**A Very Merry Mailgirls XMas Ch. 02**

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It was only just after midnight that Erin Ryan O'Neill found herself on the floor of an empty cubicle, on her back and grinding her clit in complete and total surrender. The roar of the party down the hall carried on in the distance. So, too, did the vocalizations of Sophie Scott from the next cubicle over. As well as the vocalizations from another, unknown girl in another cubicle somewhere else out there in the darkness.  
  
It was dark. Erin had that going for her, at least. If she had succumbed to her baser instincts back in the locker room, it would have been under bright, fluorescent lights, with dozens of other girls playing witness to her capitulation. The same could have been said of the employee lounge here in Human Resources, though that hadn't stopped Visitor H from doing so while Mailgirl Number Eleven and her other friend, Visitor I, laughed and cheered her on. Visitor D wasn't yet so bold or abandoned.  
  
But that wasn't to say that the dimly-lit cubicle farm a hundred feet down the hall was private, exactly. For one thing, Erin wasn't going to be able to explain away her prolonged absence as a simple bathroom break - especially if she returned to the party covered in a sheen of sweat and stinking of sex. For another, Sophie Scott was in on what she was doing. In fact, it was her stepsister who had recognized the look in Erin's eye, and who had suggested she might be able to find somewhere marginally more private for her to - in Sophie's words - provide herself with a little "relief."  
  
Erin was on her back, with her knees up and her legs spread, halfway under some stranger's desk. The faint, orange glow of the power strip beside her illuminated the underside of the desk, and Erin focused, absently, on a dry and aging wad of gum directly above her. Her hair was in a puddle around her, intertwined with power cords, and when she wiggled and wriggled just so, the top of her head bumped gently against the fabric of cubicle's wall. The carpet beneath her was both scratchy and thin, the floor hard. She wanted to give in and surrender completely, to close her eyes and imagine that she was back in LA, in her bed, but she wasn't quite there. For one, she kept glancing nervously in the direction of the cubicle's opening, fearful of being discovered in such a compromised state. But also, it was her environment, and the utter depravity of fucking herself in such in an environment, that made her hotter and hornier than any session of self-pleasure had ever delivered her at home.  
  
She'd been drinking, of course. Drinking, in fact, more than could remember drinking in the last couple of years. Save for maybe her sorority sister Ashley's wedding in Glendale the prior summer? Or maybe Ashley's bachelorette party in Scottsdale a few weeks before that? Either way, Erin had had more than her fair share holiday-themed candy cane cocktails that night - equal parts vanilla rum, white chocolate liqueur, and peppermint schnapps. And while she wasn't yet drunk, she was on her way, and the fact that she'd lost count of how many times she'd re-upped could well have explained why her inhibitions had been lowered enough to take Sophie up on her offer.  
  
She wasn't exactly sure what she'd been expecting of that night's holiday party, exactly. Sarah's depictions of the "Bitch Sessions" that the Plaza girls engaged in on Friday nights had always carried with them an air of "classiness" - cocktail dresses, fancy hotel bar, Wall Street types. She understood that things could get rowdy and randy pretty quickly, but her imaginings of Mailgirl Thirteen and her friends out for an evening drink stood in stark contrast with what she assumed those same "Bitch Sessions" might be like for the 24/7 girls in Jersey City. Still naked and collared, beaten down and imprisoned, she'd half-expected the "party" here at Park Place to be nothing more than a bunch of miserable cunts slugging back vodka from water cooler cups and whining to one another under harsh lighting in a break room that smelled faintly of burnt microwave popcorn.  
  
And maybe that's what these "Bitch Sessions" were to the Park Place girls more regularly. But the 2nd Floor employee lounge was nicer than Erin had imagined it was going to be - not as nice as the executive lounge that they'd been allowed to use every once in a blue moon, Sophie apologized - but better than the rundown break room of Erin's expectations. Half the room was carpeted, the other half tiled, with a breakfast-bar-of-sorts (turned actual bar, tonight) breaking up the two zones. To one end of the room, there was a "living room" setting, complete with a flat-screen television, a pair of expensive-looking sofas, and handful of matching, upholstered chairs. Modern-looking tables and chairs were scattered about, and a Christmas tree had been erected in one corner. A big, industrial sterling silver refrigerator presided over the kitchenette area, and the coffee makers, water filtration systems, microwaves, and toasters were all top-of-the-line. It was still very much an office setting, but a high-end one. And, if a girl were to squint, she might have been able to imagine herself in an expensive downtown loft, instead of on the second floor of USF's back office in Jersey City.  
  
The girls weren't allowed to sit on the furniture, of course, so the presence of the comfortable sofas and chairs were their own torment. The veteran mailgirls seemed to pay them no mind, pushing them up against the wall and arranging a few dozen of the USF-branded pink "mailgirl mats" (no thicker and not much more different than a standard yoga mat) around in a circle in their place. But though none of the girls was bold enough to risk being caught sitting in a chair, more than a few took up spots sitting on the bar with their legs dangling beneath them, or perching up atop one of the various tables. Erin couldn't imagine that the more regular users of this room would have been crazy about exposed pussy and bare asses on top of their eating surfaces, but there seemed to be enough grey area in the policy that the Park Place girls didn't think twice about it.  
  
Holiday music blared in the background, and a Yule-tide log flickered on the flat-screen in a loop. Mailgirls Six and Eleven, as well as Visitors H and I, were tending bar and mixing cocktails when Erin, Catherine, and the Scott girls first arrived. But it was casual, and mostly self-service. Sarah and Sophie explained that Mistress Rei and her masters in Human Capital usually provided them with a good assortment of drinks, mixers, wines, and beers, but admitted that tonight's selection was on another level. In fact, they all seemed surprised by the platters of hors d'oeuvres, cookies, and desserts that had been laid out for them - for most of the Park Place girls, it was one of just a few times they'd been allowed to eat something other than mailgirl chow since they'd first inked their contracts.  
  
Girls milled about, talking and laughing with another, and making introductions to visitors from the Plaza and from the outside world. But for the lack of clothes, and maybe the aggressive drinking, this could have been a holiday party or networking event anywhere in the world. Only when she slipped up and introduced herself as "Erin," and was rewarded with a slap across the face from Sophie - a hard one, at that - did the world the mailgirls now lived in intrude upon the mirth. As Visitor A had promised, any awkwardness or embarrassment about Erin's nudity faded away quickly, and she soon found herself almost forgetting about it entirely.  
  
Almost. The mailgirls of Park Place and the Plaza were all decidedly more comfortable in their skins than Erin or the other visitors, and thought little of a hug, a caress, or holding hands. At one point, Erin had Mailgirl Number Six's hand upon her naked hip as the two chatted Catherine, Mailgirl Number Fourteen, and Mailgirl Number Fourteen's mother Angela. There was little to read into it, Erin told herself - all over the room, there was skin-to-skin contact and a casual attitude towards "handsy-ness" without there being something necessarily sexual or predatory about it. A nipple pinch here or there. A slap on the ass. A kiss on the cheek or the neck. It was all innocent enough in the early hours of the evening.  
  
Allowances had been made that let the girls use one of the nearby restrooms on the 2nd Floor without a non-mailgirl chaperone - common enough for their weekly "Bitch Sessions," as Erin understood it. Only the men's room, of course, and stall doors were still required to be left open, but the girls could come and go as they pleased. For the visitors - the Plaza girls included - this allowance was moot; said restroom was on the far side of a locked door, and required a smartphone-equipped mailgirl to lead the way. But the back-and-forth inevitably led to the party spilling out of the employee lounge and into the hallway beyond. And though none of the girls would have dared to violate Mistress Rei's restrictions of letting themselves into anyone's office, the darkened cubicle farm beyond seemed to be fair game.  
  
Conversations were wide-ranging, but often led back to life as a mailgirl, as girls swapped war stories and horror stories, and did their best to one-up each other with confessions and admissions of an increasingly naughty nature. The mailgirls told stories that left Erin's mouth agape, but also just gave the brunette a fuller picture of even the less sexual aspects of their servitude here at Park Place.  
  
"Exercise ball," Sarah answered at one point, laughing, in response to a question from her mother. She was the rare mailgirl who was actually allowed some "down time" on Sundays to work on her research - a special dispensation awarded to her due to the nature of USF's arrangement with her graduate program back in New Haven. Sarah was given the opportunity to work in one of the cubicles here in Human Resources, detailing and documenting her life among the mailgirls for her former academic advisor and head of Human Capital both. As she was restricted from sitting in a honest-to-goodness chair, however, Human Capital had opted to provide her with a giant, inflatable exercise ball for those hours in front of a keyboard.  
  
"Most of us aren't even allowed to read," Mailgirl Six added, in a lighter tone that sounded as if she found humor in the restriction.  
  
"Seriously?!!" Plaza Eighteen shrieked, aghast. She, apparently, didn't get the joke. "That's some straight-up 'Handmaiden's Tale' style bullshit!"  
  
"We're allowed to read," Sophie said, partly contradicting Six and partly coming to her defense. "We just don't have much of an opportunity. And when we do..."  
  
"Porn," Six explained. She directed Erin's attention to the magazine rack. "It was Three's turn this week to replace the usual reading materials in here with Mistress Rei's selections." Gone were the Wall Street Journals and New York Times and Fortunes that Erin assumed usually occupied the rack. Only now did Erin see that, in their stead, were issues of Playboy and Hustler, as well as such lesser-known titles as "Bait" and "Booty" and "Big & Bouncy."  
  
Sophie elaborated. "We're on the clock for twelve hours a day, every day. And usually in the locker room for the other twelve. We don't really have a chance to read, other than Saturday nights."  
  
"And when you do...?" Plaza Eighteen asked.  
  
Six shrugged. "'Reading for pleasure' has taken on different connotations." This elicited an uncomfortable laugh from Plaza Eighteen.  
  
"I read them for the articles," Sophie added sarcastically.  
  
Sure enough, Plaza Eighteen's Park Place counterpart was sitting Indian-style on one of the mailgirl mats by the magazine rack, deeply engaged in her reading material. Though a party may have been going on around her, she was using this time off the clock to catch up on all the literary offerings Mistress Rei's smut had to offer.  
  
"This can't be a Barrow thing," Plaza Eighteen remarked, referring to the director of USF's Human Capital group in a tone that almost bordered upon disappointment. The brunette apparently thought highly enough of her captor that she felt this sort of thing was beneath him.  
  
"Not his style," Six agreed. "It'd be crueler to give us Newsweeks and Cosmos and whatever. Normal stuff. To rub our noses in what we're missing, the normal stuff, from outside."  
  
"That's Barrow," Sarah offered. Chin nodding towards Park Place Eighteen and the magazine rack, "That? That's one the underlings. Bagby, maybe."  
  
