**Life Among the Mailgirls**

by lizstanton8181

**Life Among the Mailgirls Ch. 01**

The early morning sounds of the city continued on behind Sarah Jane Scott as she crossed the marbled lobby of US Financial Plaza, but they were quickly fading into the background. Sunrise was still a good half hour away, and the Financial District was lit in the waxing blue light that signaled a new day, new opportunities, new promises.   
  
Elsewhere in the city, people were only just now waking, only just now getting showered and shaved, only just now picking out their clothes for work. They were saying good morning to their spouses or boyfriends or girlfriends with a morning kiss. They were checking their smartphones for new emails, social media for new pictures and updates from friends, the headlines for what was going on in the world that morning.   
  
But for Sarah, "elsewhere" was just that -- elsewhere. The rest of the city was already a world away, and fading fast. Her world, her universe, was here: a forty-eight story skyscraper in Southern Manhattan that served as national headquarters for US Financial. The rhythms of other people's lives -- the normalcy, the decency -- were irrelevant to Sarah's life at US Financial Plaza.   
  
Her heels clicked against the marble floor as she sped towards the security desk, David and Pedro greeting her with big smiles. She was immaculately dressed -- three inch black leather heels, a black pencil skirt so tight it constricted her every step, and a button-down white blouse with just a few too many buttons left un-buttoned at the top. Her cleavage bounced with each step, her natural, C-cup breasts playing peek-a-boo above the neckline, and the hint of her black lace bra popping just in and out of view.   
  
She wouldn't have dressed this way when she started with USF three months ago, done up and put together like a sexual predator, as if hunting for a meal on Wall Street. High heels, tits on display, and ass swaying seductively behind her. But, then, a lot had changed over the last three months, and Sarah often found herself wondering what that Sarah Scott would have thought of this one. Or what this Sarah Scott would have told that one about what lay ahead. Or if that Sarah Scott were the real one, or this Sarah Scott was.   
  
She was attractive. She knew that much. Long blonde hair framed a face that might have been chosen at random from a women's fashion magazine, complete with bright blue eyes, high cheekbones, and perfect teeth. And those lips -- thin, but sexy as hell -- when smiling, hinted that Sarah was in on a secret the rest of the world was not. She looked less a girl-next-door than a smart, cynical trouble-maker, sitting at the back of class and scheming about which boy to lure under the bleachers after detention. Which, for anyone who knew Sarah, was laughable, and completely at-odds with the girl in real life. She'd been a band-geek in high school, clueless about a world beyond her clarinet, who'd spent the better part of two years dating a closeted (but,in retrospect, obviously gay) cellist, and who'd carried her virginity embarrassingly late into college. She'd been summa cum laude at Pepperdine, and spent her time in Malibu significantly more in the library than on the beach. And, now twenty-six years old and four years deep into a PhD at Yale, she could still count the men she'd been with on one hand.   
  
Reflecting on that Sarah Scott -- the straight A's high school clarinetist, the dual anthropology and sociology major, the anthropology-slash-women's studies doctoral candidate -- Sarah felt she'd been play-acting then almost as much as she was now. The provocatively dressed Wall Street siren, with the self-confidence and the come-hither smile, was every bit as much a fictional character, and didn't capture the actual girl beneath the clothes.   
  
Sarah flashed her USF badge at the two security guards as she passed, but she needn't have bothered; they knew exactly who she was. The ear-to-ear grins told her as much. And even if they hadn't recognized her by sight, the full-body shot in the picture ID would have given it away, as there were only a handful of employees in the company whose pictures included more than a head-shot for identification.   
  
Past the security desk was a set of escalators up to the second floor, and the main elevator banks beyond that. As she ascended, Sarah glanced over her shoulder. The first floor lobby was still mostly empty at six in the morning, as few USF employees outside of Sarah's department bothered to arrive this early. There were a number of the other girls -- Sarah's teammates, her colleagues for another thirteen-fourteen hours -- who arrived just prior to the start of their shift at seven, none too eager to spend more time at work here in the Plaza than they absolutely had to. But Sarah preferred a less rushed and harried start to her day, as there were consequences to being late. She would rather be prepped and ready for her day, waiting on the tick, tick, tick of the clock, than be stressing over traffic or worrying whether she'd taken care of everything she needed to prior to her shift beginning.   
  
While the lobby, and the entire first floor, was open to the public, the second was restricted to USF employees, clients, and other guests. Downstairs, there were a handful of stores -- a bakery and coffee shop, a bookstore, a small sandwich shop, and even a boutique lingerie store among them -- as well as another set of elevators down to the basement levels and parking garage. Upstairs, the second floor was more wide open, save for four massive columns that housed the building's primary elevator shafts and access to the upper floors, and a picture-glass wall into what had at one time been home to a fitness center for USF employees. There was a coffee cart, already open, as well a shoe-shine service, a newsstand, and an ever-increasing number of café tables and chairs spread about.   
  
Sarah smiled uncomfortably at the gentleman manning the coffee cart as she stepped from the top of the escalator. Even at this early hour, and in contrast to the mostly empty lobby below, there were already a good seventeen, eighteen people scattered about. They sipped their coffees and pretended to flip through newspapers, but all of them looked up to see who was passing by. Most were men, alone. But a few of them sat in pairs, and there were always more women present than Sarah would have expected; Jessica Cochran, from Finance & Accounting, smiled at her as she passed. Sarah steeled herself as walked past them all. It was her last day with US Financial, and this was the last time she'd flash her badge at the security guards, the last time she'd ride the escalator up to the main elevator lobby, the last time she'd have to parade past the early morning coffee club. Tomorrow, she'd be moving back to New Haven, the summer over and her time with USF come to an end. She wouldn't miss her job here, and wouldn't miss anyone beyond the girls she worked most closely with. At least, not exactly.   
  
Sarah bit her lip, and hesitated.   
  
She'd learned so much that summer, even beyond the research directly applicable to her doctoral thesis. She'd learned about a sadistic little kernel that existed seemingly in everyone, even if it was buried deep and often denied. She'd learned about a masochistic side that apparently could be found in a shockingly large subset of the female population. If not the entire female population. If not the entire population as a whole, gender aside. Sarah wasn't entirely sure how extensive this tendency truly was -- it was a part of her research that demanded further study, and a theory that even she and her faculty advisor disagreed on. But, regardless, she'd discovered it in herself, and Sarah Scott had learned more about Sarah Scott in the last three months than she had in all her years of formal education.   
  
Sarah strode from the escalator, pocketbook over one shoulder and dressed to fit in with other young, successful women working in New York's financial market. She made her way between the two central columns - two sets of elevator doors on either side - that carried USF employees up into the building. But Sarah wasn't heading up, at least not yet, and she passed by elevators to the double-door entrance to the former fitness center.   
  
Clearly visible on either side of the doors, displayed prominently to anyone waiting for the elevator, or seated at one of the table for a cup of a coffee, or reading the Wall Street Journal at the newsstand, were a pair of leather benches. To this day, they still reminded Sarah of pommel horses, wide enough to fit two people across. Correction: two girls across.   
  
No, the Sarah Scott who'd entered US Financial Plaza at the start of June wouldn't recognize this Sarah Scott. And this Sarah Scott would have a difficult time understanding that one. But then, the navel-gazing and introspection was moot the moment that the girl crossed the threshold beyond the double doors, because at that moment Sarah Scott disappeared.   
  
For one last time, Sarah Jane Scott was stripped even of her name. The blonde who entered the open locker room on the other side was Mailgirl Number Thirteen.   
  
\*\*\*  
  
Thirteen entered the locker room to the sound of a running shower to her right, to whispered and subdued conversation, and the sound of another girl's moans of pleasures echoing across the tiles. The large, metal desk in front of her, with its back to the double-doors and the elevator lobby beyond, sat unoccupied. It was both utilitarian and terrifying, an unadorned piece of throwback office furniture that had been transformed into an intimidating symbol of control by its owner; even now, despite the fact that Thirteen knew that Mistress Zero was still at least thirty minutes away, bare minimum.   
  
The mailgirls' locker room stretched in both directions, from left to right on either side of the desk, on either side of where Thirteen entered the room. It was entirely balanced and symmetrical; in addition the spanking benches flanking the double doors, each side had four sinks, four showers, and twelve open, door-less lockers that faced into the center of the room. On the other side of metal desk was a corridor that led to another lobby, where the girls could access the building's East, West, and North Staircases, as well as the four service elevators. There was no door to enter the service lobby, as there was to elevator lobby behind her. But that fact hadn't alarmed Thirteen on her first day as much as the six prison-issue toilets, three on either wall along the corridor, open and exposed for anyone to see. Thirteen, though, had read of mailgirls forced to pee in litter boxes and mop sinks in other companies, so she ultimately decided to accept the toilets as some bare minimum concession that the mailgirls were still, on some level, human beings.   
  
Not that this was something Mistress Zero, or the men in Human Capital, encouraged the girls to think. On either side of the metal desk, on the floor, were two pairs of silver dog bowls. They'd been filled the night before by the girls on duty for Evening Shift, and left overnight for any girl thirsty for a drink the next morning. As the day progressed, it fell to Mistress Zero to refill -- or, more accurately, to instruct one of her girls to refill -- the bowls.   
  
