moreover, the camera would have seen me sneak into her room.
Yes, I was breaking the rules by entering her room, but I would most likely face a reduction of Rp or a lecture in the morning.
Well, that was just a guess anyway, and the reduction may be too much for me to pay, though I can just ask Ito if it is.
And when I entered after her, I made sure to do it naturally and not like a creep—it was hard to do, and they would still ask Yoshida in the morning, but I had a plan for that too.

As for the intimidation, I was just doing what would most likely work because people could lie under pressure, and I was working on theories.
Moreover, this only works because it's Yoshida. Anyway, it's time for negotiation.
"It's not selfish… I—"
"I'll tell the class," I said, my voice still calm. "I recorded what you said. And if you're wondering, yes, I will edit my parts out."
"Huh?"
Yoshida was shocked but regained her composure.
"Like they'd believe you."
She must have thought that would work because she had a nervous smirk on her face.
"You're right, they won't."
"Yes, so let me g—"
"But they'll believe Ito, who is on my side."
"On your side?"
"Precisely."
"What are you talking about?"
"Think Yoshida. It was we who solved the class debacle."
"So? That doesn't mean you're close."
"Really? Haven't you heard? I walk with Ito to school every day. Moreover, didn't we leave during that study session?"
Damn, I'm so grateful that Ito walked with me to school.
"...!"

“Didn’t you wonder why Honda is bullying me? It’s because I’m close to Ito.”
“B-But what about when you got expelled?”
“What about it? Ito was supporting me, wasn’t he?”
“...Shit, it’s true.”
“It’s good that you understand that. Anyway, I’ll report you to the school tomorrow.”
“If you do, I’ll get in trouble; moreover, isn’t it Yumemiya who is at fault?”
“She is, and she’ll get her due punishment, but you won’t go unpunished either. Unless…”
“Unless what?”
“Unless you follow my conditions.”
“W-W-What do you want?” Yoshida squirmed; she probably thought I wanted to defile her, but I wanted to do no such thing.
I wanted something much more important.
I let go of her hands and walked over to her couch and sat down with a heavy sigh.
She could run, but I knew she wouldn’t, so I gestured for her to come sit beside me, which she did reluctantly.
“All I want is the bullying to stop, but that’s not possible, is it?”
This was the main part of everything—why I didn’t present myself as a monster.
I wanted her to sympathise with me.
“...”
Of course, it wouldn’t happen immediately.

“It’s true. All I really want is for you to help me increase my reputation so more people will be on my side.”
“...On your side? The side of a rapist?”
It seemed she still thought I was a rapist. Well, of course, she did; it was one of the reasons I could intimidate her.
“You still believe I did that?”
“Yes, why would Aiya—”
“You all say the same fucking thing! Don’t you get it? She lied. She lied! She lied!! She lied!!!” I frantically screamed while banging my leg on the floor and using my hand to slam my head as if I were frustrated.
Also, I know you probably know this, but I wasn’t frustrated—I was simply acting.
“H-Hey, Nakamura, relax!” Yoshida physically stopped me. “Are you… Okay?”
“...Huh? Oh, sorry, I just really had a bad day,” I whispered.
Good, she’s slowly opening up her heart to me.
“So all you want is for me to help you with your Rp? Is that why you threatened me?”
“N-No, that’s not all. I also want to help you.”
“Help me?”
“Yes, I can increase your Rp by the end of next week.”
“What?” she asked. “What kind of phoney-ass deal is that? Moreover, it’s not like I can refuse, right? So what’s the point of this?”
“I understand not trusting me. Fine, let’s do it like this. Let’s draft a contract.”

“Hmm? What’s that?”
“It’s in the rules,” I showed her on my phone. It basically said that contracts were irrevocable unless both parties agreed to revoke them or the contract was destroyed—of course, I didn’t know this till Hayashi told me.
“So let’s make one,” I added. “So that you can believe me.”
“We can’t do that. I can’t really understand the mumbo jumbo in a contract.”
“I see; then let’s make one with our voices.”
I happened to plan a backup because I kind of expected her to say that.
“Ok then. But what are the conditions again?”
“I need your cooperation to help me increase my Rp, and I’ll help you with your popularity.”
“But if you can do that, can’t you do that for yourself too?”
“I can’t. No one believes what I say.”
“What of Ito?”
“Honda blackmailed me; I can’t involve him.”
“Oh, then if you can’t do it, you’ll get expelled, right?”
“Yes, I’ll give you a copy so that I can’t alter mine.”
“...Hmmm… Alright then.”
She barely thought about it for a second! Uh, well, good for me, I guess.
We made the contract with both of us saying our full names and “I agree” after I mentioned the conditions of the contract.

When I was done, I collected Yoshida's account name and sent it to her.
"Now I guess we're partners," I offered a handshake.
"...I guess we are," Yoshida turned away from my hand. She wasn't thrilled because I was still technically threatening her, but at least if I failed, I would get expelled.
"Wait a minute, didn't you survive expulsion already?"
"Huh? No, I wasn't expelled last time; Ito believing in me was enough."
"Oh," Yoshida was briefly scared—of course, I was lying.
"Also, why are you so desperate that you even threatened me?"
I desperately waited for that question; now I could tell her and make her sympathise with me even better. I took a deep breath and told her all the bullying I had endured.
"It's because I-I-I can't handle another day. I don't even want to go to school tomorrow…" I shivered a bit. "...but if I don't, nothing will change."
Yoshida looked a bit shaken and was about to comfort me when I suddenly stood up.
"Ah, would you look at the time? Thank you for today; I'll be on my way."
I immediately left without looking back because now I had completely encompassed a tragic person, not a monster, but someone who was hurt.
Perfect. Step 1 is complete.

After I got what I wanted, I swore off using such a method again.

Seems I've become useless at yet another thing.

***

Author's Note:

Yes, I was listening to 'Strategy' by TWICE when writing this chapter.

I saw an edit of the song by this person on TikTok. Her name is Nammgyu; it was peak—it was a light and an L one.

Also, yup, I can't beat the allegations on this one—I'm defs gonna get called a copycat after the scenes in this chapter.

But nothing I heard yet, right?

Anyway, time for thanks.

Firstly, I'd like to say thanks to my editor for this chapter, Degreat.

Secondly, I'd like to say thanks to the writer, me.

And finally, thanks to you, my wonderful readers.

See you in the next one.