While Erin had been exposed to her fair share of masturbation and muff-diving back in the mailgirls locker room, the girls' Christmas party started out on a decidedly less desperate and depraved note. She supposed this made sense; for the girls who absolutely needed some sort of physical relief, most of them had taken care of it after their shifts had ended. Dirty jokes, dirty stories, dirty looks? Sure. But - at least initially - Erin was granted a temporary reprieve from having to play audience to any sort of dirty acts. As the hours passed and the liquor flowed, however, this changed. The mood of the room began to shift, and took on an increasingly charged air. Around the same time that body shots started, Erin began to notice girls slinking off out of the party in two's and three's, or taking suspiciously long "bathroom breaks." It was only a matter of time before Mailgirl Number Ten began to openly rub one out in the corner of the room, with complete and total disregard for whoever might be watching.  
  
While Erin couldn't help but be distracted by the softly mewing girl a few feet away, the other mailgirls paid her no mind. Even back in the locker room, Erin had noticed this behavior; while a mailgirl wouldn't think twice about carrying on a conversation while at the food trough, or while squatting over the washikis, they seemed to grant one another some illusion of "privacy" when engaged with themselves, or when engaged with a partner. Immediately after completion, though, these post-orgasmic girls were often greeted with teasing, laughter, cheering, and applause.  
  
There were exceptions, however. A handful of the girls' drinking games had taken a decidedly more hardcore turn. Erin blushed all over when she realized that Plaza Seventeen and Park Place Fifteen were engaged in a "race" to see who could get herself off first, while Plaza Seven, Plaza Ten, and Sarah Scott cheered them both on, laughing and screeching all the while. Visitor H, meanwhile, had slunk off towards the back of kitchen - but that hadn't stopped her friends from hooting and hollering in her direction.  
  
It was around this point that Sophie took Erin by the hand, and led her from the room. She knew what Erin needed, even if Erin hadn't yet been able to admit it even to herself.  
  
And so it was here that Erin found herself, on the floor of a cubicle in a mostly-empty office building, with her hand between her legs. There hadn't been much back-and-forth between Erin and Sophie. For the briefest of moments, Erin feared that her stepsister might have something more participatory in mind. She was worried about how to politely decline such an offer without hurting Sophie's feelings or coming off as judgmental over how far Sophie had fallen. She was worried that, in the moment, she might not have been strong enough to do so.  
  
But, though Sophie was only a few feet away, separated from her stepsister by a thin partition, the topic of active participation in Erin's "relief" had not been broached.  
  
Erin tried her best to think of Ben. She really did. She knew that what she was doing wasn't cheating on him, exactly. But she had promised him that she'd try to be good, and this self-indulgence - solo, or borderline solo as it may have been - felt like a violation of that promise. If she fantasized about him while doing this, then...maybe...maybe...it wouldn't be so wrong. But the fact that was wrong was precisely the reason it felt so right. And, try as she might to imagine him here with her now, Ben was not a part of this fantasy come alive.  
  
Instead, as her fingers increased their speed and intensity against her clit, she found herself wondering whose cubicle this was. Because this was Human Resources, after all, the likelihood was that the cubicle's more regular occupant was a woman. On the one hand, that seemed like the preferred choice; surely another girl might forgive a sister in need? On the other, the chance that she was at a man's desk was naughtier, dirtier, and more of a turn-on. She imagined that she was here mid-day, while some middle-aged pencil pusher tried to get his work done, all while a naked mailgirl diddled herself at his feet. The sheer depravity of her need brought her to another level.  
  
"Ohhh," she moaned softly, self-conscious that Sophie would hear her.  
  
A rapid inhale-exhale, inhale-exhale, inhale-exhale was the only response from the cubicle next door.  
  
It wasn't going to take long. Erin knew her body well enough to know that, at least. As unsexy as she felt while gobbling down mailgirl chow from the communal trough in the locker room, and as brisk and frigid as her shower had been, Erin's arousal had never really abated since she'd first set foot in USF's lobby. The truth of the matter was that this had been building since she'd landed at Newark yesterday, maybe even since she'd first decided upon this visit back around Thanksgiving. For months, Erin had dreamed and fantasized and imagined what it would be like to be a mailgirl - a naked slut at the receiving end of humiliation and control on the part of some unseen corporate master. The abandonment and obscenity of it all was too much. She never stood a chance when it came to resisting these sorts of baser urges.  
  
"Ohhh..." she moaned again - a little louder this time, a little more confident. "Oh, oh, oh..."  
  
While her right hand continued on with the task at hand, her left found one of her nipples. It was rock-hard, almost painfully so, and she pinched it between her thumb and the knuckle of her index finger. She then traced it with her thumbnail, running laps around it while gently kneading the underside of her breast with her other fingers. Mistress Rei had provided similar attention earlier that afternoon - playing with her nipple absentmindedly and casually, squeezing her tit while standing behind her, breathing her hot breath on Erin's naked back. Erin had fantasized about being with a woman every now and then, of course, but she'd never acted upon it - not even in her wildest days in Tempe. Mistress Rei, with her cruel and torturous pinches, pokes, and prods was the closest she'd ever come.  
  
Erin probed the inside of her pussy with her middle finger first, and then her middle and ring almost immediately after. Her clit was rewarded with an upgrade, as the butt of her palm picked up where her fingers had left off. She ground forcefully up against her hand, her hips rising to meet it and her bare behind lifting ever-so-slightly up off the floor.  
  
"Hooo..." she breathed.  
  
She was wet. Wetter than she had probably ever been, her whole life over. Whatever conflicts were playing out in her psyche between her id and ego, these were conflicts that her body did not share in. Her pussy knew what it wanted. Her pussy knew what it needed. Her pussy was in the driver's seat now. It was calling the shots. Perhaps it had been calling the shots all along.  
  
The build was less of a build, and more of a sudden and uncontrollable surprise. And it came not from the presence of Erin's hand alone - but, rather, from the presence of two naked figures in the dimly lit space above her, standing the entrance of her cubicle.  
  
"Sorry!" one the girls yipped. They both giggled and then stepped back into the darkness.  
  
Erin exploded. "Gaaaah!" she yelped, surprised by her climax and by being caught in the act all at the same time. "Ah! Ah! Ah! Ah! Ahhhhh!" Any pretense of biting of her tongue was now gone.

Her hips bucked violently and she arched her back. Her left hand now joined her right on top of her pussy, as if she was trying to hold onto the orgasm as long as she could, as if she could keep it from escaping. Her leg muscles tightened, her heels lifted off the ground, and she rose to the balls of her feet.  
  
And, through it all, she heard Sophie giggle in a hoarse, out-of-breath voice, "...this one's occupied, too!" Apparently, Erin's visitors had simply tried to move on to the next cubicle over.  
  
One orgasm would never be enough for Erin. It had never been, when she was alone. More recently, it was at least three before she was ready to be done. Certainly, here and now, one wasn't going to cut it. Before the entirety of her first had even passed, her right hand was back at work, coaxing out a second.  
  
She was embarrassed, of course, at being caught in such a compromised state. By that point, however, she'd lost count of the number of girls she'd witnessed getting themselves off since the mailgirls had returned to the locker room. She told herself that she was just one more girl among many. She wasn't sure if that was her brain rationalizing it or reasoning with her sense of shame, or if it was her crotch - willing to make her believe anything in that moment, so long as she didn't stop. Being caught, even as briefly as she had been, and even if her witnesses hadn't seen her face, was humiliating. But humiliating in an oh-so-delicious way.  
  
In that moment, as orgasm number two now began to announce it was coming, Erin felt a few brief seconds of clarity. If it weren't for her tattoo, none of the girls back at party would ever have been able to single her out, or identify that it was Erin O'Neill - sorry, Visitor D - writhing on the floor of that cubicle. But, whoever they had been - Park Place mailgirls, Plaza mailgirls, other visitors, or even Sarah and Catherine - they'd know full-well who she was and what she'd done to herself when she returned to the employee lounge. They'd seen her transformed, and they'd witnessed her become sex incarnate, arousal realized. They'd seen her at her most vulnerable and most honest, singly focused on nothing more than sexual pleasure.  
  
She climaxed again.  
  
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As her obsession with all things mailgirl began to take hold over her that Fall, Erin increasingly took a more circuitous route back from work. Capstone Partners was downtown, as was Donovan Runnels. Capitol Pictures had a program, but was all the way over in Hollywood. Okajima Heavy Industries was down in Long Beach. Fabrikam, though? Fabrikam wasn't unreasonably out-of-the-way, and Erin could take the long way home, pass by their suburban headquarters, and still get in the door before Ben.  
  
Erin knew it was unlikely she'd get a peek at one of Fabrikam's mailgirls, especially at that time of day. The company's offices weren't terribly exciting from the outside - just the usual bland, modernist glass and concrete structure, with its neatly trimmed grass and manicured hedges that could be found anywhere in the sprawl of Greater Los Angeles. She knew, from her research on the Post Office, that the Fabrikam girls were all picked up at home by a company shuttle bus with tinted windows. That they wore formless white shifts that they were expected to surrender to the driver the moment they boarded. And that they were unloaded each morning inside the building's parking structure. The chance that Erin would catch a glimpse of one of these naked slaves was slim to none. The only outward sign that Fabrikam even had a mailgirl program was the presence of a Whitestocking encampment across the street, protesting its existence.  
  
And yet passing by the building became a part of Erin's daily routine all the same. There was something exciting about being so close to the action, about just being in the vicinity of the mailgirl world, that kept her from her more normal commute. Back in October, and in early November, that had seemed almost enough.  
  
She imagined herself as one of them. Rising each morning before dawn, with Ben still asnooze in bed, and stripping out of her nightie. Slipping on her shift, with nothing beneath it, and waiting at the end of her driveway for the short bus to come. Stripping again once aboard, with her covering - such as it was - deposited into a communal box at the front of bus, and knowing full-well that the shift she wore home at the end of the day might have been on another girl entirely that morning. Getting unloaded in the garage with her fellow naked mailgirls, and being roughly hustled out to the courtyard that served as Fabrikam's take on the mailgirl locker room. Showering outdoors. Shaving her intimate areas while the muggles all watched from inside. Getting collared, getting leashed, and getting inspected before being put into circulation.  
  
It wasn't the humiliation that appealed to her; the embarrassment and dehumanization of it all was secondary, a product of what the real allure was. It was control. It was surrender. It was playing the part of sex object while someone else called the shots.  
  
How could she ever have expected Ben to understand that?  
  