Being Number Thirteen, the blonde had the misfortune of having the first locker on the right, closest to her mistress's desk. It was here she went first, to put her purse down, take off her heels, and run her thumbprint over the smartphone charging there within. And, without thinking any more of it, without lamenting her misfortune or the humiliation of the exercise, Thirteen turned back to Mistress Zero's desk, dropped to her hands and knees, brushed her hair back from her face, and began sipping up water from the bowl. Her ass in the air, her face in the dog bowl, Thirteen drank down the room-temperature water, not even bothering anymore to consider the fact that the bowl was already half-empty, and had likely already been drunk from by at least one or two other girls. She was thirsty, but she was careful not to drink too much; not only was it common for Mistress Zero to "forget" to refill the bowls, but Thirteen knew she'd be able to have a drink in a few minutes in the shower. And, besides, she had found that one of the biggest challenges to being a mailgirl was not the humiliation of delivering interoffice envelopes in the nude, nor enduring the punishment for racking up too many demerits, nor the physical exertion of climbing up and down stairs or spending long stretches of time on her knees. No, three months in, Thirteen still found it difficult to balance the necessities of hydration with the realities of a limited number of bathroom breaks.   
  
Still fully dressed, aside from her shoes, Thirteen stood and nodded down the line of lockers to Numbers Fifteen and Sixteen, already stark naked. Fifteen was a tall, slender brunette, with relatively small breasts but puffy nipples, and a mischievous side that couldn't help but rebel against her new station in life. Sixteen was an African-American girl with an ever-so-slight Southern accent, light brown skin, and a shock of dark, curly, chin-length hair that seemed to be a source of pride for someone whose daily work attire consisted of little more than an armband and a smartphone. The new Number Twenty-Three, another brunette, was there as well; three weeks in, Thirteen still thought of her as the "new" Number Twenty-Three, having replaced the previous Number Twenty-Three, who herself had only been a mailgirl for five weeks in total. Twenty-One, too, was here, and was already in the shower, alone. On the other side of the room were One, Five, Nine, and Twelve. As well as Two and Three, in the far set of showers - which explained where the moans were coming from.   
  
No sign of Number Seven.   
  
"Today's your last day?" Twelve asked from her locker, standing in just a bra and a pair of hip-hugger panties. She was pixie-cut blonde, approximately Thirteen's height and build, and closer in age Thirteen than most of the other girls (though, admittedly, the oldest girl in the program was just eight years older than Thirteen herself). The pixie cut had actually grown in; it had initially been much shorter, and bequeathed upon Twelve as a punishment by Mistress Zero. It was a friendly enough question, but it was tinged with suspicion, accusation, and jealousy. The girls all knew it, of course -- they knew Thirteen was getting out, was getting free of the program. But Thirteen wasn't sure if she should being calling attention to that fact or not. Was she a symbol of hope? Or was her release after three months just one more form of torture for the girls that still had nineteen, twenty, twenty-one more months to go?   
  
"It is," Thirteen replied politely. "Wish me luck."   
  
"Good luck," Twelve answered glumly.   
  
Torture, Thirteen decided.   
  
And then, from Twelve, "They'll fuck you."   
  
Thirteen glanced back over at the other girl, as if she hadn't heard her. Or as if she hadn't understood her.   
  
"They'll fuck you," Twelve repeated. "You know they will." It wasn't Twelve being a bitch. It wasn't her striking out at Thirteen for getting free. What she was offering was sincere concern, a friendly warning for Thirteen not to get her hopes too high. There was no doubt that Twelve was rooting for Thirteen to escape, but there was also no doubt that Twelve felt it wouldn't actually happen.   
  
"I'm sure," Thirteen managed to reply politely, even if she didn't believe the sentiment. Sure, she suffered alongside these other girls, and she did the same job as these other girls. She was stripped and embarrassed the same as these other girls, and she was spanked, paddled, and punished the same as these other girls. But she was different from them; apart. She knew that, and understood that, even if the other girls couldn't see it. This was a three-month sentence for Thirteen, while it was two years for everyone else.   
  
"No, I promise," Twelve went on, and offered again, "they'll fuck you." She reached behind her back, and unfastened her bra. "You'll be here tomorrow. Some sort of threat. Some sort of bullshit penalty. Some sort of legal maneuvering we're too fucking dumb to see coming."   
  
Thirteen let it slide, and unfastened the waist of her skirt. Whatever Twelve thought, whatever Twelve said, Thirteen knew she was different. This was just part of life among the mailgirls -- the constant fear of some new torment, either physical and psychological, just waiting to be sprung upon them.   
  
\*\*\*  
  
On the face of it, the entire mailgirl phenomenon was preposterous.   
  
The first Thirteen had heard of it, four or five years earlier, she hadn't entirely believed that it could be real. After all, how could this really, truly, be a thing? It had popped up in an "infotainment" type news story online, that covered one of the first two or three programs in Tokyo in a laughing "isn't this weird?!" sort of way. Maybe it was just a cultural thing that Americans couldn't understand -- a bunch of young girls scurrying around an office building, delivering packages in the nude? Thirteen remembered the general tone of that first story: "Ha ha ha! Aren't the Japanese crazy?"  
  
But it turned out it wasn't a culture issue -- at least not in the traditional East vs. West sort of way. The first few mailgirl programs in Tokyo turned out to have an odd sort of staying power, and tapped into the imaginations and secret (or, not so secret) desires of men in positions of power throughout the region. Osaka. Sapporo. And then, Hong Kong. Singapore and Seoul. And then onto Berlin. Mailgirls went from a masturbatory fantasy of teenaged boys to a viral reality overnight.   
  
It was a simple enough idea that got picked up and repeated again and again. Relatively young, attractive girls volunteered to take over mailroom duties at their places of work, always in the nude, and usually in exchange for some large sum of money or promise of eventual career advancement. It didn't surprise Thirteen that there were perverse older men, high up in some of these companies, who would support the idea. She supposed it didn't entirely surprise her that there were women out there -- exhibitionists, submissives, girls desperate for cash -- that would agree to work naked in exchange for some sort large lump sum. Even if Thirteen, when news of the programs first broke, could never in a million years have imagined that she'd end up as one of them, she supposed she didn't fault these mailgirls-of-her-imagination for signing on. And maybe, maybe, it made sense in a porn-obsessed place like Japan, or in Germany with its FKK culture. After all, this was occurring in privately owned office buildings, during work hours in which children weren't around.   
  
But then the Times ran a piece on the "mailgirls phenomenon" in its International section. Cosmo ran a feature-length piece on what being a mailgirl was like in Tokyo. 20/20 covered it, as did all of the cable news networks, and all the major networks soon after. Mailgirls were featured as part of one of HBO's "Late Night" documentaries. And photos and videos soon began showing up online.   
  
What Thirteen found was that mailgirl programs were darker and more sadistic than she'd ever imagined. Sexual abuse was rampant, though perhaps she'd been naïve to ever imagine a world where it wouldn't have been. More disturbing was just how terrible these girls were treated without sex even directly entering the equation -- instead of the whole thing being soft-core and sexy, it had strong BDSM elements that were demeaning, at best.   
  
And yet...  
  
And yet...  
  
And yet Thirteen hadn't been able to look away. She hadn't been able pass by some new account of a girl's life as a mailgirl. She hadn't been able to keep from clicking through to see some sort of NSFW video. Or to stop from downloading a picture of some girl being whipped for delivering a package a few minutes too late. And she knew she wasn't alone -- the mailgirls "thing" seemed strike a nerve for a lot of people worldwide. It scratched an itch than a lot of people hadn't even known they had.

For Thirteen, this curiosity hadn't been sexual at the time. Or, at least, she didn't think it had been; who knew anymore? She'd minored in Women's Studies as an undergraduate, and she'd come to the East Coast specifically to study under Dr. Gillian Schang in New Haven, whose work in Anthropology included a particular focus on Third- and Fourth-Wave Feminism. Thirteen's own forthcoming doctorate was technically in Socio-Cultural Anthropology, but it was heavily flavored by Women's Studies. Her research to that point had been women's place in society, but also women's "culture," in and of itself. She'd been interested how women interacted with one another -- almost with a social psychology bent. And so, Thirteen had approached what it meant to be a mailgirl from a purely academic standpoint.   
  
Gillian had pushed it upon her even more, encouraging her to double-down on "mailgirl culture" as an area of focus for her doctoral thesis. And Thirteen had complied. After all, the entire thing seemed tailor-made for her particular sliver of academic interest. It was also Gillian who suggested field work: although there had been a handful of peer-reviewed journal articles about mailgirls from an industrial psychology or economic standpoint, no one had yet looked at it from a cultural or anthropological direction. And then, too, Thirteen had agreed and complied, fully intending to fly to Seattle, or San Francisco, or Los Angeles, to interview and observe some of the nascent mailgirl programs that had begun to get a foothold on the West Coast.   
  
But Gillian wanted Thirteen to go one step further. There was an opportunity, she pushed, to truly understand what made a mailgirl tick, and how a mailgirl interacted with both her peers and her superiors. Thirteen would be losing something by using anonymous surveys and one-on-one interviews, researching and reporting on everything second-hand. No, Gillian reasoned. The best way for Thirteen to study what it meant to be a mailgirl was the live among the mailgirls, to live as a mailgirl herself.   
  
Thirteen, naturally, had balked.   
  
She had more information than most girls had when opting to become a mailgirl, having studied how the programs had worked in Japan, Central Europe, and in the Pacific Northwest. She'd read firsthand accounts of girls being humiliated and tormented time and again. Not every program was exactly the same; in fact, policies varied widely from company to company, depending on their authors. But the commonalities and central concept should have been enough to terrify any girl away. There was no way Thirteen would ever be caught stripping off her clothes and signing her life away.   
  
