Raising (Spirits)

Chapter Eight of Masking

Fara walked away, dejected. Emily stood awkwardly at attention.

"Hey, do you-" Tammy walked away without answering. Emily found herself scrambling after her. "Hey! Wait up, Tammy!"

"No." Tammy's voice shook. It was weak. Not with the fun sort of weakness that Tammy showed when Emily took charge that one time, but...with something real, and heavy. Something old and terrible, like a festering wound ripped into her soul. "Not here."

"But-!"

"Red!" Tammy snapped. It was a *command-*and she spat it like one. Immediately Emily backed off a step.

"I-understood. Okay." Tammy turned and walked across campus. Emily followed, unsure what to do. She knew, though, that she couldn't do anything here. They walked in silence for a minute, the sky dark. The campus had been consumed by blackness, beaten back only by the streetlamp-like lights that generously dotted the university's sidewalks. Tammy breathed in, then out.

"Go."

"Huh?"

"I said go." Tammy was beating back tears. "I need to be alone."

"But you said-"

"I-I'm sorry." Tammy pulled up the hood of the hoodie Emily only now saw the domme was wearing. It seemed like it had little triangles poking out of it, resembling cat ears. "I need to be alone. I need-" she choked on her own words. Tears threatened to seep from her eyes. She beat them back. She feigned a smile. "Go."

Feeling defeated, Emily nodded. "Okay." She turned and left, headed for her own dorm.

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Chris heard a knock at the door. Had Walter forgotten his key? He got up and opened the door, only to be utterly taken aback.

Before him stood a tall, powerful man with a tight frame. Hair, thick and black, fell wild and untamed from a face devoid of facial hair. The man had slender shoulders, a face with sharp cheekbones and yet a gentle chin, and wore a jacket (with no shirt underneath) which showed tight and toned abs.

"Holy shit," Chris mumbled. He had no idea what Walter's taste in men would be but this was the last thing he'd guess. Wait, was this guy Walter's? "Hey, sorry." Chris dropped his headset to his shoulders so he could hear. "You Walter's friend?"

"I'm his boyfriend, yes. May I come in?"

"Oh, uh, sure." Chris took a step back. The man let himself in and hopped up onto the giant windowsill every room on this floor had. He gazed out the window.

"Sorry. I was supposed to help Tammy dye her hair today but she, uh, she's not up to it. Left a sign on her door for me." The thought of Tammy willingly interacting with this dude surprised Chris but it wasn't shocking.

"Anyway, anything I can do for you?" The man looked at Chris and had a laugh.

"Not unless you feel like letting me smoke in your room. Which you don't."

"I mean-" Chris laughed. "Yeah, honestly, you're right. I don't. Wait, you're one of Tammy's…?" A pause. Laughter. Intense, BOOMING laughter.

"No! LOOK at me." Walter's boyfriend made a comical gesture of pointing at himself.

"Okay, and?" Chris looked over him. He had a pair of neat, vaguely crescent-shaped scars around his nipples, which was kinda weird, but other than that he was just a lean, shredded dude. Like the actor you'd expect to play a character whose gimmick was being a more "realistic" Bruce Lee. "She has subs that're guys. I think."

"Oh?" They laughed. "Maybe. Well, I can assure you, I'm still not her type. I'm a friend of hers."

"Yeah, that makes sense." Chris returned to his computer. "I guess Walter and her having the same tastes would be weird."

"And not the other thing?"

"I dun know, man, some of her partners gotta have boyfriends. Girlfriends, maybe? I don't get it but whatta I know." He pulled a box of cookies out of his desk, aiming to be a good host. "Homemade. Oh, and vegan. You want any?"

Walter's boyfriend shook his head. Chris shrugged and pulled one out. "You're not missing much. They're plain as hell." He ate it and turned his attention to some kind of school project. "You'll be here a while if you're waiting for Walter. He's probably at the library."

"Honestly I'm more concerned about her. Has she been in her dorm?" Chris paused for a moment. He wasn't sure.

"No idea. Why do you ask?"

"Well, if you see her around let her know Walter and I are in my dorm for the night. That, and I came to grab this." He reached under Chris' desk and grabbed a bag of chips.

"I don't think I'm supposed to know where those are."

"Then I'll tell Walter to hide them somewhere else this time." Was the shirtless boy's retort as he walked out. At the last second, Chris shot to his feet.

"Hey wait! I forgot to get your name!"