She'd met Ben O'Neill shortly after college. He was tall, good-looking, and - above all else - kind. Their marriage was one of those modern, 21st century ones where they took turns making dinner, folding the laundry, shopping for groceries, and all of that. Ben brought home flowers for her every Friday afternoon, and sometimes just because. They went on hikes together, trips up the coast together, and out to dinner for "date night" every other Saturday. They communicated well, telling each other everything - every dream, every fear, every hope for their life together. Because of this, Erin had felt guilty keeping her online exploration of Mailgirls Exposed and the Post Office from him.  
  
Erin's preoccupation with idea of mailgirls was very likely a reaction to fact that she and Ben had been talking about kids more and more over the last year. She was thirty, and Ben had a couple of years on her. They both had good, stable jobs. They owned a house in the suburbs, in a neighborhood they'd chosen in large part due the quality of the school district. And Erin wanted kids. She did. She really did. She just wasn't sure she wanted them quite yet. She liked being the hot, young schoolteacher the eleventh-grade boys thought about in the privacy of their own bedrooms, the young-and-fun girl still in her twenties. She wasn't ready to become someone's mom. She wasn't ready to sacrifice her body, and be that woman with saggy tits and a muffin-top. Ben wasn't pressuring her. It wasn't his style. But Erin had felt the pressure all the same.  
  
Sophie had called a couple of times that previous summer, panicking over her own impending life events. Though never quite as buttoned-down and conservative as her older sister Sarah, Erin had always thought of Sophie as someone who knew who she was, and knew what she wanted, from an early age. Even as a teenager, Sophie seemed to be one of those people who had it all figured out - certainly more so than Erin ever did. But Sophie was increasingly on-edge about her wedding to John, fretting over whether she was too young to settle down. From high school to college, from college to dental school. From Patrick and Catherine's house to the dorms, and from the dorms directly into an apartment with her fiancée. House, job, pets, kids, graduations, retirement, death. It all seemed to be planned out too soon, too early, too neat.  
  
Erin wrote it off as nothing more than cold feet - at least initially. But it caused her to reflect on her own life, and her own life choices. If Sophie, at twenty-three, was worried that there were no more big adventures out there for her, what did that mean for Erin at thirty?  
  
John had been outraged when Sophie called off the wedding, and informed him that, instead, she'd been spending the next two years as a naked mailgirl in New Jersey. He just couldn't understand it, and was furious that Sophie would do this to him. Ben, in contrast, had been concerned and empathetic - it was his nature. He even offered to Catherine that he could look over the contracts Sarah and Sophie signed to find some sort of loophole; he wasn't a lawyer by training, but he worked in Procurement, and knew enough that he might be able to parse the legalese. Catherine had thanked him, and shared the contracts with him, but nothing had ever really come of it. After all, both Sarah and Sophie had volunteered for this, whatever their individual reasons had been.  
  
"I'll wait for you," Ben had told Erin that morning in bed earlier in the month month, surrendering to her need to go visit her stepsisters and everything that that visit entailed.  
  
"I'll wait for you," he'd repeated, when he'd dropped her off at LAX.  
  
"I'll wait for you," she imagined him saying, when she'd quit her job and put in application at Fabrikam.  
  
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"Fire alarm!" Erin thought to herself, waking with a start.  
  
The world was dark around her, and the floor hard beneath her. She panicked, and grabbed at the collar on her neck, knowing it was connected to a short, metal leash, which in turn was connected to a metal eye-hook in the floor. If there were a fire, there'd be no way to get free; inebriated as she may have been the night before, she hadn't forgotten the sound of the "click" as she'd fastened the leash to her collar. It would take one of Mistress Rei's keys to get free.  
  
She could, however, remove her eye mask, and did so. She was greeted immediately by the bright, fluorescent lighting of the locker room. She squinted, and rubbed her eyes, the light assaulting her just as much as the ringing was assaulting her ears. The eye mask - a blindfold, in essence - had been a necessity. The mailgirls locker room was bathed in light twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. Shut-eye required the aid of a staple from the world of bondage and discipline.  
  
Around her, thirty-some-odd naked girls were all pulling off their own masks, and rising from the floor, but only the visitors seemed shaken and confused by the clanging of the alarm bell. This was, apparently, routine.  
  
"Good morning, pets!" Mistress Rei sang out from the center of the room in heavily-accented English, her back to the squat toilets. "Merry Christmas!"  
  
True to Sophie's word, Mistress Rei had given up the pretense of being anything more than a full-fledged dominatrix. She was dressed in a black leather corset, laces cinched tight at the mid-section, with garter straps connected to a pair of white fishnet stockings with scalloped lace around each thigh. This was apparently Mistress Rei's holiday outfit, though, as the cups of the corset were a bright red, with a big, black bow between them. The edges of the corset itself - at her chest, at her waist - were trimmed with snow-white fur. She wore a pair of red panties, which Erin would later realize was a thong that left her backside nearly fully exposed. On her feet were platform heels, the same shade as her underwear and the corset's cups, with five-inch stilettos, a bit of fake mistletoe near the toes, and more of the white fur at the ankles. In her right hand was a black-and-red leather bull whip, maybe four feet in length, that ended with a small tuft of black leather tails.  
  
Erin's jaw dropped.  
  
"Up, up, up!" Mistress Rei sang out, and cracked the whip against the backside of first one, and then another, of the two girls closest to her - in this instance, Mailgirl Eleven and Mailgirl Thirteen. Visitor G (Mailgirl 12's aunt, Erin had learned last night) got the next kiss from the whip, and she yipped out in a mixture of pain and surprise. Mistress Rei wasn't swinging the instrument with any particular ferocity, but the "crack!" each time it landed sounded vicious all the same.  
  
"The rest of the visitors will be arriving at noon," Mistress Rei called out. The male visitors, she meant. "Today is a holiday. Even for little sluts like you. But before we do presents, I expect you all in uniform. Inspection is at six-thirty. Wash. Shave. Shampoo. Food. Water. And then back on your knees."  
  
She unlocked Mailgirl Thirteen, freeing her from her leash, and then handed over her keys for Thirteen to do the same for the others. With a few quick taps on her tablet, Mistress Rei brought a merciful end to the ringing of the alarm bells, and then began to pace menacingly down the line of naked girls in the direction of Erin and the Scott sisters.  
  
Erin drank in her surroundings. Park Place's mailgirls had all secured themselves to their usual spots. Sophie and Sarah, as Mailgirls One and Two, were on the end, closest to the door that Erin, Catherine, and the visitors had all first entered the previous afternoon. At the next eye-hook over were Mailgirls Three and Four, and then Mailgirls Five and Six at the next after that, and so on down the line. The visitors - the Plaza girls and the outsiders - had been given more freedom to choose where they'd bed down for the night. For the most part, they'd chosen to secure themselves with their hosts, as Erin had with her stepsisters. Visitor B was with her sister, Mailgirl Five. Visitor G was with her niece, Mailgirl Twelve. Visitor A was with her girlfriend, Mailgirl Sixteen. But, as there were only nineteen regular mailgirls distributed among twelve eye-hooks in the floor, Visitors H and I had opted for the last hook, unoccupied, on the far side of the room. Catherine and Angela - or, rather, Visitor E and Visitor F - had taken the other empty hook beside them. Plaza Ten, Plaza Seventeen, and Plaza Twenty-One were all with Park Place Nineteen, Plaza Eighteen had cuddled up with Park Place Six, and Plaza Seven had joined Erin, Sarah, and Sophie here on this side of the room.  
  
Erin had been spared the embarrassment of having to face her stepmother when she'd returned to the party with Sophie last night. As things began to get a bit more out of control, Mailgirl Fourteen had escorted her mother and Catherine Ryan back to the locker room for an earlier bedtime than the rest of the girls. Erin doubted that anything had happened between them. At least, she liked to tell herself that nothing had happened between them. But, even if they had paired off, a lesbian tryst between the two oldest visitors couldn't have held a candle to the other pairing that had the party tittering over and whispering about. No, it was what Mailgirl Five and her sister had done that had scandalized and shocked a group of girls who were most likely difficult to scandalize and shock.  
  
Erin risked a glance in their direction. If either Mailgirl Five or Visitor B felt any shame in what they had done, there didn't seem to be any evidence of it. They were standing close together, holding hands, and whispering secrets in one another's ear, giggling and smiling back and forth. In a room full of goddesses and supermodels, these two were on another level. Big round tits, the both of them, with long, blonde hair and bright smiles. These two would have been the stuff of masturbatory fantasy even fully-dressed. That they'd been caught together in the men's room, with Mailgirl Five's tongue buried deep between her sister's legs, was so twisted and warped and wanton that Erin couldn't even fathom the decision-making that had gone into such an incestful pairing. That they'd carried on even after being discovered - and even switched giver and receiver - signaled such a complete and total lack of shame that Erin couldn't wrap her head around it.  
  
Not that Erin was really in a position to judge. She'd masturbated with her own stepsister, after all, with only a few feet and a flimsy partition between them. When she'd finally finished and sat up, she'd been greeted by a big, sly smile on Sophie's face, peering over the cubicle divide. Sophie had wrapped up a few minutes before Erin had fully satisfied herself, and had played witness to at least Erin's last body-shaking, spasm-inducing orgasm on the floor.  
  
"Better?" was all Sophie had asked of her.  
  
"Much," Erin had answered, while simultaneously wondering if the dim lighting of the surge protector and the scattered exit signs gave away just how furiously she was blushing.  
  
If Sophie had felt any shame of what they'd done more-or-less together, she showed no more sign of it than the other pair of sisters a few eye-hooks down. She smiled at Erin when their eyes met, as Erin took in her fellow "hook-mates."  
  
Sarah and Plaza Seven were still making googly eyes at one another, and it was clear that - Ten's presence in their reunion yesterday evening notwithstanding - there was something more than just purely physical between them. It made sense. Erin got it. She understood it. They had a history together at USF Plaza downtown, a shared experience that made their relationship deeper than just a desperate pussy and a willing tongue. Erin had witnessed such connections last night, beyond just Sarah and Plaza Seven, beyond Mailgirl Sixteen and her girlfriend. Mailgirls Seventeen and Eighteen appeared to be very much an exclusive couple. And Mailgirl Twelve had introduced her aunt to Mailgirl Three in such a way that signaled Three was someone very important in Twelve's life. "Letter-carrying lesbians," all, who'd found love and affection amid enslavement and abuse.  
  