As she remembered how adamant she had once been, Thirteen slithered out of her skirt, and let it pool at her feet.   
  
Gillian had continued to push her, and had even gone so far as to secure a privately-funded research grant for the two of them. There wasn't a company out there that was going to sign a sixty-year-old like Gillian on as a mailgirl, but she continued to believe that she and her student were at the forefront of something truly fascinating. She pressed Thirteen forcefully, over the course of three separate meetings, before Thirteen had made an empty promise to give it more thought. And, even as Thirteen designed a framework for her research into a mailgirls program that had sprung up in a dot.com in San Francisco the year prior, Gillian hadn't given up on the idea of a placing a research assistant into a program as a mailgirl; if that wasn't going to be Thirteen, she was going to find another girl. Gillian arranged a meeting between Thirteen and Guy Dubuc, another faculty member at Yale, as Gillian herself interviewed a handful of young, attractive first- and second-year female graduate students. While Gillian hadn't come right out and said it, the implied threat was clear -- she'd move on with another girl, and Thirteen would be looking for a new faculty advisor.   
  
That was the stick. But Gillian wasn't empty-handed when it came to a carrot. The research grant she'd received was sizeable, and she was willing to put the majority of it into Thirteen's hands. Food and housing would be completely covered, and Thirteen would receive a generous stipend for other expenses, to use entirely as she saw fit. Moreover, a doctoral thesis on the mailgirl controversy, along with a joint publication with the reputable Gillian Schang, probably meant a faculty position at a place like Stanford or Berkeley, or one of the Ivies.  
  
In the end, it was the opportunity at USF that got Thirteen to finally commit. In San Francisco, she would have been only just north of her mother and step-father in Santa Clara, whereas USF's New York headquarters meant there would be an entire continent between the shame of what she was doing and her family. Also, USF at that time had only just announced their mailgirls program -- which meant that Gillian and Thirteen could watch a program be built from the ground up. And, perhaps most importantly, Gillian knew the program's director personally. Will Barrow, now USF's Director of Human Capital (a smaller unit within USF's larger Human Resources division), had been an undergraduate at Yale, and had studied under Gillian. Unlike other programs, Thirteen could be assured she'd be protected and looked after -- relatively, of course. With Barrow in charge, Gillian was convinced that there was less of a risk that USF's initiative would descend into the realms of full-on sexual slavery that had swallowed up a handful of other iterations of mailgirls.   
  
Even then, the uneasy agreement Gillian had brokered between USF on one end, and Thirteen on the other, had nearly fallen apart half a dozen times before the summer began. Fearful of extensions and legal trickery, Thirteen had refused to sign away her Power-of-Attorney to the company, as other girls were forced to as part of their standard mailgirl contracts. For USF, this was a sticking point, and they ultimately budged only after Thirteen had agreed to sign her legal rights over to Gillian and Yale's Anthropology Department, instead.   
  
USF, on their end, was wary of what they were getting out of the deal, and concerned that they hadn't laid eyes on this grad student turned potential mailgirl. In addition to sharing Thirteen's research, Gillian assured the company that that needn't worry about Thirteen, but they insisted on seeing her picture nonetheless. When they received headshots and fully clothed pictures, they insisted on seeing her body. When they received a naked selfie that Thirteen had taken in her bathroom mirror (to that point, the most humiliating thing that Thirteen had ever done), they'd insisted that she send them more, including shots from behind, from below, from all over. And, the fact that there had been six days between that next submission and when Thirteen finally received an invitation to come down to New York had been tortuous to the girl's self esteem.   
  
In the locker room, Thirteen hung her skirt in her locker, and began to unbutton her already half-unbuttoned blouse. Her black lace, demi-cup bra was exposed first, and a matching thong came into view as she worked her way south. Because USF now controlled every aspect of her life within the building, they even mandated how she hung and folded her "street clothes" as she got "into uniform." Her blouse was hung carefully alongside the skirt, but everything else was to be folded neatly on the lower shelf -- pants, if she'd been wearing them, top (if not hung), then panties, then bra. Outerwear to innerwear, top to bottom. Mistress Zero claimed that this was so the mailgirls' locker room, exposed to the elevator lobby, would never look cluttered or out-of-sorts. The truth was that it was just another petty form of control.   
  
Thirteen was certainly exposed. She was facing her locker, and had her back turned towards the locker room's entrance, but she guessed there were still almost twenty people on the far side who were able to watch her undress. If she turned, Thirteen would only see her own reflection, wearing nothing more than her bra and panties. But it was mirror-glass, and though Thirteen couldn't see out, she knew full well that her audience was able to see in. The mirror-glass ran the length of the locker room -- from the showers, to the sinks, to the bondage-and-discipline set-up by the front door, and anyone on the other side could watch her shower or put on make-up, watch her lap water from the dog-bowl, watch her pee while on one of the exposed toilets. But the mirror-glass had become a blessing in disguise, as even if she knew there were men and women out there able to watch her every move and see every part of her body, Thirteen could trick herself into almost forgetting that fact. She'd entered through the main elevator lobby that morning, and she'd exit through it that evening; in-between, she could deny that that outside world was even there.   
  
Thirteen reached behind her back and unsnapped her bra. She slid the straps down her exposed arms, revealing round, natural, and firm Goldilocks breasts -- neither too big, nor too small. She had pinkish brown areolae, and nipples that had, as of late, spent more time standing at attention than at rest. That very moment was no different, as the cool air of the locker room, combined with the embarrassment and excitement of undressing more-or-less in public, had them standing upright and outwards.   
  
Would transferring to Guy Dubuc to finish out her PhD have been the end of the world? Would letting some other girl assist Gillian Schang and her research into mailgirl culture have set Thirteen back that much, career-wise? After all, Thirteen had suffered for that honor, more than she had ever expected to. Earlier that summer, Thirteen would have mostly certainly said "no," and been more than happy to let some other girl take her place here at USF. Now that she was mostly looking at her time as a mailgirl in the rearview mirror, she felt differently, and just hoped that her work was as significant as Gillian assured her it was.   
  
Thirteen found the waistline of her panties, and slid them off. She dutifully folded the thong neatly, or as neatly as anyone could expect her to fold such a minimal amount of fabric, and carefully positioned it in her locker with her bra on top. She was shaved bare -- as all the girls were -- from the neck down, and her pussy was visible to anyone who even bothered to glance in her direction. She had no tattoos and no piercings (aside from her ear lobes), and the only markings she bore on her body were from a faded, black, felt-tip marker: Thirteen was clearly demarcated as such, with her assigned number scrawled on her right hip.   
  
She'd showered three times since Mistress Zero had traced the number thirteen on her body the previous morning, but the reality was that the marker was stubborn and difficult to get off without vigorous scrubbing. Back in early June, Thirteen had insisted on getting it off before she went home. She had hated seeing it when she was home, being reminded of what her daily life was now like. But, like so many other things as she spent more and more days as a mailgirl, Thirteen had eventually surrendered -- why bother going through that effort if she was just going to be marked up again the next day? Yesterday, Mistress Zero had only run her marker over the previous day's number thirteen, as she'd done the day before that and the day before that. And as she'd do later this morning.   
  
Thirteen took her earrings out. She took off her rings, bracelets, and watch. She unfastened her platinum pendant. All of these things were placed in a utilitarian metal cup that each girl had in her locker for such items, and Thirteen wondered -- not for the first time -- why she bothered to put jewelry on in the morning, in the first place.   
  
With one notable exception among USF's mailgirls, there seemed to be two schools of thought as to how the girls should dress in the morning. The first held that, since they would be stripping the moment they arrived at work, it didn't matter what they wore. These girls -- and they were increasingly in the minority -- arrived each day in something like yoga pants or lounge wear, comfortable sneakers and lightweight sweatshirts.   
  
The other school, and the one that Thirteen was now firmly encamped in, felt the need to overcompensate for their actual work uniforms by putting themselves together as if they were going to real, normal jobs on Wall Street. It didn't matter if they had to get up even earlier than they already were. It didn't matter if they showered and did their hair at home only to have to repeat the exercise here in the locker room a short while later. Thirteen liked getting dressed in the morning, she liked the normalcy of the routine, she liked being able to pass as any other girl commuting to the office. The style had gravitated more and more towards "vampish" though, and there were any number of unspoken rules among the mailgirls themselves that they all followed, even if Mistress Zero had nothing to do with them. Only skirts and dresses were worn, for instance. There was also a fine line between "flirty" and "slutty," and it was a "no-no" to cross from the former into the latter. Short skirts were acceptable, to a point; tightness, on the other hand, was far more important.   
  
Thirteen, like most girls, had started in the first camp -- sweatpants and jeans, t-shirts and casual shoes -- almost as if the way she dressed was itself the first stage on the twelve steps towards becoming a full-blown mailgirl. Embarassment. Depression. Nihilism. But then, eventually, came acceptance, and a desire to fit in with the mores and habits of the girls before her. And, before she knew it, Thirteen was spending an alarmingly high percentage of her stipend on business-wear that she'd put on only for the commute to work, and then again for the commute home.   
  
And then, outside of those two schools of commuting wardrobe, there was Number One. She hadn't been assigned her number for any specific reason, only that she'd just happened to be approached to volunteer just an hour or so before Number Three and the original Number Two. But something about the number had set her apart, even if it was just in her own mind. She alone commuted to and from work in-uniform -- naked, except for a cropped, tan, summer-weight trench coat.   
  