"Mine?" The man paused. "Edmond."

"Gotcha!" Chris sat back down. "Godspeed, you big funky dude."

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Emily paced across her room, staring at her phone. She regretted yet again that she'd deleted Tammy's number from it. Why, oh why had she done that!?

"Oh my god." Groaned Grendel on the other side of the room. Whatever tv show she was trying to fall asleep watching droned on in spite of her. "Go the fuck to sleep, Emily. It's two in the morning."

"But I-what-ugh!" Words failed her. What did that beautiful, friendly girl's dad *do* to her!? Up until today (or rather, technically speaking, until yesterday) she'd been under the impression that Tammy could never hurt a fly! She got a bit short sometimes, but…

"God DAMNIT," Grendel jammed a pillow into her face and groaned a second time. "I'm about to start lodging a chair against the door if you're not back before a curfew!"

"I...think that would break school rules," Emily muttered under her breath. "I'm sorry, just-I'm so WORRIED!"

"Then GO TO HER YOU DUMBASS!"

"IT'S TWO IN THE MORNING!"

"YEAH! SO GO THE HELL TO SLEEP!" Both suddenly remembered what time it was and froze. Their Residential Assistant disliked noise. After enough time passed that they knew they were in the clear, Emily sighed.

"Yeah. I...guess I should."

"Yeah. Sorry. That was rude of me. I didn't get much sleep last night, either, so I'm being kind of a huge asshole." Emily silently accepted her roommate's apology. She flopped into bed and crawled under the covers. Sleep took her a long time, but it arrived sooner than she'd dare hope.

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It was Thursday. The hour was one past noon, almost exactly. Emily sat in wait outside the room where her psychology teacher taught. Chris approached and turned to lean against the wall half a foot to her left. Emily had been fighting the urge to text him all morning. He smiled at her and said hi. She answered in kind. Something hammered at her heart. She wanted to-

Her resolve shattered.

"Did you see Tammy?" She blurted out, like the words were a fish exploding from her mouth.

"Kind of," he answered. "Walter's boyfriend popped by my room and had me leave a message for her. She kinda just ignored me but I think she got the memo?" Damn. The pit in Emily's gut grew bigger, deeper, and ever more ravenous.

"That's good to know," she mumbled. "I wouldn't want to drag you into this."

"Into what?"

"It's...not important."

"It sounds important."

"That sound is misleading."

"Is it?"

Tammy walked over and sat on a little bench that was pushed against the nearby wall.

"Is it about her?" Chris whispered with a tease in his grin.

"Obviously!" Emily hissed back. "Why would I ask that specific question if it wasn't!? What possible reason could-"

"Hey." Emily was cut off by a classmate of theirs, who was friends with Chris and his girlfriend but whom Emily had never met. "Just so you guys know, class is canceled today. The homework is due by when it ends. There was an email about it."

"Thanks!" Chris said to his buddy. Tammy angrily cursed under her breath and fumbled for her phone. Emily looked at her domme with concern.

"Heyyyy," said Chris to his friend, taking a hint. "You wanna go swimming?"

"Can't. I have rehearsal." The two walked away, engaged in conversation that Emily didn't care about. She sat next to Tammy and watched her tap furiously at her phone.

"What's wrong?" Emily asked.

"Fucking, goddamn school email," Tammy growled under her breath, "Hate it hate it hate it why would you not try to contact me any other way-" panicked, Emily threw her arms around Tammy. The pink haired girl squeaked. "Emily! H-hi…"

"Hi," Emily tried to purr seductively. Guys liked that. Tammy would like it too, right? "Can you tell me what's wrong?"

"No,"

"Okay. Have you had lunch?"

"No."

"Do you wanna come get it?"

"No."

"What do you want?"

"I don't know!" Tammy pulled away. Emily reluctantly released her. "I'm-I'm sorry, just, I'm so upset and my fucking hands are shaking and-"

"Shhhhh," Emily purred. She scooched over and cupped her hands supportively under Tammy's. The shaking didn't go away, but it seemed to become less frantic and panicky. "I'm here, okay?"

"...okay…"

"Are you trying to submit it with your phone?" Tammy nodded, tears in her eyes. "Okay. Let's get you into the library." Emily kissed Tammy's face, making sure she placed it to clean some of the salt water off of her face. "C'mon." She stood and, still holding Tammy's hands, helped her up to her feet as well. "Thaaaat's it. Atta girl."