That said, whatever Sarah's relationship was with Plaza Seven, it wasn't a monogamous one. The race Erin had witnessed between Plaza Seventeen and Park Place Fifteen earlier in the evening, to see who could masturbate to climax first, escalated towards something else entirely towards the tail end of the night. And it was Plaza Twenty-One who had her tongue buried deep in Sarah's pussy, while Sarah sat up atop the bar. Beside her, Park Place Six was similarly engrossed in a similarly situated Plaza Eighteen. Plaza Eighteen sung out the redheaded mailgirl's victory loudly, to cheers and laughter and applause around the room, when Park Place Six got her over the crest. If Sarah was disappointed in her-and-Twenty-One's second place finish, though, she got one hell of a consolation prize all the same.  
  
It was one thing to have her stepsister excuse herself, to hang back at the loading dock to greet old friends. It was another thing entirely to watch her cum in a crowded room full of naked mailgirls, on the losing end of a cunnilingus race. Though she was currently re-assigned to a bit of forced time off here at USF, Sarah Scott was still technically a doctoral candidate at Yale.  
  
"Oh!" Sarah had called out, her eyes wide open and her chest heaving. She held tight to the back of Plaza Twenty-One's head, and refused to let go - even though the race was over. "Oh, fuck. Oh, fuck! Fuck! Fuck! Fuck!"  
  
"...stare, if you want to," Sophie had told Erin earlier in the evening, in reference to Nine masturbating under the shower. "She doesn't care. Some of us like the audience." Sophie might very well have been referring to her own sister, apparently. Erin and Sarah locked eyes as Sarah peaked. Gone was Sarah Scott, the PhD-to-be. In her place was only the wild, desperate, animal lust of Mailgirl Number Two.  
  
Now, though, Sarah seemed be feeling a little more shame than Mailgirl Five and Visitor B were exhibiting. She caught Erin's eyes again this morning, and then quickly looked away. Plaza Seven squeezed her hand, kissed her lightly on the lips, and waited with her to be unlocked. Erin wondered if things would ever be the same between her and Sarah again. She didn't see how they could be. Thankfully, she was distracted by the arrival of Mistress Rei and her whip.  
  
"Crack!"  
  
With barely a flick of her wrist, Mistress Rei had snapped her bullwhip and landed it perfectly upon Erin's right buttock. Erin barked in pain, the sting more surprising than painful, and she instinctively put her hands out in front of her as if to stop another blow. She'd been spared the riding crop last night, but she wasn't so lucky that morning.

"Stand and wait like a mailgirl!" Mistress Rei ordered. "Legs apart! Shoulders back! Titties out! Eyes down!"  
  
Erin was far from the only naked girl "out of position" as she waited to be unlocked. But, apparently, it was just her turn to receive attention from her new mistress. She winced as the Japanese woman cocked her wrist once more, but she did as she was told, all the same. She fought back a tear and braced for another kiss from the whip, though it didn't come. Not yet, at least.  
  
Instead, Mistress Rei reached out and grabbed her violently and viciously by her left nipple, tugging her whole torso downwards and towards her, so they were face-to-face. Even with the other woman in heels, Erin still had a few inches on her. Without releasing her grip, Mistress Rei proceeded to lick Erin's cheek from jaw to temple, and whispered in her ear, "Have you been nice? Or have you been naughty?"  
  
"Naughty," Erin whimpered softly. "Naughty, Mistress Rei."  
  
"Louder!"  
  
"Naughty."  
  
"Louder!"  
  
"Naughty, Mistress Rei! This girl has been naughty!"  
  
"I knew it," the woman hissed. "I know what you are. I could smell it on you yesterday."  
  
Erin willed Mailgirl Thirteen to hurry with the keys.  
  
"I could smell it. Smell your dirty, naughty cunt. You don't fool me. You're not a visitor. You're a mailgirl." She leaned back in to Erin's ear, so that only Erin could hear her. "Tell me what you did. Tell me how you were naughty."  
  
"I...I...I..." Erin began, and was treated to increased pressure upon her nipple between her mistress's finger and thumb.  
  
"'This girl...'" Mistress Rei corrected.  
  
"This girl..." Erin parroted back. "This girl...touched...touched herself in an empty cubicle."  
  
"'This girl fucked herself.'"  
  
"This girl fuh..fucked herself."  
  
"'This naughty girl finger-fucked her wet, dirty pussy.'"  
  
"This naughty girl finger-fucked her wet, dirty pussy."  
  
"'This naughty girl finger-fucked her wet, dirty pussy the first chance she got.'"  
  
"This naughty girl finger-fucked her wet, dirty pussy the first chance she got."  
  
"Louder."  
  
"This naughty girl finger-fucked her wet, dirty pussy the first chance she got!"  
  
"Louder."  
  
"This naughty girl finger-fucked her wet, dirty pussy the first chance she got!!" Erin yelled out. Catherine would know about it now.  
  
Mistress Rei released her grip, and Erin did her best to catch her breath.  
  
"Were you alone?"  
  
"I...I...I..."  
  
"Crack!" Erin felt the sting of the bullwhip once more. It stung. It was painful. But Mistress Rei exhibited enough control that it didn't out-and-out hurt so much as Erin might have expected.  
  
"This mailgirl was with her!" Sophie called out, coming to her rescue. Erin would have lied, and said she was alone. Sophie knew the consequences for lying.  
  
Mistress Rei cocked an eyebrow. She looked to Sophie, and then back to Erin. "'This naughty slut finger-fucked her wet, dirty pussy with her sister.'"  
  
Step-sister, Erin corrected her mentally. The distinction, though, didn't seem to matter in the here and now.  
  
"This naughty slut finger-fucked her wet, dirty pussy with her sister!" she yipped. A tear streamed down her face.  
  
"No need to cry," Mistress Rei assured her with mock comfort. "We've got nothing but naughty sluts here. Santa still made his rounds." She laughed. "Tell me. What is it that you want from Santa? More than anything in the world?"  
  
Diamond earrings, she told herself. A pearl necklace. A new car.  
  
"This girl wants to be a mailgirl," she mewed.  
  
"That," Mistress Rei smiled appreciatively, "we can do."  
  
Panic set in. What had she just done? What had she just said? Was that how this began? She had just blurted it out. She thought that was what Mistress Rei wanted to hear. Whether it was true or not...  
  
"But not here," the woman went on, and gestured to her hip. "Tattoo. And -" she added, emphasizing, "too slutty. Too much of a slut even for us. You want this too bad. You reek of it."  
  
Too slutty for a room full of girls finger-fucking themselves and each other for the better part of the last twelve hours. Mistress Rei's dismissal stung her more than the whip.  
  
"I'll see what Santa can do," Mistress Rei said. "We have friends."  
  
Erin shuddered. She screamed inwardly at herself. She wanted to beg and plead to take it back. She wanted to pull out her hair. She wanted to run screaming from this room, and back into Ben's waiting arms.  
  
"Thank you, Mistress Rei," was all she offered in response.  
  
The horror she felt was reflected in the faces of Sarah and Sophie, when Mistress Rei walked away and Erin finally dared to look up from the floor.  
  
"No!" Sarah whispered at her angrily. "You don't want this."  
  
"I...I...I..."  
  
"No," Sarah repeated forcefully. "Ben."  
  
Ben. Erin began to whimper, and she knew more tears were coming.  
  
"Mailgirls don't cry," Sophie said, and grabbed her by the hand. "Don't let them see you cry."  
  
"You don't want this," Sarah insisted. She looked away, and then back to her stepsister. "Don't do this."  
  
Erin sniffled, and held back a sob. "I just don't know..." She trailed off.  
  
"They'll fuck you. I promise. They'll fuck you," Sarah said through clenched teeth.  
  
"Don't sign anything," Sophie added.  
  
"They might not need her to." This from Plaza Seven. "I'm sure there's something in the agreement she already signed."  
  
There wasn't. Erin knew the visitor's agreement forwards and backwards. She'd been through it over and over and over. Ben had even forced himself to read through it, to make sure. He had started and stopped three times, getting too angry to finish, before finally buckling down and barreling through. But...maybe...maybe she'd missed something. Maybe she hadn't understood something. Or - she gasped - maybe they'd slipped something into the agreement she'd re-signed at the security desk yesterday?  
  
"Whatever they put in front of you, don't do it," Sarah went on. "Whatever it is. Promises to pay off your mortgage. Promises of some big payday."  
  
"Threats," Sophie said.  
  
"Threats," Sarah agreed. "Whatever they say. You've got Ben. You'll be alright. You don't want this."  
  
"You don't want this," Sophie echoed.  
  
You don't want this, Erin told herself. Do you?  
  
Mailgirl Thirteen arrived at that very moment, looking as pale over the exchange as Erin was sure that she herself did. She reached out, and gently unlocked the leash from Erin's collar.  
  
"Thank you," Erin croaked.  
  
To say that the back-and-forth with Mistress Rei had been a mood dampener was an understatement. This all suddenly felt too real. Too much like a nightmare, whereas before it had been only fantasy. There was now a very real possibility that she wouldn't be flying home to LA tomorrow.  
  
But spirits seemed low, all around. Gone was the unbridled exuberance Erin had witnessed when the mailgirls got through with their shifts yesterday. Gone was the wildness and sexiness and over-the-top orgy atmosphere that had defined the mailgirls' Christmas party. All around her, the locker room was calmer and quieter than it had been before. Even the handful of girls Erin saw masturbating in the shower did so joylessly, more utilitarian and reluctant than as an outlet for pent-up sexual energy. They were all hung over, Erin supposed, and suffering from a lack of sleep; if it was five-and-change now, Erin doubted that she could have gotten more than three hours of sleep last night.  
  
Erin's head was spinning, but she knew it wasn't just the peppermint schnapps and cherry liqueur.  
  
Though they all were to experience the first-of-its-kind "day off" here at Park Place, the reality of the mailgirls' normal morning routine had a sobering affect upon them all.  
  
There were just six showerheads for a sum total of thirty-three naked girls, and so there was a bottleneck in the girls' efforts to be ready in time for "inspection." They improvised, though, by often doubling up and hurrying along to the best of their ability. Erin, for one, had no interest in lingering beneath the ice-cold water the girls were allowed for their morning showers, but she was forced to remain there for a good duration all the same. Though she and Catherine both, independently, had gone and gotten waxed before their trip to New Jersey, Sarah insisted that Erin still needed to "make a show" of shaving her pubic region before submitting herself to Mistress Rei.  
  
"I'll do you. You do me," Sarah suggested, almost apologetically. "It's faster."  
  
What was Erin going to say? As awkward as her stepsister's hands between her legs might have been, it was no more or less awkward than anything else Erin had submitted herself to since arriving at Park Place. And, it appeared that this was a more common practice among the Park Place mailgirls than was going it alone.  
  
"I'm sorry," Sarah offered quietly under the shower. She was down on one knee in front of Erin, at crotch-height, and gently sliding a razor across the inside of Erin's thigh.  
  
"Sorry for what?" Erin asked. Had Sarah accidentally cut her with the blade?  
  