Given that her locker was more-or-less in the center of the locker room, Thirteen really had her choice as to whether she would shower on one end of the room or the other. Girls tended to gravitate towards the shower block closest to their lockers, but they weren't slavish towards doing so. There were eight showerheads for twenty-four girls, and they all needed to shower around the same times as one another in the morning, over lunch, and in the evening. In practice, then, the girls showered wherever there was an open spot. If there wasn't one, and they weren't willing or able to wait, they typically joined one of the other girls and shared.   
  
Number Twenty-Three had joined Twenty-One in the shower block on Thirteen's end of the locker room, and both Fifteen and Sixteen looked to be following behind momentarily. On the other end, Two and Three were both still finger-deep in their own sex (hence, the moaning Thirteen had been greeted with that morning) under a single shower head. One and Twelve had just begun their respective showers alone. And Five was just getting out. Thirteen chose to cross to the other side of the locker room and take Five's place, counter-intuitively preferring to shower as close to the masturbating pair of girls as possible. The logic went that, when one girl or another was touching herself, no one in the audience on the other side of the mirror glass was going to pay one lick of attention to the other girls nearby.   
  
Twelve had taken the showerhead closest to the two masturbators, however, and only One's presence under the far left showerhead had kept Five from sliding any further away from them when she'd been showering. Like the toilets leading to the service elevators, there were no partitions, no shower curtains, and no privacy; the shower blocks themselves were open to the room beyond. But it wasn't as if the locker room filled with steam each morning; not only would that steam have fogged the view the USF employees had of the showering mailgirls, but it would have meant the mailgirls would have been allowed a simple creature comfort as warm water.   
  
Cold showers were universally acknowledged as a solution for getting too aroused, but you couldn't tell that to the two girls with their fingers inside themselves at one end of the shower block. Such was a fact of life in the locker room, as the girls dealt with the confusing feelings of arousal caused by their current vocation. Full-blown lesbian love-making was a punishable offense, at least here in the building, but Two and Three (a couple since before Thirteen had joined the program) managed to stay on the right side of the line by keeping their hands to themselves. It wasn't exactly uncommon for two girls to be diddling themselves side by side, but the amount of eye contact and the proximity with which Two and Three were doing it was rare. More common sights included girls washing one another's backs or shampooing one another's hair, sharing a brief and friendly peck on the cheeks or even lips as a quick hello, or playfully slapping someone's ass. Mostly, though, this was reserved for the generally more upbeat end-of-the-day shower than the somber and dutiful early morning shower with the work day still ahead.   
  
While Thirteen was content to let them continue on with their ministrations without interruption, Two grunted out a quick, "Hi" as Thirteen stepped into the shower just a few feet to her right.   
  
"Hi," Thirteen offered in a non-committal tone. She felt the frigid water fall over her as she turned the shower on, and ducked her head under it quickly.   
  
It wasn't that Thirteen was above masturbating in the locker room; that ship had sailed long ago, and she could likely count on at least one session of self-pleasure before the end of her shift today. But she'd gotten herself off earlier that morning, as she had every morning since sometime in early July, and Thirteen had just enough self control (or, at least, she told herself that she did) that she didn't necessarily have to climax before her shift began. It was an utterly pointless line in the sand, given the behavior of the girls around her, and the predictability of her own expected behavior a bit later in the morning. And she had failed to live up to that morning conviction already once in the last week -- losing a battle of wills with herself, and succumbing to resignation and rationalization. But in a life defined by control and surrender, Thirteen comforted herself by knowing she could at least try to exert control over this.   
  
Beside her, One reached for the communal shampoo. Thirteen glanced back towards the metal desk, and -- after confirming that Mistress Zero still hadn't arrived -- decided against going through the show of shaving her pussy. She was already completely bare and stubble-free, having shaved at home that morning. But it was still a calculated risk, if Mistress Zero were to be watching on the other side of the glass. It wasn't necessarily a requirement that the girls shave every morning, only that they be completely hairless when their shifts began. Often, even when unnecessary, Thirteen still went through the exercise, as it was easier to make a show of the act than to be subjected her mistress's inspection.   
  
Showering in cold water was another hardship that Thirteen had first learned to endure, and later to prefer. It woke her up in the morning, and cooled her down after running around the building at the end of the day. Even in her own apartment, Thirteen had started showering without warm water. It was, admittedly, still nerve-wracking to shave her intimate areas in cold water. But Thirteen couldn't deny that it left her with a closer shave, and she was oddly proud of how smooth her pubic area was, both visually and to the touch.

As she ran her fingers through her hair, Thirteen watched herself in the reflection. Given the way the locker room was exposed to the elevator lobby, the coffee cart, and the café tables, a good part of this was for her audience. The shower was still more utilitarian than for performance. The masturbation taking place at the far end of the shower block -- and Two was beginning to climax now -- was also more utilitarian than performance. Still, Thirteen found that she occasionally lingered a bit longer in the shower than she did at home, that she soaped up and washed her breasts and intimate areas a bit more than necessary, that she bent at the waist to pick up the shampoo instead of crouching and bending at the knees.   
  
The thought of her audience sent a familiar tickle up her spine. Not today, she told herself. By tonight, she'd be free of ever having to shower in public again, and there was no need to give in and debase herself more than she had to. Even if she knew full well she'd be forced to touch herself later than morning. Even if she'd gotten off in the shower dozens of times in the past. Even if Two's orgasmic exhalations were turning her on.   
  
Thirteen shook her head, and shampooed her hair. She made herself think of what she needed to do that night, back at her apartment, before leaving for New Haven in the morning. She knew that if she started down the path of justifying a morning session, she'd lose what little control she had. As she washed her hair, and soaped up her body, she instead went through a mental checklist of boxes she'd packed up last night and the few remaining items that needed to be packed. She was careful to avoid letting her fingers spend too much time washing her pussy, and careful to keep herself from gently pinching her straining-at-attention nipples as she rinsed herself off.   
  
One was done, and turned the water off beside her. Twelve, like Thirteen, had managed to hold off any sort of intimate session with herself, and was ready to step from the shower. And Three, after letting out a deep, animal-like series of grunts - instead of the sexy, effeminate groans Two had just released - kissed her partner lovingly and was now ready to move on with her day. Thirteen hurried through the rest of her shower as new girls rotated in.   
  
There was a small cubby on either end of the shower block -- four in total, in the locker room -- that held white, rough-to-the-touch bath towels, and Thirteen helped herself to one. None was big enough to be wrapped around even the smallest girl, but that was never intended to be their function. They were good enough for Thirteen to dry herself, and so she patted herself dry before depositing her towel the laundry. Thankfully, USF employed a laundry service that came weekly and kept the girls stocked with relatively clean towels; it was probably only USF's decision not to invest in on-site washers and dryers that kept this responsibility from the mailgirls themselves. Thirteen knew of a couple of girls who regularly deposited some of their own, personal laundry in with the towels; the clothes would usually come back, though sometimes they wouldn't. They'd learned not to include underwear, which was guaranteed to go missing, and be careful that they had a spare outfit available so they weren't relying on something for the commute home. Thirteen didn't care for the harsh, industrial detergents that were used, however, and she didn't trust the service even with the few pieces of laundry she wore to work that didn't need to be dry-cleaned. But when they were working upwards of seventy to eighty hours every week, Thirteen supposed she could understand the desire of some of the other girls not to spend free-time doing laundry at home, and their willingness to risk the fact that not all of it would be returned.   
  
Thirteen heard Seven laugh before she saw her, and she couldn't help but feel a spike of jealousy when she turned and saw her giggling with Nineteen. Seven and Nineteen weren't a couple, not in the way that Two and Three were, certainly. But there was an intimacy there that had Thirteen feeling left out. The two girls were still fully dressed -- Nineteen in a full-on grey suit with matching blazer and skirt, Seven in a dark, work-appropriate chambray sheath dress -- and enjoying a quick conversation by Mistress Zero's desk. As she noticed Thirteen, and caught her eye, Seven smiled and waved hello, and Thirteen nearly melted.   
  
Thirteen could have sworn she'd met Seven before starting at USF. Shoulder-length blonde hair, sharp chin, prominent-but-still-attractive nose defining her face, and a smile that stretched from ear-to-ear. Of course they hadn't, as Seven had been a mailgirl a week longer than Thirteen, and had been in USF's legal department before that. But there'd been something familiar about her, something that bothered Thirteen until she'd been able to put her finger on it. And it hadn't been until ESPN had been turned on above the bar, one Friday night when the girls were all out for their weekly "Bitch Session," that Thirteen had placed her -- Seven could have been a doppelganger for one of the anchors, a Lindsey Something-or-Other. Thirteen had never been big into sports, but she'd nonetheless been subjected to the daily routine of SportsCenter by a boyfriend early in graduate school, and being able to finally identify why Seven seemed so familiar had been a breakthrough.   
  
Thirteen was closer with Seven than she was with any of the other mailgirls, but she couldn't say that the relationship was exactly reciprocal. It was the inherent problem in Thirteen's summer study that she was "among" the mailgirls, but not entirely "of" them. She did the same job that they did, and suffered the same indignities, embarassments, and punishments as they did. But she was here only for three months, and she was here to study them and the culture that rose up among them and around them. She was a participant, but also an observer, and it meant that the camaraderie and commiseration only went so far.   
  