The two walked to the library. The whole way, Tammy dejectedly hung her head and occasionally muttered to herself. When they set food inside though, she seemed to go silent. The two girls sat at a computer and Emily watched as Tammy rapidly logged in, opened her school email, seethed violently (but quietly!) for a minute or two, deleted an email, then sent one to the appropriate teacher with Tuesday's assignment attached. Emily did the same afterwards, managing to be slower despite never pausing. Once they'd submitted, both logged out of their emails and then out of the computer. Tammy's stomach growled.

"I...think I'm hungry," she muttered in a defeated hush.

"That's okay," said Emily, "let's get a bite to eat."

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Emily said thank you to one of the lunch ladies as they handed her an entree plate covered in lasagna. She put it on her tray and turned towards the drink machine, where she grabbed a cup and filled it with ice water. From there she did a run by the salad bar and filled a side cup with tomatoes and broccoli. Before she could think of what to get for a second side, though, she saw Tammy in line and scurried over to be there for her. The two girls swiped their ID cards at the register and then returned to their chosen table. There, they ate quietly.

"Yesterday really roughed you up," Emily remarked. She was deeply concerned, and her voice made it readily apparent. "Are you doing okay now, or…?"

"Yeah! Thanks for asking," Tammy said as she rapidly devoured the grilled cheese she'd gotten. Emily wasn't sure she bought it. Tammy had recovered too quickly for her to trust it. Too cleanly.

"Sweetie…" she was at a loss for words. What did she say here? "Are you?" Tammy took a huge bite of her food and slowly chewed. She swallowed it. She took a drink. Her eyes fell.

"No…" Emily knew that Tammy probably didn't want to talk about it. That was okay, of course.

"Okay. Do you want me to stay with you today?" Tammy nodded. It was weak. It was shaky.

"Then I will, sweetie. I promise." They finished their respective meals and put their trays on the conveyor belt.

"Can we...go to your room?" Tammy asked shakily, on the verge of tears. "Don't...wanna be in mine…"

"That's quite alright dear," Emily smiled. There was nothing to do there, of course, except maybe listen to Grendel work. It was what Tammy wanted, though. That took priority over anything else.

She led Tammy to her dorm, past the smiling security guard on duty in the lobby, up the stairs to her floor. They stepped into the room, and there they were greeted by the trustworthy clacking sounds of Grendel's fingers on her keyboard.

"Back already? You're not skipping class are you?"

"You...know my schedule?"

"No but I know the shortest classes this campus offers last fifty minutes. I also know you left forty minutes ago. Either you aced a test, gave up on it, or-"

"Class was just canceled," Tammy awkwardly cut in. Grendel's typing slowed momentarily so she could look up at her. She performed a brief, amused snort.

"Hi Tammy." Grendel turned her attention back to her work. Tammy and Emily both sat in the latter's bed. A truly uncomfortable length of time passed before Grendel's work came to a standstill and she popped her laptop shut. "I have class. I'm grabbing my key. Bye." With just that, she left.

But unfortunately for Emily, that wasn't enough to banish the silence. Tammy stared at the floor and idly swayed her dangling legs back and forth. Eventually, its terrible weight became too much to bear.

"So…" Emily started, "Anything I can do to make you feel better?"

"No, not really. Nothing right now. You could let me stare at you," Tammy mumbled. She sounded depressed, or guilty, or ashamed, or...something. Whatever it was, Emily wasn't letting it stay. *Commence Operation: Heal Tammy,* Emily thought to herself.

"I can do you oooone better, mmhmhm," Emily purred as she jumped out of bed and unbuttoned her shirt. "You said I'd be hot in my uniform last night, right?" She didn't wait for an answer. Instead she tossed her shirt aside and bent over her discarded gym bag. The question of whether the skirt she was wearing would cover her butt this way or not didn't bother her: so what if it didn't?

"O-ohh," Tammy blushed intensely and sat straight up. "You're...very pretty…"

"Thank youuu," Emily sang as she stood up and pulled the bright orange shirt over herself. It wasn't as skimpy as a costume (or even as skimpy as the uniform of a cheerleader at a college with heavier emphasis on sports) but it was tight enough to show off her tits and thin enough that her boobs (which were no longer in a bra) poked through when she was aroused. Which, after swiftly replacing her skirt with the short and flashy one that the cheerleaders wore, happened the instant she turned around.