"For everything," Sarah answered. It was heartfelt. And intimate, in a way that was only somewhat diminished by the fact that there were other naked girls on either side of them. "I didn't mean to come off that way, so judgmental, just now." She swallowed. "And I'm sorry about...about...last night. I just got carried away."  
  
Oh, so they were acknowledging it now? The eye contact, that is. As Sarah had climaxed and locked eyes with her stepsister.  
  
"It's okay," Erin replied meekly. "It's okay."  
  
Sarah hesitated, and ran the razor through the shaving cream on Erin's groin once more. There wasn't any stubble to be found, but Sarah was meticulous all the same. "It's not. It's my fault - all of it. None of you would be here now, forced to do any of this, if it weren't for me. Not you. Not 'Mailgirl Number One.' Not 'Visitor E.' I feel like I infected you all with this."  
  
"You didn't force me to do any of this. In fact, you did your best to tell me to stay away. But I wouldn't listen."  
  
"But if it weren't for me..."  
  
"If it weren't for you, I might have gone barreling headfirst into all this, anyways. I mean, it's kind of a thing. Kind of an obsessed thing. Kind of an obsessed thing that I can seem to shake. I needed to do it, and see it for myself. If it weren't for the 'visitors' program here, I might have already signed a full-on contract back home. I'm not sure I would have been strong enough to resist it."  
  
"Come on..."  
  
"I'm serious. Seriously serious. You heard Mistress Rei. She can smell it on me."  
  
"A: I'm pretty sure she was fucking with you. And, B: I'm pretty sure it was your vagina she was talking about..." She paused in what she was doing, inspected her work, and then looked up at Erin. "Which..."  
  
"Shut up!" Erin laughed.  
  
"You can rinse," Sarah instructed. "I'm pretty sure were fine beforehand, but they're pretty strict about this."  
  
"Okay." Erin stepped back under the ice-cold water, and used her hands to wipe the remainder of the shaving cream away.  
  
"You don't have to do me," Sarah said to Erin, standing and asking Mailgirl Seventeen to pass her the can of shaving cream. "I've got a little more going on. And I'm a little more practiced at this."  
  
Erin didn't necessarily want to get so up close and personal with her stepsister's crotch. But they'd had a tit-for-tat deal, hadn't they. "Are you sure?"  
  
"Uh-huh. It's fine. I know what I'm doing." Sarah squeezed a liberal amount of shaving cream into her palm, and began lathering herself up on either side of her slit, and up above. She got back to her knees, and then down her backside, before spreading her legs wide open and beginning her routine. Two showerheads over, Mailgirl Eleven and Visitor I were in the same position, doing the same thing.  
  
Sarah's stubbly pussy didn't need the entirety of her attention, however. "Alright, well, I'm sorry for jumping all over you just now, then. I don't know what's going on with you. I can't see inside your head. And I'm the absolute last person to judge you if this is really and truly something you need to do. You know, long-term."  
  
"You're looking out for me."  
  
"I'm looking out for you," she agreed. "This," - meaning Erin's visit - "isn't what this is like most of the time. Last night? We get that once a week. And it gets taken away from us if the demerits start piling up, or if they just want to fuck with us. No food, either. Not real food. If we're hungry for something to eat, it's just more chow."  
  
"I kind of figured..."  
  
"It's hard. It really is. We have an EVP here, on the sixth floor, that the girls all call 'Captain Buttplug.' He's got a toy - a couple of them, in fact - that I think has made the rounds, into each and every one of us."  
  
Erin blanched. "I thought that USF didn't..."  
  
"It gets a little more gray the higher up the food chain you go."  
  
"Ugh."  
  
"Ugh," Sarah agreed. "There's also this absolute, fucking bitch in Clearing who likes to decorate us with binder clips."  
  
"Jesus."  
  
"And I think you saw what they did to Six? When you first got here?"  
  
"I did. We did."  
  
"It gets worse. I got left upside down in a St. Andrew's Cross - don't ask - and ended up passing out. Outside. In November."  
  
"Were you okay? I mean, obviously..."  
  
"Yeah. No. I mean, I was fine, in the end. But, what I'm saying is that this all can feel exciting. And exploratory. And, fuck, I mean it is. But there's this thin line between sadomasochism and just out-and-out sadism. Sociopath shit. And, honestly, I'm worried that that line keeps getting blurrier." She paused. "You don't want to do this."  
  
Erin just nodded.  
  
Sarah was almost done now. She rinsed. She inspected herself. She went back one more time for a touch-up.  
  
"Last night," she began. "With Twenty-One. And then you were there..."  
  
"It's okay."  
  
"Okay. I just, I don't know, I got caught up. And having you and my mom here? It's just, like, I don't know, like all of this on crack."  
  
"It's okay," Erin assured her. "I promised I'd give you space. It's my fault."  
  
"No, no. It's not. I can't promise you that it won't happen again. With the other Seven here, I'm not sure that I can...I'm not sure that I want to stop. You don't need to disappear, is what I'm saying. It is what it is."  
  
Sarah finished, stood, and rinsed. Erin reached for the knob, and turned the water off. Both of them wrung out their hair. As they stepped from the shower block, bodies dripping with cold water and skin covered in goose bumps, Erin asked, "Are you going to stay?" That is, would Sarah stay with USF, even after her contract was through.  
  
"So...who knows if I even have a choice in the matter," she answered glumly. "But, no, I want to go back and finish my PhD."  
  
The two girls helped themselves to the scratchy white hand towels and began to dry off. "And then?"  
  
"And then, I don't know. The paper I wrote is getting a good amount of attention. Good and bad. But I'm in this niche now, one that no one is really looking at from an academic standpoint. And certainly not from an insider's perspective. I mean, my reputation is just completely and totally trashed now. The mailgirls thing is just absolutely radioactive on college campuses, so I'm not sure I'm going to get the faculty position or the fellowship I might have wanted.  
  
"Which sucks because it's good work. And work that the field - Sociocultural Anthropology, that is - really should be doing. And maybe, in a couple of years, if and when mailgirls as a concept really and truly goes mainstream, and assuming Congress doesn't pull the plug on the whole fucking thing next month, maybe I'll get the sort of opportunity I thought I'd get - that I talked myself into thinking I'd get - before I got undressed that first time back in June.  
  
"Until then? I don't know. I've really only got my experiences here at USF to speak to. I've been thinking that maybe I need to go somewhere else. Somewhere where they do all of this a little differently, and in their own way. Maybe some place that's, I don't know, maybe even a little rougher?"  
  
This startled Erin. "'Rougher'? Like, 'providing relief' sort of rougher?"  
  
Sarah shrugged. "Maybe. In for a penny."  
  
"You'd do that?"  
  
"Like I said, my reputation is shit anyways. No one's going to think any less of me. What's the harm in getting my rocks off, and really going deep? Really going all the way? If I'm going to get called a 'slut' and a 'whore' no matter what I do, why not drop the whole 'look-but-don't-touch' shit and own it. Really and truly. And, afterwards? Let the world catch up, and accept me for who I am."  
  
"Wow," Erin said. She took the already soggy towel, and did her best to dry her hair a bit more. She hesitated, and then asked pointedly, "But not me?"  
  
Sarah met her stepsister's eyes. "You have Ben. Who loves you. I'm sure if you asked, he'd be happy to spank you and whip you and do whatever else it is you think you're missing out on. There are people who are into this sort of thing, without having to become full-on mailgirls."  
  
"Enough chit-chat," Mistress Rei bellowed in their direction. "Kiss and say 'I love you' later. Hair and make-up. Weigh-ins. And then back your spots."  
  
It was gross to share underarm deodorant. It was grosser still to share a toothbrush. But Erin still dutifully readied herself for inspection. She'd choked down a healthy serving of mailgirl chow before her shower, hoping to quell the churn of a stomach that had been treated to too much alcohol the night before. But she discovered that doing so before weighing in was a rookie mistake; the girls were all measured to within a tenth of a pound, and the difference between a full stomach and an empty one could potentially lead to demerits. As the scale synched with Erin's profile on Sophie's phone, she noted that she registered a little heavier than the night before - negligibly so, and within such a margin that she might never have noticed it at home. But an uptick all the same.  
  
While the visitors had been allowed the freedom - such as it was - to choose where to bed down the night before, inspections were a little more formal, and visitors were expected to secure themselves with their hosts. The Plaza girls were directed to distribute themselves between the two empty eye-hooks on the other side of Nineteen, however, and so it was just Sarah, Sophie, Catherine, and Erin locked in together on this side of the room. One big, twisted, happy family.  
  
Inspection was one thing. Though it wasn't particularly pleasant to be up on her toes, with her hands behind her head, as Mistress Rei ran a finger over her body to check for stubble, Erin had already been through this once before, the previous afternoon. The "confessional" portion of the exercise, in which the girls were required to report any and all instances of sexual activity that had occurred the night before, was a new and fresh hell. While Mistress Rei stood before them with her tablet, tapping it all in and saving it for posterity, each of them confessed their sins.  
  
"Once, by myself," Sophie offered, starting it all off. "Ten minutes. Two orgasms. Three, and then a two." Session. Duration. Count. Intensity of each.  
  
"Once, by myself," Erin stated flatly when it was her turn. "Ten minutes. Five orgasms. Four, maybe, on a scale. Three? And then two, two, and two." It might have been fifteen minutes; Sophie was finished before her, after all. And it might have actually been six orgasms - Erin wasn't sure - but she thought it preferable to low-ball the number. Same with her guesstimate on the intensity of each; her first, when she'd been caught in the act, was decidedly a five. Three's and two's were on the low side, as well - Erin couldn't remember having cum like that before last night. The need. The desperation. The release.

Mistress Rei smiled wickedly, and observed, "You are a naughty little slut, aren't you?"  
  
"Yes, mistress," was all Erin offered in response.  
  
"Just like your sisters," the Japanese woman purred.  
  
Stepsisters, Erin said to herself.  
  
"Once with Plaza Seven and Plaza Ten," Sarah said when it was her turn. "Fingers and oral. Fifteen minutes. Two orgasms. Five and five, both."  
  
She went on. "Once with Plaza Twenty-One. Oral. Five minutes. One orgasm. It was another five, mistress."  
  
But she wasn't done. "Once by myself. Five minutes. One orgasm. Another five."  
  
Erin knew about the first. She'd witnessed the second. But she'd been with Sarah for the remainder of the night, and wasn't sure when her stepsister had had an opportunity to sneak that last one in. Could she have...no!...but, could she have...? Could she have gotten herself off on the floor last night, after they'd bedded down, with Erin sleeping just a few feet away?  
  
Erin shuddered.  
  