Some of the girls had been outright hostile to Thirteen's presence when she first started, and that hostility had lent support to her faculty advisor's suggestion that she not make her study public. Thirteen hadn't wanted to keep anything from the other girls, though, and after weathering some initial wariness and skepticism, she felt she'd made the right decision. The mailgirls had accepted her as an equal, and began opening up to her slowly. Some hoped that her short stint would allow her to blow the whistle on just how many abuses they were suffering at the hands of their corporate masters. Others were hoping that she could help explain some of their conflicting emotions, as if she were a psychoanalyst and not an anthropologist.   
  
There'd never been any hesitation from Seven, though. She was open and friendly right from the get-go, and embraced Thirteen right away. She wasn't the prettiest mailgirl, or the fastest, or the most obedient, or the most willing to accept new punishments -- all of which meant that, outside the mailgirls locker room, she was neither popular nor unpopular. Inside the locker room, however, Seven was easily the most well liked, able to get along with and be accepted by everyone in a way that seemed unlikely in a group full of women. For the most part, the girls all shared a bond, and supported one another, albeit with some cattiness and cliquishness along the way. But the first two classes of mailgirls even remarked that things had seemed to get better when Seven started, when Seven had turned the occasional "drinks night" into the regular, standing Friday-night Bitch Sessions that they were. She'd share a showerhead with a girl who'd had a particularly tough day, and she'd give new girls advice on whom they could trust in the building and whom they should avoid whenever possible. She was a big sister, a coach, and a confidante, more so than any of the girls who'd joined in the first or second cohorts; Mistress Zero kept the girls motivated, but it was Seven who kept them from being out-and-out miserable on a daily basis.   
  
But Seven was still fully clothed and still engaged with Nineteen, so Thirteen passed the pair by, and headed to the sinks on her end of the locker room to do her hair, brush her teeth, and put on make-up.   
  
Again, there were only eight sinks for twenty-four girls, but they made it work. Lined up shoulder-to-shoulder, with a row of naked and exposed tits from left to right and right to left, the girls squeezed in and got ready for their day. They shared hairbrushes and hair dryers, lipstick and eyeliner, and even -- god help them -- toothbrushes and deodorant. They talked and gossiped as they did so, in subdued tones that gave away how much they all still dreaded the day ahead, even if they'd been a mailgirl for months upon months at that point. Few of them had much of a life outside of USF now, as run-down and beaten up as they were at the end of each day, so the conversations often revolved around the world inside the building. And, increasingly, the girls' favorite topic of conversation was a catty dissection of what other women were wearing to work.   
  
"I swear to god," Twenty-One was laughing to Seventeen. "Stocking tops!"   
  
Seventeen, a redhead, laughed out loud as she brushed her hair. "Like, visible? Like, that was her intention?"   
  
"So, full picture," Twenty-One began again, making eye contact with Thirteen to make sure she was included. "Skin-tight white blouse with a black bra underneath -- "  
  
"See-through?" Thirteen asked playfully, happy to be included.  
  
"Completely visible," Twenty-One answered. Gesturing with her hands, she started at her waist and dropped one to high on her thigh. "Miniskirt. Two or three inches of leg. Stocking top."   
  
Seventeen let out a goofy wolf-whistle, and Thirteen responded with a fake gasp. It was Thirteen's turn to join in, offering, "...and heels, of course."   
  
Twenty-One laughed. "Of course. Stilettos."   
  
That the mailgirls had the nerve to ridicule anyone's outfit was ridiculous. But while they were all technically volunteers, almost none of the girls would ever have confessed to volunteering freely; in their own minds, and to hear any of them recount how they'd landed in their current predicament, each of them had been tricked, misled, and coerced. For some of them, Thirteen knew this to be true, as she'd had access to their HR files early in her own tenure as a mailgirl. Number Four was here because she'd suffered three consecutive "poor" performance reviews, and would have been let go otherwise. Number Six had worked in the Capital Markets group, and had badly botched a trade that had cost USF close to $500K. Number Fourteen had been caught having an affair with the husband of a more senior executive in the building. For others, though, Thirteen suspected that this was a revisionist attempt to protect their own egos -- they'd been tempted by the money, or by promises of future career advancement, and had signed on not fully understanding just how bad the program could be.   
  
Still, this victimhood freed them up to pass judgment on their former colleagues elsewhere in the building. After all, these other women were free to dress as they chose. And, despite this freedom, USF's female employees had been dressing increasingly provocatively and risqué since the mailgirl program first began.   
  
Given what Thirteen had been wearing even just to-and-from work lately, she knew full well that she was in no position to mock others. But, she laughed along with Twenty-One and Seventeen. What she wore on her commute wasn't held to the same scrutiny among her peers; she was a mailgirl.   
  
And, of course this woman had been wearing stilettos. Of course. The height of the footwear, as much as the inappropriateness ("Knee-high boots!" "Five-inch heels!"), was a favorite topic of derision among the mailgirls.  
  
"Secretary? Receptionist?" Thirteen asked, knowing full well that it hadn't been. The stories were funnier and less mean-spirited when they weren't picking on one of the support staff.   
  
"Marketing executive," Twenty-One laughed.   
  
The trend was not unique to USF, and fairly common among companies who'd rolled out mailgirl programs of their own, regardless of nationality or culture. In fact, a good portion of Thirteen's research that summer had centered not on the mailgirls themselves, but on USF's non-mailgirl female employees. Whether it was a conscious decision or not, the launch of a mailgirl initiative always, always set off competitive behavior in other women in the workplace. From an anthropological, mate-selection standpoint, Thirteen supposed this made sense; in a world in which young, attractive co-workers were bounding about the building with tits and ass on display, the fact that an arms race had kicked off between the mailgirls and non-mailgirls was perhaps unsurprising. It didn't seem to matter if these non-mailgirls were married or not, were in a relationship or not, or even if they were consciously aware of the change in their wardrobe or not -- the end result, regardless, was that hemlines had gotten shorter, necklines had gotten lower, and heels had gotten higher. It wasn't each and every woman within USF, certainly -- but, on average, the female population of USF, even excluding the mailgirls -- was dressing sexier and more risqué as the program went on. Thirteen had even pulled security footage of the building's lobby as far back as February and March, and had begun rating women on a scale from 1-10 of how much skin they were showing when they arrived at work. She needed to do more vigorous analysis, needed to adjust for seasonality, and she supposed she could even try to measure hems and necklines caught on tape with the right resources -- but the data, as qualitative as it was, backed up her expectations.   
  
On the security tapes, Thirteen had watched her own transformation. In June, she'd dressed down, and entered the building looking meek, timid, and terrified. By August, she was regularly hitting a "7" or an "8" on her own admittedly less-than-scientific "skin scale," and even her gait seemed different -- more confidence, more swagger, more presence. It was all for show -- maybe Thirteen dreaded undressing a little less each day she did so, but she still dreaded it all the same. She wondered to herself what she had looked like on the security footage today, though -- had there been a skip in her step? Had she seemed happier? Had her pace been quicker than usual? The sooner she undressed, the sooner she could get about her day, and the sooner she could put this entire ordeal behind her.   
  
Any amount of confidence, swagger, and presence that Thirteen had felt that morning, though, dissipated the moment Mistress Zero entered the locker room. Standing at the mirror with the other girls, mascara brush in hand, Thirteen didn't see or hear her mistress enter the room, so much as she felt a cold shiver run up her spine. Any amount of laughter fell silent, any conversation dropped to a near-inaudible whisper. The few girls still dressed, and dawdling before getting undressed, were immediately set into motion by the invisible hand of fear. And even if Mistress Zero paid them no mind, each and every girl in that locker room was acutely aware that she was now among them.   
  
She was tall -- maybe not as tall as Fifteen or Four, but above average height and taller than Thirteen, at least. She was a few years older than any of the mailgirls at USF; but even if she was closing in on forty, she was every bit as attractive as any girl in the room, and perhaps moreso than half. Dark brown hair that had pulled up in bun and high, angular cheekbones gave her an appearance of discipline and severity, which was only further underlined by her thick German accent. Human Capital, up on the 18th Floor, may have designed the mailgirl program here at USF, may have owned the metrics and analyses, and may have recruited the girls into the program, but it was Mistress Zero that made it work in practice.   
  
Whereas Thirteen had HR files on each and every one of her fellow mailgirls, and while she'd been able to pull files on other employees who caught her interest or whom she thought might be relevant to her research, Will Barrow and his Human Capital team had given her nothing on the dominatrix who so terrorized the girls. Thirteen understood the logic; as "apart" as she might have been from the other mailgirls, Thirteen was still a mailgirl herself, and Mistress Zero's authority and discipline was fundamental in understanding the mindset of the girls.   
  
Still, Thirteen's research in other mailgirl programs throughout the country and abroad had been extensive, and it hadn't taken much digging for her to identify Mistress Zero as none other than "Mailgirl Funf" at an Investment Bank in Frankfurt; most companies kept extensive files, complete with photographs, of their mailgirls. Her name had, at least at one time, been Mila Bluhm. But Mistress Zero's real name seemed as important as Thirteen's; which was to say, not at all. The fact that she had herself been a mailgirl had humanized her a bit to Thirteen, but it also made her transition to dungeon master that much more perplexing; given that she had faced many of the same trials and humiliations as the girls at USF, shouldn't that have made her more sympathetic to their plight? There was no documentation around Funf's transition to Zero, about whether the role had been lined up between the companies, or if USF had hired her directly. But, over time, Thirteen came to realize that despite the torment, despite the punishments, despite the discipline, Mistress Zero was almost every bit as important to the mailgirl program as the mailgirls themselves; she was every bit a part of the show as the girls.   
  