Tammy was staring. Tammy was blushing. Tammy was gripping the sheets. "You know-I was, that wasn't an order right?" Tammy sputtered. "You didn't have to do this, or anything for that matter-"

"I know, sweetie." Emily smiled. "I know how it feels when someone tries to pressure affection out of me with a guilt trip. You're not." She grabbed her pom poms and jumped up and down. Her tits bounced. On one hand, ow. Mega ow. On the other hand, Tammy's face lit up like fireworks were exploding behind her eyes. *Nailed it!* Emily thought to herself. "L O V E! I frickin love Tammy!" She rattled off from nowhere. Frankly, she was on autopilot. Between her brain feeling all clever for thinking of this, her heart bursting at the seams from the look on Tammy's face, and the adrenaline flooding her for...some reason, she was too busy to think about petty things like what was coming out of her mouth. "Wanna kiss! Wanna bliss! Wanna date this hotty tist!" Honestly she'd be mortified if she was listening to herself talk, but fortunately for her she was too busy making sure she bent her back and knees in the air *just right* to give Tammy the bounciest, most titillating show possible without maiming herself. "T! A! M! M! Y! That's two M's just like mine! Emm Emm!" She landed and shook both her pom poms for effect.

Tammy immediately started clapping. "Yaaaaay encore encore!"

"You big fuggin dork," Emily said as she curtsied and imagined herself under a spotlight with streams of falling confetti surrounding her.

"I AM. What of it~?" Asked a laughing Tammy. Emily giggled back as she stored her pom poms back in the gym bag where they were kept.

"Good question," Emily said and smiled wide. She zipped her gym bag back up and stood straight, then turned to Tammy looking relaxed. She opened her mouth to speak but was cut off when Tammy's phone beeped. Emily's guest retrieved it from her pocket to give it a look.

"The video games club is having an event today. I kinda wanna go...is that okay?"

"We-we have one of those?" Emily had no idea that was even on the table, but she'd never been one for school clubs based on hobbies. It wasn't that they were beneath her, she'd just never heard of one that caught her attention. "Wait-more important, why would you need to ask me?"

"I dunno, I…" Tammy scratched the back of her head awkwardly. "You've been so kind and patient today, I'd feel guilty ditching y-" In a flash of orange and white and blonde, Emily crossed the space between them. She practically vaulted off the ground onto her bed and landed in Tammy's lap. One finger playfully went on Tammy's lips and silenced her.

"I, have been patient, because you are good to me," Emily breathed out heavily. Did she sound threatening? She didn't want that. This is how guys reassured their girlfriends, though, right? "You have shown me soooo much more patience and caring than I could possibly have earned when we met." Tammy nodded, but her eyes didn't look comfy. Emily felt guilty now, herself; she backed away to give space. Tammy seemed to relax. "I love yo-" the words caught in her throat.

Love?

You couldn't just *say* that to someone with a girlfriend, could you? No, no, no, absolutely not, not with their relationship, Emily felt color draining from her face-

"Hey." Hands held one of hers. Tammy looked up at her, eyes sparkling like a clear pool of spring water under a full moon. *"I love you too. Thank you."* Emily's heart was so soothed by that familiar, delicious voice that she calmed down instantly.

"But...you have a girlfriend." Emily prepared herself. Tammy shouldn't be saying this either, right? She didn't want to be a homewrecker, not for anyone so kind and giving. Surely anyone deserving of Tammy's love deserved better than to have their heart broken-and certainly not for *Emily*. Right?

"Yeah. And she likes you too."

Huh?

"Huh?" That was...unthinkable. She was Tammy's girlfriend! She couldn't possibly be okay with all this! But Tammy wouldn't lie to her, would she?

No. Tammy would never. Even the thought that the innocent pink cherub gazing up into her soul, with a face so perfect it dared the mind not to envision some goddess sculpting it in their own image, would lie to her was absurd. Tammy would never lie about such a thing.

But she didn't know Tammy's girlfriend. Maybe they would lie to Tammy, if it meant keeping things smooth. That was a lot to assume of a stranger, though. Emily tried to dismiss that thought.

"Erhrrm." She coughed. "A-anyway, you can absolutely go do the thing! Have fun!"

"Do you wanna come?" Emily felt like she'd hit a brick wall. Did she?

Well...she wanted to spend time with Tammy, of course. And she did have fun last time she played a video game (with Tammy, incidentally).

"Y-yeah. I don't have anything going on."