The revelations were far from over. "Once," Catherine answered next, and Erin stiffened. "With Visitor F. Oral. And...uh...fingers. Fifteen minutes. One orgasm." The older woman hesitated, but then offered, "Five."  
  
No more wondering about why Catherine and Angela had turned in early last night. No more wondering if something had happened between Catherine and Mailgirl Fourteen's mother. It was all out there now.  
  
It was more than Erin had ever wanted to know. Maybe she should have been upset at her stepmother for cheating on her father, even if it was with a woman. Erin didn't linger on this question, however - these were extenuating circumstances. Erin had no interest in breaking the news to Patrick Ryan. Erin had no interest in confronting her stepmother. Erin had no interest in thinking about Catherine and Angela going down on one another here in the locker room.  
  
After all, was she really in any position to judge?  
  
The girls were restricted from speaking during inspections. And so this news, this confession, hung out there awkwardly as Mistress Rei moved on to Mailgirl Number Three.  
  
Most of the girls had something to confess, it seemed. There were a few - Mailgirl Seven, Visitor C, and Mailgirl Fourteen, for instance - who had nothing to report. But the vast majority had, at the very least, gotten themselves off on their own. And there was a tangled web of who had slept with whom that Erin tried to keep straight - even if the numbers, letters, and duplicates from the Plaza made it a difficult exercise. Mailgirl Six's number got called out more than once, though everyone in the room - everyone but Mistress Rei - knew that there was some artificial inflation in her sum total.  
  
"Once, with Mailgirl Number Six," Mailgirl Five had lied, after first copping to the solo session earlier in the evening. "Fingers and oral. Ten minutes. Three orgasms. First was a Five. Second was a Four. Third was a Four."  
  
"Once, with Mailgirl Number Six," Visitor B said when it was her turn. "Fingers and oral. Ten minutes. Four orgasms. Five, four, five, and five."  
  
"You do get around," Mistress Rei cooed at Mailgirl Six.  
  
"This girl is good at what she does," Six replied snarkily.  
  
The night before, in the aftermath of the "race" between Plaza Twenty-One and Six, Erin overheard a snippet of conversation between Sarah and the mailgirl from downtown. "Don't beat yourself up - that was amazing," she reassured Plaza Twenty-One, consoling her for the second-place finish. "Six has had a lot of practice. A lot, a lot, a lot of practice. It was her way of making it up to the other girls, for putting them on her list of mailgirl candidates."  
  
Whether or not Five and her sister had clued Six in on the lie ahead of time, Six covered for them. She listed each of their designations when it was her turn. Her own list was expansive, and Erin wasn't sure if she should have been offended that Six hadn't tried anything with her.  
  
It was some time before Mistress Rei made it all the way down the line. Not only were there fourteen extra girls whom she had to inspect, but there were also fourteen extra girls for whom she needed to play confessor, and whose disclosures she needed to enter into the system for record-keeping. Erin doubted that this exercise usually took this long; last night had apparently been a wild one, even by Park Place's standards.  
  
When they were finally, mercifully, let up off their knees, there was only one thing that Sarah and Sophie wanted to talk about. But detail into Catherine's confession would have to wait, at least temporarily. The Plaza girls were instructed to remain behind, but Mailgirls One and Two, and their other guests, were assigned responsibility for cleaning up the employee lounge on the 2nd Floor. A handful of others, including Mailgirl Fourteen (and by default, her mother), were to report to the gym, for being over their weights, even if only marginally so. Another few were sent back to the troughs for another serving of mailgirl chow for being under.  
  
"Ten o'clock," Mistress Rei barked, and punched the deadline into her tablet. The smartphones affixed to the mailgirls' arms all came alive at once, registering the assignment. "1st Floor atrium, by the Middlesex Courtyard. For gifts. Don't be late."  
  
It was nice, in its own twisted way, to get time alone as a family, away from the rest of the mailgirls. Even if that time away was spent mop in-hand, cleaning up the excesses of the night before. Sarah and Sophie led the way, sprinting up to the 2nd Floor. They didn't have a deadline to meet - not for this exercise, at least - but it was almost a force of habit. Sarah would later explain that if she didn't get a jog in, she'd start going a bit stir crazy.  
  
The smell of sex - of pussy, more accurately - was overpowering when they first entered the employee lounge. The girls hadn't trashed the room completely, but there were empty bottles of booze and half-drunken cocktail glasses everywhere. The mailgirl mats needed to be collected and redistributed throughout the building, and the furniture all needed to be put back in its proper places. What remained of the hors d'oeuvres and desserts would be trashed, and what little remained of the liquor needed to be boxed up and brought back down to Mistress Rei's room on B2.  
  
First, though, Sarah poured a shot glass full of the vile cherry liqueur. She slid it across the bar to her mother.  
  
Erin, along with Visitor H, had each been awarded such a drink. It was a ritual the mailgirls celebrated, for when a girl "popped her cherry" and masturbated in public the first time. Erin had played with herself in a far less public setting than had Visitor H; but she'd done so all the same, and it seemed impolite to protest and point out the difference.  
  
"Be careful," Sophie had warned her. "The first time is a gateway diddle."  
  
"To the slightly less embarrassing nature of subsequent sessions of self-pleasure!" Sarah had cheered, toasted, and slugged back a drink of her own, to the roar, applause, and participation of the rest of the room.  
  
Now it was Catherine's turn.  
  
"It's seven thirty in morning," she protested.  
  
"Do the crime..." Sophie began.  
  
Knowing she was licked, Catherine grimaced and took the glass.  
  
"It'll help wash the taste of breakfast out of your mouth," Erin offered helpfully.  
  
Catherine shot her stepdaughter a skeptical look, and then knocked the drink back. She scrunched up her face, stuck out her tongue, and coughed. "I think I prefer the taste of the mailgirl chow."  
  
They all laughed.  
  
"So..." Sophie teased. "...Visitor F?"  
  
Catherine smiled, and said demurely, "She was gentle." She chuckled to herself, and then went the other way. "No, she definitely wasn't."  
  
"Ew! Ew! Ew!" Sarah came back. "No, let's not do this!"  
  
"You're one to talk!" Catherine replied. "Anyone here you didn't sleep with last night?"  
  
Sophie raised her hand. Erin, too.  
  
Catherine hinted around the details. And though Sarah and Sophie both - but Sarah, in particular - made a show of recoiling and acting weirded out by their mother's admissions, neither could help herself from asking follow-up questions.  
  
"You know there are cameras in the locker room, right?" Sophie asked at one point, while stacking the mailgirl mats by the door. Erin hadn't noticed the cameras, herself, but it didn't surprise her in the least. She'd seen pictures of the Park Place locker room online, but they were all amateur-style shots, taken through the mirror glass. Human Capital, though, likely had thousands of hours of footage stored away somewhere, perhaps for the purposes of contract renegotiation somewhere down the line. "The stairs. The hallways."  
  
"I'm sure they're in here, too. This place is probably crawling with hidden cameras and bugged to shit," Sarah added. She looked up from the box she was squatting in front, where she was gathering half-filled bottles of liquor. Addressing the room, and asked, "Isn't that right, Will?"  
  
"The bathroom. Or one of the cubicles. That's where you should have gone," Sophie went on.  
  
The revelation didn't seem to bother Catherine all that much, however. "We didn't leave the party thinking anything was going to happen."  
  
"Maybe you didn't," Sarah replied. "Fourteen's mom is here every couple of weeks. It's like a fetish she and Fourteen's dad have."  
  
"But maybe better you than one of the other girls," Sophie offered. "She lured Seventeen back here once, back before Seventeen and Eighteen were a thing."  
  
"Thirteen, too," from Sarah. "I think she's got kind of an Asian thing. Usually."  
  
"Alright, alright," Catherine said, throwing up her hands. "Not important. But I didn't leave the party thinking it was a foregone conclusion. I just wanted to give you girls some space, some privacy. And, honestly, I was tired - it was a long afternoon."  
  
Whatever Angela Giannini's game had been, and however much she might have preyed upon Catherine, it had been a slow and subtle pursuit. They'd gotten ready for bed, used the bathroom one last time, and chosen to go to sleep on the far end of the room, leashing themselves to one of the empty eye-hooks as far away from Sarah and Sophie's usual spot as possible. Neither had been able to fall asleep. Both complained about the hardship of their older bodies trying to get comfortable on the tiled floor. Both confessed to being excited and aroused from their exposure, of being seen as objects of sexual desire to people other than their own husbands. Somewhere along the way, Angela had cuddled up to Catherine. Somewhere along the way, Catherine had begun caressing Angela's hip. And then, before any of the other girls had returned from the party upstairs, something else had happened, and Catherine hadn't been able to slow it down. She hadn't wanted to.  
  
She had no regrets. Of Erin's father, she offered, "Even if I told him - and I'm not going to - I think he'd forgive me. For being with another woman, at least." In Erin's direction, she added, "Ben would, too."  
  
Erin didn't bother turning around. She continued scrubbing the counter with a sponge. She deflected, joking, "I don't want to sleep with Fourteen's mother."  
  
"You know what I mean."  
  
"I know what you mean," Erin conceded. Ben didn't have a single jealous bone in his body, a virtue that Erin had twisted into a fault on more than one occasion. A virtue that she was taking advantage of, undressing in a lobby full of strangers and parading around naked in an office building on the far side of the country.  
  
She was curious, of course, about the idea of being with another girl. She didn't know any of her friends who hadn't confessed to that same curiosity, and she knew of a few of her sorority sisters who'd realized said curiosity at one point or another before graduation. Soft skin. Soft lips. Soft touches. Sure, it was a fantasy. But, though Ben might very well have been perfectly fine with the idea, and might have even been turned on if she'd confessed to such a dalliance when she got home, it wasn't something she was going to act on today, tonight, tomorrow morning. She'd already given in and masturbated here once. There was a begrudging certainty that she'd do it again, before this little adventure was through. But she didn't need to add to her sins by getting hot and heavy with Mailgirl Six, or Mailgirl Fourteen, or one of the Plaza girls.  
  
"I think Ben will just be happy to have me home, with all this out of my system," Erin said, finally.  
  
If she were allowed to go home.  
  
If Mistress Rei didn't help her make that morning's Christmas wish come true.  
  
If there were any chance that "all this" would ever be out of her system.  
  
She swallowed hard, and continued to scrub.  
  
Catherine wasn't through, however. "I think he'd surprise you," she told her stepdaughter. "I think he knows you better than you think he does."  
  