There were countless mailgirl programs that were run on a day-to-day basis by men. Some had been selected by higher-ups to run the daily operations, some had been rewarded with the role, and more than a few just happened to be working their company's mailroom when the program rolled out. Thirteen laughed at the idea that any mailgirl program could be respectable, per se, but most of the more "respectable" programs had tapped women to oversee and keep order. It made sense to Thirteen; given the paddlings and spankings, the intimate inspections, and the escalation of psychological torment, it made the abuse -- lower-case "a" -- seem less like Abuse -- capital "a" -- to the audience. Even at USF, most of the rules and regulations were established by the small team of men up on the 18th Floor, but it was Mistress Zero who carried them out. No doubt she had improvised a punishment or two over the course of the summer, or meted out a penalty when Human Capital might have advised her to let it go, but Thirteen suspected that her Mistress grasped a central truth about the mailgirls concept that still continued to elude a small handful of Thirteen's fellow mailgirls: they weren't here to deliver the mail. No, rather, it was the debasement of the girls themselves that was the true service their department was providing the company.   
  
"Good morning, mistress," Thirteen finally heard, as Number Fourteen entered the locker room.   
  
If Mistress Zero had so much as grunted a response in Fourteen's direction, Thirteen didn't hear it.   
  
As Fourteen, behind her, began undressing at her locker, Thirteen focused on her own reflection in the mirror, and what she had to do to get ready for the day. Seventeen and Twenty-One continued to giggle and whisper back and forth, but it was with nowhere near the same volume or glee as it had been before.   
  
Hair dried, brushed, and pulled back into a ponytail. Teeth brushed with a purple toothbrush that had been handed to her by Fifteen, barely rinsed. Deodorant applied with a stick that had been handed to her by Seventeen, still warm from Seventeen's own body. Cheap, flowery "mailgirl perfume" misted over her bare body. A subtle, barely noticeable amount of make-up applied. Thirteen puckered her lips, offered a subdued-but-playful kiss in the direction of Twenty-One's reflection, and excused herself to the row of toilets in the hallway next to her locker.

The fact that Mistress Zero's cold, utilitarian metal desk was the seat of power in the locker room, and the fact that it sat directly in front of the toilets the girls all used, always caused the girls to laugh in private. She herself used a more private women's room around the corner, in the lobby for the service elevators, but she was still forced to sit fifteen-maybe-twenty feet away as her girls emptied their bladders. Fifteen, in particular, seemed to delight in that fact, and viewed every opportunity to use the toilet when Mistress Zero was present as some small enactment of vengeance.   
  
The German woman was sitting with her back to hallway, facing the locker room entrance, and flipping through files and statistics on her tablet as Thirteen tried to pass by. But Mistress Zero lifted her head, and Thirteen cringed when she caught her eye.   
  
"Good morning, mistress," Thirteen offered, hoping that she could pass to toilets without anything more needing to be said.   
  
"Thirteen," Mistress Zero responded, her lips offering a cruel smile, her eyes hinting a mischief. "Today's your last day with us here at the Plaza."   
  
That's the plan, Thirteen thought to herself. She offered only, "Yes, mistress."   
  
"You'll miss us," the woman stated. It wasn't a question.   
  
"Yes, mistress."   
  
She nodded to her tablet. "I see twenty-one demerits since Tuesday." Again, it wasn't a question. But, this time, a threat was implied.   
  
"Yes, mistress," Thirteen replied, without committing to anything further. New punishments and humiliations were thought up and applied almost arbitrarily, but the one thing that any girl could count on was corporal punishment at every interval of twenty-five demerits. A good day -- for Thirteen, at least -- was four or five; she averaged probably closer to nine or ten. What that meant was that it was unlikely she'd make it through the day without one last visit to the leather bench, one last punishment at Mistress Zero's hand.   
  
Her mistress looked her up and down, and then turned her attention back to the tablet. For a moment, Thirteen hoped that would be all, and she'd be allowed to pee without further comment. But it was unlike Mistress Zero to let her go with just that, and true to form, she said, "Let's try to be a good girl today, or I'll send you off with something to remember me by."   
  
Thirteen swallowed hard. It was unlikely she'd be forgetting Mistress Zero anytime soon, regardless. But she understood, nodded, and offered one last, meek, "Yes, mistress."   
  
So excused, Thirteen padded past the desk, and up into hallway. She took a seat on the toilet closest to her, directly across from where Number Six was relieving herself, still dressed but with her skirt hiked and panties at her ankles. Unfortunately, unlike those moments when a girl was masturbating and the others left her to herself, toilet etiquette provided for no such moments of unspoken-but-agreed-upon attempts to feign privacy. Six smiled at, softly greeted her with a "hi," and said, "I can't believe it's your last day."   
  
As she peed, Thirteen shook her head and said, "Neither can I."   
  
"You don't think she's going to try to keep you here for one last Saturday shift?" Six asked in a whisper, gesturing to Mistress Zero with her head. The older woman might have been able to hear the question, but she didn't look up from her work.   
  
Thirteen wouldn't have put it past her. Fall Term didn't start until Tuesday of next week, and Thirteen could have conceivably worked one last Saturday before returning to New Haven -- even if it violated the contract she and Gillian had signed with USF. But, no, Mistress Zero posted the Saturday shift girls on Thursday afternoons, and Thirteen hadn't been on that list last night. And, besides, Thirteen had spent more than her fair of Saturdays here at the Plaza. "I don't think so," was all Thirteen offered in response.   
  
"But you're still coming to the Bitch Session tonight?"   
  
This made Thirteen smile. "I wouldn't dare miss it," she answered. This would be her last night out for drinks with the other girls, and she understood that Seven was making sure just about everyone would be there -- even Five and Eight, neither of whom usually participated.  
  
It was Seven who had turned irregular nights out for drinks into the standing, Friday-night tradition that they'd become, but it was Fourteen who'd bequeathed upon that tradition the name. True, half the girls would be required to show up to the Plaza the following day, for the pared-down Saturday shift. But the end of the week felt freeing nonetheless to them all, and it had become an opportunity for them to go out, collectively, and blow off steam. Rare did the topic of conversation stray from their lives as mailgirls, and Mistress Zero received a good portion of the girls' ire in absentia. With a drink or two in their systems, and a weekend to look forward to, the girls were almost able to laugh at themselves, and joke about the misery they'd suffered that week.   
  
For Thirteen, the Bitch Sessions had become an invaluable research tool. The girls opened up about their situation, about what they were feeling on a day-to-day basis, about what it meant to be a mailgirl. Thirteen, often a little buzzed, did her best to jot down notes and reconstruct confessions when she got home later that night, and then clean them up on Sundays prior to a weekly check-in call with Gillian.   
  
No one really had a life outside of being a mailgirl; even fully dressed, even away from the Plaza, even on a night in which many of them had entire weekend ahead of them, they were still mailgirls. It was impossible to date and meet someone new; how did you explain what you did for a living? Most of the girls who volunteered for the program were single at the time, and those few girls who'd been seeing someone typically saw that relationship fall apart within a few weeks; Twenty-Four had only just broken up with her boyfriend -- of two years -- a week ago. Most nights, a mailgirl returned home exhausted both physically and emotionally, beaten up in every sense of the word. And even on weekends, and even if she wasn't working a Saturday shift, a good portion of a mailgirl's time was devoted to something mailgirl-related: tanning, grooming, or even bleaching (Thirteen's asshole puckered just at the thought of that new, fresh hell of her expected hygiene). Thirteen often went stir crazy without a long run on the treadmill in her building's gym -- barefoot, of course. There were the occasional nights and weekends where Thirteen found herself wondering why she ever bothered going home; she might have been better served sleeping at the Plaza.   
  
So it wasn't surprising that they'd spend most of a Friday night telling each other stories about their week at work. At the start of night, the Bitch Sessions truly earned their name -- the girls were negative, angry, and miserable. But horror stories and fresh embarassments were recounted in such a way that they were often delivered with a "can-you-believe-it" style of storytelling, and a laughing commiseration began to lift their collective spirits. The girls shared stories of having their nipples tweaked or asses pinched; both were violations of company policy, but regularly overlooked when it came to the senior staff. They tried to one-up one another with accounts of such miserable things being said to them that it became funny (notably, by Paul Hooper in the actual mailroom), or interactions with colleagues with whom they'd worked in their prior jobs. And then inevitably, at some point, someone would confess to getting turned on by some humiliation or punishment that any one of them would have recoiled from prior to becoming a mailgirl; this, instead, would be met with laughs and nods, and another, more X-rated game of one-upsmanship.   
  
Despite being objectified and sexualized at USF all week long, Friday nights were more than just an emotional release for many of the girls. Even the girls who showed up in sweats or jeans or yoga pants at USF tended to dress up for Friday's night out, and more than a few among them went out without underwear. Four, Fourteen, and Twenty each had a string of one-night-stands that they picked up on Friday nights, and most of the girls had at least one such night themselves; Thirteen was among this latter group, but had done it only once, finding it awkward, out-of-character, and unsatisfying. More common were the girls who went home with each other; jokingly referring to themselves as "letter-carrying lesbians," most had no experience with another girl or any bisexual leanings prior to becoming a mailgirl, but found in one another understanding, acceptance, and shared experience. Thirteen, for a time, had been part of this group, as well. And, finally, there was a particular booth at the Imperial Hotel's bar that was out-of-the-way and poorly lit. It was nicknamed by the girls -- wildly, inaccurately - the "kissing booth," and a girl (or two) could get herself off while a friend served as look-out. Thirteen had to admit that she'd participated in this particular exercise, too.   
  
Earlier in the summer, Thirteen had hated herself for such behavior, hated that she'd that she'd descended into this level of depravity. It wasn't enough for her, apparently, that she had been stripped naked at USF, been subjected to spankings and paddlings and other such torments, and been humiliated time and time and time again. The eye-opening revelation of the summer had been how much she seemed to get off on it all, and how much she needed -- needed! -- to touch herself because of it.   
  
Thirteen wasn't alone in hating herself. Almost all of the girls felt the same way. Which, in and of itself, was a way out of that very same anguish. Very few of them would have confessed to being exhibitionists coming into the program, but the exhibition was having the same effect on them all -- even on girls like Twenty-Four, who refused to act on that arousal (at least, in public). This realization, this shared experience, was freeing in its own way: Thirteen wasn't a pervert or a deviant, but rather reacting to her current situation in a very normal way, in a way that twenty-some other girls were reacting here at USF alone, in a way that countless other mailgirls were reacting worldwide. And it opened them all up to be honest about themselves, about what turned them on, and even about the individual kinks and quirks that were unique to them.   
  
For instance, Six had confessed she now had a difficult time peeing when no one was watching. Thirteen, at that moment, was providing the audience that Six needed.   
  
But Thirteen finished, nodded a "goodbye" in Six's direction, and headed back to her locker.   
  
The locker room could be loud and rowdy at times - usually at the tail end of the day, when the amount of time between the end of a mailgirl shift and the start of a mailgirl shift the next day was at its greatest. Most mornings -- and this morning was no different, despite Thirteen's impending freedom -- were more subdued, especially with Mistress Zero present. There were whispers and quiet conversations, to be sure, and there was a soft murmur throughout the locker room that reminded Thirteen of one of the libraries back in New Haven. But as Thirteen reached for the smartphone that sat charging in her locker, she thought to herself that, despite the misery and negativity the accompanied most mornings, she was going to miss the particular and peculiar combination of excitement and dread that was central to life as a mailgirl.   
  
Thirteen had input her arrival time into the unit with a simple thumbprint that morning, and she awoke the unit with her thumbprint again now. It was one of the few, rare times she was even allowed to touch the device, which she'd come to regard and respect as her "electronic leash"; most of the time, it sat in a lycra arm-band around her left bicep, and was available only so that those sending and receiving messages, mail, or interoffice deliveries could "bump" their own smart device against it for instructions or information. It proudly displayed the number thirteen for most of the day, but at the moment it was open for morning inputs.   
  
The first screen that popped up was Thirteen's morning affirmation. "I swear, under the penalty of the law, that I submit under my own free will..." She clicked "accept" without scrolling further. She'd read it all before, and iterations of the same message in her research into other programs before. Essentially, it assured the company that her participation in the mailgirls program today was entirely of her own choosing, that she was a volunteer, that she could walk away at any time, that she was allowing herself to become subject to whatever USF threw at her that day, that she wasn't being blackmailed or coerced into this life, and yadda yadda yadda. It was mostly bullshit; of course she was being coerced, she thought to herself, as she remembered Gillian's runaround with Guy Dubuc. Just as any other girl was being coerced ("incentivized" was Human Capital's term for it) by onerous contracts that could cripple her financially and career-wise for years to come. But by signing and swearing each morning, Thirteen was creating a digital record of her acceptance and submission, one that USF was sure to throw back in face if challenged in court. Sure, any of the girls could theoretically click "decline," instead. But, five months into the program here at USF, few had yet dared to.   
  
Next, Thirteen carried the unit over to one of two digital scales in front of Mistress Zero's desk, and patiently waited behind Fifteeen and Sixteen for her morning weigh-in. Mistress Zero barely glanced up as each girl stepped on the scale and offered a "Good morning, mistress." Thirteen, though, again got a devious smile when she took her turn and offered, "Good morning again, mistress." Maybe it was just in regards to the unavoidable spanking coming her way, or maybe Human Capital had one last humiliation to inflict upon her before she left today, but Thirteen knew that something cruel and unusual was coming her way. Whatever it was, she reassured herself that by that by tonight the entire ordeal would be behind her.   
  
The smartphone chimed, indicating it had synched with the scale, and Thirteen glanced down at stepped off. She smiled to herself, as she was down half a pound since yesterday. Not so much for the negligible weight loss, but for the fact that she remained within the narrow band of "acceptable" weight fluctuation. Too heavy, and she'd be given half-rations at lunch, in addition to a demerit. Too light, and it was a demerit and a double ration.   
  
Returning to her locker, Thirteen slipped the lycra armband over her left hand, up over her forearm, and snapped it snugly in place around her bicep. She then inserted the smartphone into the band, touching it for the last time until she needed to take another shower.   
  
Not only did the device synch with the scale, but it also uploaded to the mailgirls app accessible to every USF employee in the building. Anyone who logged in from their own laptop, desktop, or smart device would see how much Thirteen weighed that morning, and could pull up historic data about how much she had weighed yesterday, the day before, or three months prior. Thanks to a pedometer in the device, it tracked how many steps Thirteen made on a daily basis. Height. BMI. Hair color. Eye color. Measurements. Cup-size. Dress size. Shoe size. Birthday. Age. Sexual preference (confusing as that might have been for Thirteen at the time). Place of birth. She had to have someone log every bathroom break between 7am and 7pm. She had to confess every masturbation session here at USF with Mistress Zero, who logged it and made it available to anyone and everyone with the app. If she were on her period, Mistress Zero needed to know; and, rather than being taken out of circulation, she was given a tampon and "red-flagged" in the system for everyone to see. Even though she was required to correct anyone who used it, and forbidden from using it herself, her given name was on there. And, for no reason other than pure cruelty, the girls were forced to provide their mother's full name, as well.   
  
Thirteen's mother, Catherine Ruth Ryan, knew nothing about the part she played in this little game.   
  
The lycra armband and the smartphone weren't the entirety of Thirteen's mailgirl "uniform," however. No, her get-up wasn't complete until she'd heard the soul-crushing click of the metal collar around her neck. One part dog-collar, one part choker, and one part lifted directly from some of the deepest, darkest corners of the Internet, Thirteen's collar seemed to hammer home the fact that she was enslaving herself to USF. The nudity, apparently, wasn't enough; the collar took her current enforced nudity and exhibitionist predicament and sent it careening down the path towards bondage and discipline, with a bit of sadomasochism mixed in for good measure. It could only be unlocked at the end of the day by Mistress Zero, or some lucky designee she assigned responsibility to for a particular night. But, it was left unlocked in each girl's locker every night, and every morning they'd be required to put it back on before they got into position. The keyhole was hardly noticeable; instead, it was the #13 dog tag, and the D-rings affixed around the circumference of the collar, that caught one's eye.   
  
Thirteen had been forced to wear the collar home one Thursday night in late July, a punishment for some minor, trumped-up offense that she could no longer recall. Had it been any other night, she might have been able to just hide in her apartment until the next morning. But the fact that her little sister Sophie had been visiting from LA at the time turned just another day-in-the-life embarrassment of a mailgirl into something even more deeply humiliating.   
  
Thirteen shivered at the memory.   
  
The collar, naturally, came with a leash. Like the collar, it was metal, ugly, and medieval-looking, with thick, heavy links. One end was affixed, permanently, to the floor of Thirteen's open locker. The other? Thirteen had the honor of hooking it through the D-ring on the back of her own collar. She listened for the next click, indicating that it, too, had been locked, and that she'd only be freed when Mistress Zero decided it was time for her to be freed. The chain leash had only enough slack that Thirteen could stand directly in front of her locker, and stray no further.   
  
But Thirteen didn't need to stay standing; she could "rest" until Mistress Zero came by for her inspection. And so, the blonde girl got her knees, with her back to her open locker and the clothes she'd shed that morning. She sat back upon her haunches, in what would be her standard position of the day. Per her training, it was simply referred to as "Knees" here at USF, but she knew that other programs referred to it as "Resting Position" or "Mailgirl Kneeling Position" or even "Nadu" (something apparently lifted from Gorean sub-culture). Both arms behind her back, with the back of her right hand resting against the very top her ass, and her right hand grasping her left wrist. Legs at the very least shoulder-length apart, with her shaven pussy so prominently on display that she imagined her swollen clit was practically throbbing and glowing for all to see. Back ever-so-slightly arched, pushing her breasts out. Eyes cast downward, focused on an imaginary spot four feet in front of her, in a show of submission.  
  
It had taken Thirteen, for some reason, longer than most to learn her positions; or, at the very least to get them right. She had thought that Mistress Zero was picking on her initially, putting the PhD candidate among the mailgirls in her place, driving home just how stupid Thirteen really was. She wasn't arching her back just right. She wasn't spreading her knees far enough apart. She was making too much eye contact. By the time she'd finally gotten "Knees" correct, her ass had been spanked raw, and she swore she'd never be able to sit down in a chair again. Maybe that had been the point.