No, Ben didn't have a jealous bone in his body. When she'd told him about Ethan Weiland - an 11th grader in her second period class last year - and how she'd caught Ethan trying to look up her skirt one particular morning when she crossed her legs in front of the class, Ben had just laughed and offered the boy praise in absentia for his boldness. Erin hadn't confessed that she had been more excited and aroused than creeped out by the violation. But she had scolded Ben for not being more jealous, all the same. How could he not be jealous?  
  
"Let him look. Let him fantasize," Ben had laughed. "It's me that gets to sleep with you when the day's all through."  
  
Would sleeping with another girl violate that laissez-faire attitude?  
  
"I'll wait for you," Ben had told her at the airport.  
  
Sweeping and vacuuming was one thing. Cleaning up empty glasses and collecting the assorted porno mags was fine. As Erin scrubbed the counters, however, she found herself wondering how much of the sticky mess was spilled drinks, and how much it was pussy and sweat. She wondered what Ben was doing that morning. She wondered why she had insisted upon spending Christmas morning this way, doing this, away from him.  
  
Erin needed to pee at one point, and needed Sophie to escort her. Or, more accurately, needed the smartphone on Sophie's arm to let her through the locked doors and out to the men's room. They passed by Erin's cubicle from the night before, and Erin couldn't resist a peek in, to see it in the full light of day, and to make sure she hadn't left any sign of her own bodily fluids behind. There was no sweaty outline of her bare behind on the rug, and any imagined whiff of pussy could very well have been coming from either her or Sophie here and now.  
  
In fact, it struck Erin how mundane and boring the site of her crime was. How regular. The office chair was still scooched over to one side, leaving just enough room for a fully-grown girl to lie down on the floor beside it. But it was like any other cubicle anywhere else in the world - a stack of print-outs piled neatly in one corner, a pair of pens lined up alongside the mouse pad, a phone and a computer and a keyboard. A picture of a couple was tacked to one wall, as was a comic strip Erin didn't recognize.  
  
"Heidi Pomeranz," the nameplate by the entrance read. A woman's cubicle, after all. Erin wondered who Heidi Pomeranz was. What she did. How she'd react if she knew a naked mailgirl - a naked mailgirl wannabe - had gotten herself off at her workstation over Christmas break.  
  
"We're going to have to clean in here, too," Sophie remarked glumly as they entered the men's room. There was a plastic party cup, still half-filled with booze, on the counter. There was another that had spilled by the trash. One of the urinals was unflushed, and had been very obviously been put into use by one of the girls last night, in a feat that Erin wasn't sure she understood the mechanics of; a few splashes on the floor signaled it hadn't been done completely without error.  
  
Erin glanced at the counter. She hadn't witnessed the incident herself, but it had been the source of gossip and whispers all night. And Visitor B had been cheered and toasted, and treated to her own shot of cherry liqueur, for the heinous act with her sister. So it wasn't exactly a secret, even if Mailgirl Six had been inserted into the story when they had recounted it to Mistress Rei that morning. What could have possibly possessed Visitor B and Mailgirl Five that they'd crossed that line? How did such a thing even happen?  
  
Erin propped her stall door open, like a good mailgirl, and sat down to pee. Sophie did the same in the handicapped stall beside her.  
  
"So...Mailgirl Five?" Erin asked. She wasn't sure what she was even asking. She supposed she just wanted to gossip with Sophie about what had happened.  
  
She was greeted with silence.  
  
No, Erin told herself.  
  
No, no, no.  
  
No.  
  
No!  
  
No!!  
  
What?!!  
  
Sophie's silent pause spoke volumes. The pause said more than Sophie ever could have. The pause spoke to something vile and unthinkable.  
  
Sophie cleared her throat. "It's..."  
  
Another pause. Another silence. Another moment for Erin's brain to explode.  
  
They met each other at the sinks, and Sophie made a show of washing her hands, and collecting the errant cup. She wanted to tell Erin, but she didn't. She wanted to explain herself, but she couldn't. At this point, she knew that Erin knew, and that her reaction had been awkward enough that Erin knew the whole thing, even if she didn't know the details. Sophie needed to explain herself.  
  
"Don't tell my sister that I told you," Sophie warned. "And don't breathe a word of this to my mother. "  
  
"Sophie," Erin replied, "I'm not even sure that I want to know." She went un-corrected for her use of Sophie's proper name.  
  
Sophie took a deep breath. "It's just that you spend your whole day, hour after hour, getting called a slut and a whore. And, honestly? I'm kind of a slut and a whore. No, I am a slut and a whore. I'll own it. This exhibitionism thing, this submission thing, this control thing - it's dirty, it's depraved, it's 'naughty.' And one you're already in that place?"  
  
She went on. "You have to understand. Whatever the mailgirls are to people, the idea of sisters is on some other level. We're like a fucking circus act. We're not allowed to touch each other - you know, intimately - outside of the locker room. And, even inside, it's...like...just seven until nine. Saturdays, too, I guess. We're not allowed to touch ourselves, either, when we're on duty. So there are limits. We can't do it. And they can't tell us to do it."  
  
"Right," Erin nodded. She understood that much.  
  
"But there's a lot of wiggle room, and a lot of freedom, in what you can ask a mailgirl to do, right up to that line. A lot of the time, it's just mean shit - sadistic shit - without it being sexual or sex-related. Playground shit. Number Seven had to eat dead fly once. But a lot of the time, most of the time, there's an element of testing the limits. Like, 'Suck on her nipple' or 'Touch her pussy' or 'Kiss her' type stuff. Every single one of us has done that sort of thing with one another. We've been forced to do that sort of thing with one another. With sisters, though? It's that, on steroids."  
  
Sophie avoided Erin's eye contact. Instead, she looked only at her own reflection in the mirror.  
  
"So, Sarah and I... Two and I. Don't slap me. We get dared and ordered and blackmailed into all sorts of nonsense. It is what it is. Nipple-licking, pussy-touching, tongue-kissing, and all that. And it's just - I don't know - we hit a point one night, when it was just the two of us, and we were both horny as shit, and both going to touch ourselves anyways, and it just sort of happened. We've touched ourselves next to each other like hundreds of times now, and been there in the room when the other one got off. But this time, it was different, and it was like a 'I don't care how dirty this is - I'm just going for it" sort of thing. It was a Saturday night. We were alone. We'd snuck off, just like you and I did last night, but into one of the supply rooms. And, fuck if it wasn't the dirtiest shit I'd ever done. But, like, dirty in a way that was hot."

Erin shook her head. "I'm not sure I..."  
  
"I knew it was wrong. Of course I knew it was wrong. And she knew it was wrong, too. But it was wrong in that exact right way, where it was happening without a lot of higher brain functioning. I've been with, I don't know, like...half of the locker room at this point. Maybe a third? She's not a 'technique' sort of girl, even given as much practice as she's had with the Plaza mailgirls. She's not as good as, like, Six. Or Sixteen. But I came so hard, so fast, so furious - the foulness of it all was exactly what it made it as hot as it was."  
  
Erin didn't know what to say. What was she supposed to say? How was she supposed to react to a confession such as this? "No, Sophie, I get it," she lied. "It's another world in here."  
  
Sophie shook her head. "So, that was the first time..."  
  
It had happened more than once. On four separate instances, to hear Sophie tell it. It had been awkward in the aftermath of that first time, Sophie admitted. Uncomfortable. Their only saving grace had been that the other girls didn't know. They all knew that Sophie and Sarah might masturbate with one another every now and then. And that was weird. But not that weird. Not any weirder than any of the girls masturbating with any of the other girls - something that was commonplace enough here at Park Place. And, so, even when they'd gotten together again for a second time, none of the other Park Place girls were any the wiser, or aware that something else had happened between them.  
  
But then Sophie had spilled the beans to Six, and it was pretty soon after that that everyone knew. And even that hadn't stopped Sarah and Sophie for doing it again. It was precisely because it was so wrong that it felt as adventurous and naughty as it had, so warped and so wicked and so wanton. Sarah and Sophie didn't have a standing thing. Each time it had happened, they'd sworn to one another that it'd never happen again. And, yet...  
  
And, yet...  
  
And, yet...  
  
The revelation was head-exploding. Erin returned to the employee lounge with her mind still racing, and unable to engage either Sarah or Catherine in any sort of conversation. How was she going to carry on a normal conversation with Sarah, now knowing what she knew? How was she supposed to pretend everything was fine when talking to Catherine? How was she going to be able to think about anything else?  
  
She wanted to leave and go home. Her things were in the basement, a floor down from the locker room. Sophie knew where. She wasn't a mailgirl - not really. There'd be no financial penalties if she tapped out. She was visiting. Volunteering. Here entirely of her own volition. She could put back on her skirt, her blouse, and her coat, and wait for Catherine back at the hotel. She'd been naked for less than twenty-four hours, and she wanted almost nothing more than put her clothes back on, and put all of this behind her. She wanted to be with Ben and his family in Santa Barbara, unwrapping presents with his nieces and nephews in her pajamas. She wanted to put on a Christmas outfit, and sit down and have a normal Christmas dinner with her in-laws.  
  
This didn't seem fun anymore. This didn't seem like an adventure she wanted to be a part of anymore. This wasn't her Christmas wish, whatever she'd said to Mistress Zero.  
  
But Erin still dutifully mopped the men's room floor while Catherine scrubbed the toilets. She carried the mailgirl mats with Sarah, and redistributed them throughout the building. She hefted the boxes full of half-filled liquor bottles downstairs, and left them outside Mistress Rei's room on B2. She couldn't leave. Not yet.  
  
There'd been a sense of gloom in the locker room that morning, something of a hangover - both actual and emotional - from the night before. Last night, with a special holiday "Bitch Session" on the 2nd Floor, there'd been excitement and anticipation and freedom. Today, though, despite the fact that they still had the bulk of the day "off" from regular mailgirl duties, they'd still been expected to submit themselves for inspection, to make weight, to clean up their mess, to choke down breakfast from the trough, to handle a myriad of other petty little tasks and chores. This wasn't fantasy. This was reality.  
  
Sophie's confession had only underlined how wrong this all was - what USF was doing to these girls, and what these girls were doing to themselves.  
  
And so, far from the joy a child might feel on Christmas morning, there was a sense of dread when they arrived at the atrium for Christmas presents. No doubt that whatever awaited them would only humiliate them and de-humanize them that much more.  
  
But that sense of dread was back-burnered, at least momentarily, when Erin looked out upon the courtyard and saw that it was snowing. Her heart skipped a beat. She was a California girl, who'd gone to college in the desert, and then had settled in LA. She couldn't remember the last time she'd seen snow. The courtyard was decked out for the holiday - oversized plastic candy-canes, wooden gingerbread men with big, fake gumdrop buttons, and evergreens lining the walkway leading towards a yurt-like structure done up like an igloo in the center. Erin doubted that this had been done for the mailgirls; the greater likelihood was that this was for USF's regular employees, for some sort of holiday party or event. Snow was falling, and was accumulating everywhere, blanketing the scene in virgin white. It seemed innocent and pure. A little gaudy, perhaps. But it seemed like Christmas.  
  
Going out into the snow, wearing nothing but her collar, was daunting. And, as Sarah opened the door to the outside, a blast of arctic air chilled Erin to the core. Her nipples hardened reflexively, and she shivered. A path hadn't been shoveled, but there was a trail leading to the igloo all the same, the snow flattened down the bare footprints of a dozen or more other girls ahead of her. Catherine, Erin, Sarah, and Sophie hurried the igloo, tip-toeing through the snow, with each subsequent step numbing Erin's feet that much further.  
  
The interior of the yurt-turned-faux-igloo stood in marked contrast to the winter outside. In fact, it was probably a good twenty-some degrees warmer inside than even in the halls and corridors of Park Place proper. After the dash through the snow, it felt positively sub-tropical inside, space-heaters and body heat ratcheting the temperature up well into the nineties.  
  
It was a decent-sized space, but not necessarily one designed to accommodate thirty-three naked mailgirls and their mistress. It felt tight and cramped. Erin's arm brushed up against a girl over here, and her bare behind bumped the bare hip of another over there. A Christmas tree stood tall against the back wall, with presents scattered beneath it. And an imposing chair - gold paint and red velvet - was beside it; Santa's "throne," obviously. Seated upon it, and presiding over this deranged scene, was Mistress Rei, still done up in her outfit from that morning. Her bull whip dangled to her right, and she played with the handle menacingly.  
  
There were no snacks or treats laid out, like there had been in the employee lounge the night before. But there was coffee, hot chocolate, and even a limited selection of Kahlua, Bailey's, and crème-de-menthe. Erin helped herself to the coffee, sweetened it with four sugars, and added cream. She chose to hold off on liquor; memories of last night's peppermint schnapps and cherry liqueur still had her feeling queasy.  
  
For the mailgirls, coffee alone was an indulgence. Outside of Saturday nights, they drank water - morning, noon, and night. For many of them, adjusting to life without caffeine had been every bit as challenging to adjusting to life without clothes. Some, more so.  
  
But there were presents - actual presents - for them to unwrap. When the last of the girls had squeezed into the igloo, Mistress Rei barked and ordered them onto their behinds. Erin sat, legs crossed Indian-style, and put her coffee down in front of her. Catherine was to her right. Sarah and Sophie were on the other side of their mother. Erin was two or three rows back from Mistress Rei's throne, staring at the bare backs of other girls in front of her.  
  
Mistress Rei opened by explaining that she only had gifts for her mailgirls, and that these were gifts selected by the Director of Human Capital, himself - albeit with some input from Mistress Rei and the Human Capital staff. To the visitors, and the Plaza girls, too, she offered an apology dripping with sarcasm, but promised that she'd try to make their Christmas wishes come true, all the same. She looked in Erin's direction as she said this, and Erin bit her lip.  
  
Moreover, the Japanese woman specified that she'd need to confiscate these presents tonight, before bedtime, but that the girls would be allowed to play with them and enjoy them as they saw fit until then. The girls were forbidden personal items of any kind, but Mistress Rei purred that she was happy to hold onto them, as party favors for Saturday nights. Or, as rewards for girls with low demerit totals. Or citations for "exemplary service."  
  
There was little question as to what the gift-wrapped boxes under the tree held. Sex toys. Erin knew it without doubt.  
  
And, on that regard, Erin wasn't wrong. Sophie was called up first, and given her present.  
  
"You can fit sex in a box?" she joked, to polite laughter from her audience.  
  
Even Mistress Rei cracked a smile. "We tried," she allowed, smiling.  
  
She didn't disappoint. As Sophie delicately tore the wrapping paper from her box, Erin craned her neck for a better view. And, sure enough, Sophie gasped, laughed, and pulled a bright pink, silicone dildo from inside. From behind Erin, one of the mailgirls hooted in appreciation.  
  
Sophie's present was part of a set, however. The girls discovered this fact when it was Sarah's turn, and she unwrapped a black-and-pink harness, to be worn about the midsection. Borrowing Sophie's dildo momentarily, the toy snapped into place with a "click." Mistress Rei and her masters had given the Scott sisters a strap-on.  
  
Beside Erin, Catherine made not a peep. Erin kept her eyes forward, not wanting to acknowledge the presents in the presence of her stepmother.  
  
And so it went. Dildos and vibrators, in a variety of different shapes and colors. A personal massager. Stream-lined vibrators and realistic-looking fake cocks in gaudy shades of pink, purple, and red. Butt plugs and anal beads. Nipple clamps. A double-headed dildo. And on and on. The mood of the room began to shift sometime around Mailgirl Five, and took on the air of a particularly naughty bachelorette party. The girls weren't as free or abandoned as they'd been in the orgy-like heights of the party from the night before, likely due to the intimidating presence of their mistress in their midst. And no one was so bold as to put their new toy to use then and there - though a number of them pretended to do so while laughing and cackling all the while. These girls were being humiliated and toyed with once more, but they were complicit in their embarrassment; the larger world, and the surely mean-spirited nature of the gifts, were pushed aside. The girls themselves chose to think about what they'd be able to do with them later that afternoon.  
  
Not all of the gifts were meant for insertion, however. Each of Park Place's mailgirls received a little piece of jewelry: a new number, decked out in fake diamonds and other assorted bling, to wear on their collar. Mistress Rei replaced the old numbers - delicate-looking silver tags that stood in marked contrast to the ugliness of the collars - on a few of the girls, and then granted the rest the freedom to do so for themselves or for each other. Erin felt a pang of jealousy as Sarah and Sophie were fitted with theirs, weirdly disappointed with the simple, unadorned letter "D" that hung from her own collar, a loaner.  
  
There was a glittery ball-gag that one of the girls unwrapped. A paddle. A set of eye-masks that had been bedazzled with the words "Slut" and "Dyke" and "Juicy." A spreader bar, not entirely dissimilar to the one that Six had been outfitted with yesterday in the stocks.  
  
For Six, there was even a pack of Parliament Lights, and a lighter to go with it.  
  
"You owe me a few of those," Mailgirl Eleven laughed.  
  
"Outside," Mistress Rei warned them.  
  
"Fuck it," Six answered back. She elbowed her way towards the door, and announced, "If anyone else wants one..."  
  
Erin could feel the sense of disapproval from her stepmother as she joined the contingent by the exit. Erin didn't smoke. Not really. It had been months since she'd last lit up with one of the other faculty members at her school. It was a pastime she'd never fully succumbed to, but one that was an occasional indulgence, all the same. She felt that she'd earned it, though. That she needed it. Even if that meant standing outside and enjoying it in the snow.  
  
The cold was bracing as Erin stepped from the igloo. But - at least at first - it was a welcome relief from the hot and sweaty interior. She and Six weren't alone; they were joined by Mailgirl Eleven and Visitors H and I. Six lit two cigarettes at once, passed one to Erin, and thenhanded the pack and lighter to Eleven.  
  
They huddled close together, luxuriating in the smell of tobacco and the feel of smoke in their lungs, while suffering the cold, wet misery of that December morning. Erin danced from foot to foot, and rubbed her arms in a futile effort to stay warm. Six put her arm around Erin's waist, and pulled her close, goose-flesh upon goose-flesh. It was worth it. It felt like she was being a "bad girl" in a whole different way.  
  
When they came back inside, Erin found her coffee cup - or what she believed was her coffee cup, as there were dozens of them here, there, and everywhere - and filled it back up. This time, she gave herself a liberal dose of Irish cream. She hardly ever smoked. But when she did, it was usually when she was drinking. One went hand-in-hand with the other.  
  
What these girls really wanted, Erin bet, was an escape. A "Get Out of Jail Free" card. A holiday. A day pass, even. The opportunity to get dressed and leave the building - even just for a few hours. Neither Sarah nor Sophie had worn clothes since August. For others, it had been nearly as long. As much as Erin had wanted to be a mailgirl, the mailgirls no doubt wanted out.  
  
Sarah shook her head, when Erin suggested as much. "Don't get me wrong," Sarah replied. She was distracted. She was laughing and watching as Sophie, wearing the harness and strap-on, pantomimed a quick fuck. Catherine was blushing, a hand over her eyes, but giggling along. "Don't get me wrong, I want it. I'd love to be done with this, and on the other side. To put on clothes and go home. To be by myself, in the privacy of my own bedroom. But a day pass? To leave and then have to come back? I'm not sure I'm strong enough for that anymore."  
  
To hear Sarah tell it, it was easier to be a mailgirl at Park Place than it had been at the Plaza. It was counterintuitive, she conceded. But it was true.  
  
At the Plaza, Sarah had twelve hours on, twelve hours off. Maybe it had been more like thirteen or fourteen hours on, she admitted, once she factored in time spent in the locker room before and after her shifts - showering and shaving, among other things. But at the end of each day, she'd been allowed to get dressed and go home. She was released back out into the real world. And, for a few hours, she could wear clothes and pretend she wasn't a mailgirl anymore.  
  
Only, she couldn't. Any sense of relief she felt at the end of her day was short-lived, as she almost immediately began counting down to the start of her next shift the following morning. She dreaded it. She feared it. The following morning, she'd have to strip down and submit all over again. She'd have to surrender her clothes and surrender her dignity anew. It was like having to make the decision to become a mailgirl again, and again, and again. In the face of all that, and with the Whitestocking encampments just outside the building's doors, the simple choice of showing up at work or not was torment.  
  
At Park Place? Sarah was a mailgirl, through and through. She wasn't trying to balance another life outside of this one. She wasn't faced with the temptation to run screaming into the arms of the Whitestockings. She wasn't forced to go through the ritual of undressing each and every morning. She was in it. She was in it all the way.  
  
Jersey City hadn't lost a single mailgirl recruit since the program began. The Plaza, by contrast, seemed to suffer a defection every month or two. The girls of Park Place weren't prisoners - not really. They were welcome to walk out and leave this life behind whenever they decided they couldn't take it anymore. But they stayed. They stayed because they were mailgirls, twenty-four hours a day and seven days a week. They stayed because this was who they were now, and there was no hiding from it. No half-in and half-out. No part-timers.  
  
Erin took a sip from her cup. It made sense, in its way. If she were to do this, if she were to become a mailgirl, she supposed she should do it all the way. Could she go home every night to Ben, tell him about her day, and then do it all again the following morning? It seemed kinder - to him and to her, both - for there to be some distance. For her to stay on-site. For her to surrender to this life totally and completely.  
  
She was wet just thinking about it.