She spent a significant portion of her day on her feet, dashing from one delivery to the next, with hardly more than a few minutes' rest here or there. Even in those rare moments where USF employees didn't have a delivery for her to make, or a memo for her to distribute, or an important message they needed to be assured a colleague would pay attention to, Mistress Zero and Human Capital kept her busy delivering supplies, keeping conference rooms stocked and maintained, and otherwise doing odd jobs. But, every now and then she was just lucky enough to catch a breather, and it was most often in the "Knees" position. In just three months Thirteen had begun to find the position both restorative and oddly comfortable.   
  
In addition to the "Knees" position, there was "Feet." And "Toes," which was also referred to as the "Inspection Position." There was "Hands-and-Knees," as well as "Elbows-and-Knees" and "Forehead-and-Knees." There were countless others. And then there was what the mailgirls themselves jokingly referred to as "Back" - not an official position, but one which was a common position in the locker room nonetheless, with proper hand placement rubbing desperately back-and-forth between one's legs.   
  
Thirteen wasn't the first girl in position that morning, but she was among the first few, as usual. Others -- Fourteen, for example -- were still in the shower, and still had hair and make-up to do, affirmations to proclaim, and weigh-ins to complete. Thirteen couldn't do it; in those few occasions when she'd been running a bit behind, she had felt a pit a dread in her stomach as she raced against the clock to get to her knees in front of her locker. After the first few days as a mailgirl, it was rare that any of the girls weren't in position when inspections began. But, all the same, Thirteen preferred to have a few minutes to herself, to sit quietly, and to steel herself for the day.   
  
Most mornings, Thirteen forced herself to "power down" her higher brain functions -- they did her no good as a mailgirl. Whoever she'd been before arriving at the Plaza that morning had no bearing on her ability to do her job quickly, effectively, and submissively. She entered an almost meditative state in which her whole being was consumed by the orders delivered to her via the smartphone affixed to her arm. It was freeing, in its way, and Thirteen had read countless confessions and testimonies of current and former mailgirls who felt the same way. Gone were worries over bills or debt or anything else intruding from the outside world. Gone was stress over impending project deadlines or contracts to be reviewed or clients to be kept happy or -- in Thirteen's case -- research still to be done. Even the embarrassment over her nudity, the humiliation from drinking out of a dog bowl, the shame of being subjected to corporal punishment -- she could accept it almost robotically, detached as if it were happening to someone else.   
  
Today, however, was a bit different, and Thirteen's mind was racing. She knew she had a spanking coming to her -- it was inescapable. She knew that Mistress Zero had something new, cruel, and unusual waiting for her, a parting gift to remember her by. She knew she still had an entire day of abuse in front of her. But she'd endure, as she'd endured for three months to that point, and by tomorrow, all of this would be behind her. Twelve-hours-and-change from now, she'd put her clothes on and walk out of the Plaza for the last time, never to return. It was, for most mailgirls, a crueler torture than most -- hope.   
  
Jolting her back to the present, however, came a rough tug upwards on her leash. She'd somehow lost track of time, so consumed by her thoughts of returning to Connecticut. The locker room was now silent, and all twenty-four girls had taken their place in front of their lockers. Fourteen, now stark naked and costumed in the same armband and collar as the rest of the girls, was on her knees beside her. Mistress Zero was in front of Thirteen, jerking the blonde girl to her feet by her leash, and barking out simply, "Toes."   
  
"Yes, mistress."   
  
Thirteen did as she was told. She rose to her feet, and then up on tip-toes -- instinctively keeping her legs about three feet apart. She put both hands behind her head, elbows out, and then interlocked her fingers. She stared straight ahead, eyes fixed forward, and locked eyes with her own reflection in the mirror-glass across the room. She made no attempt to look at Mistress Zero, but instead gritted her teeth and waited for her mistress's touch.   
  
Mistress Zero didn't disappoint. She dropped her hold on Thirteen's leash and immediately grasped the girl's left nipple between her thumb and forefinger, pinching it violently. She repeated the exercise on the right. Most USF employees would be reprimanded and punished harshly for touching a mailgirl like this (punished, that is, with a written warning or a termination -- not a paddling or spanking as a mailgirl might expect). But Mistress Zero was given nearly carte blanche to do to the girls whatever she pleased, to keep them motivated and performing, to instill a level of terror in them that kept them in line. That she was performing for an audience, as well, wasn't lost on Thirteen.   
  
If Thirteen's nipples hadn't already been hard and standing at attention before, they certainly would have been now.   
  
The intimate abuse didn't stop there. Mistress Zero performed a "sniff test," making sure Thirteen smelled of soap and shampoo and deodorant, and faintly of perfume, and the sensation of the woman's warm breath on Thirteen's bare skin caused similarly warm sensations to begin percolating up from inside of her. It didn't help, then, when the German woman ran a finger along the bare skin above Thirteen's pussy to check for stubble, and then roughly cupped the girl's sex with her hand -- probing either side of her slit with her fingers to make sure Thirteen was fully in compliance with the hairless policy.   
  
Thirteen shivered with the familiar mixture of terror and excitement.   
  
Mistress Zero had performed that same exercise on twelve girls before her, and would perform it upon the next eleven girls down the line. It was hardly sanitary, but Thirteen doubted the older woman, or the men in Human Capital who oversaw her, were overly concerned.   
  
With her right thumbprint, Mistress Zero activated Thirteen's smartphone, never bothering to remove it from the girl's armband. There was a mild vibration, and Thirteen felt the counter begin to tick down towards seven o'clock.   
  
"Feet."   
  
"Yes, mistress."  
  
Heels on the floor. Arms behind her back, right hand grasping her right wrist. Eyes cast downward in submission.   
  
Mistress Zero circled behind her to inspect her from behind. This was standard procedure. "Ankles," she instructed. This was not.   
  
"Yes mistress."   
  
Legs apart, bent at the waist, each hand around an ankle.   
  
Though hardly a part of Mistress Zero's normal morning routine, "Ankles" was still a position the girls were expected to know and take, if instructed. At least here in the locker room, it was more commonly asked of new mailgirls -- partly to make sure they'd been properly bleached, partly to further break their spirits. It was fairly uncommon throughout the rest of the building, though Thirteen had still been asked to take the position just last week, by a particularly cruel junior executive in Middle Market Financing, upset at Thirteen for being only a few seconds late with a memo. This, now, was similarly nothing more than cruelty, Mistress Zero's way of letting Thirteen know she was still in charge.   
  
At least for today.   
  
For newer mailgirls, Mistress Zero actually made a show of spreading their cheeks for a closer inspection. Fifteen had snickered that this couldn't have been particularly enjoyable for the German woman, either. Today, at least, Mistress Zero decided that the position was humiliating enough, and walked back around to in front of Thirteen. Roughly (as she rarely did anything gently), she grabbed the blonde girl by the hair, and removed the elastic that held her ponytail in place.   
  
"I think pigtails today," she said.   
  
Fine, Thirteen thought to herself, before mewing, "Yes, mistress."   
  
Standard, for Thirteen, was a ponytail. Other girls wore their hair up in a bun. Still others just let their hair flow freely as they dashed from one mailstop to the next. It was one of those rare freedoms of choice they were allowed, for some inexplicable reason. Only occasionally did Mistress Zero decide to weigh in -- but she did, from time to time. Twelve's pixie cut was an attestation to that fact. As was the fact that Thirteen would be bounding around the Plaza today with her hair done up like a kindergartner's.   
  
No matter. She'd do what she was told. It made not one lick of difference if she objected or protested, so she didn't bother giving it another thought. Once her inspection was completed, she'd put her hair up in pigtails.   
  
"Up," Mistress Zero instructed, pulling her up by her hair. "Feet."   
  
"Yes, mistress," Thirteen replied.  
  
Heels on the floor. Arms behind her back. Eyes cast downward.  
  
Mistress Zero produced a felt-tip marker, and traced a fresh number thirteen over the ever-so-slightly faded number thirteen already written on Thirteen's right hip.   
  
"I don't know why they don't let us just tattoo you girls," the woman mused.   
  
Thirteen hadn't encountered any mailgirl program going that far -- yet. But she had read accounts of former mailgirls doing just that, of getting tattooed with their former numbers once liberated. It was maybe one part a badge of honor, that a girl had endured all of the torture and humiliation and come out the other side. But it was likely also one part a reminder to never, never fall victim to a mailgirls contract again. Thirteen was happy to soon be rid of hers.   
  
They'd been recruited in classes when the mailgirls program had rolled out at USF. One, Three, Five, and Six, as well as the original numbers Two and Four, had all been assigned their numbers when the first wave started in April. Then came the original number Seven, whom Thirteen had never met, as well as Eight, Nine, Ten, Eleven, and Twelve in May. Thirteen had been assigned her number as the first member of the June class, along with five other girls, Fourteen through Eighteen. Unlike the two previous classes, the June group hadn't yet lost a single girl. Even the July wave, Nineteen through Twenty-Four, couldn't say the same -- they'd lost the original number Twenty-Three just two weeks ago.   
  
Thirteen's number was her identity at this point. She'd read of companies randomly assigning numbers daily, to keep that very thing from happening - to strip everything away from a girl, to keep her from being anything but simply a mailgirl, to make sure she knew her place. Thankfully, however, USF didn't have to go that far to make sure Thirteen knew her place. If the fact that she was naked here at the Plaza weren't enough, the collar and leash hammered that message home.   
  
Mistress Zero unlocked the leash from the collar with a key she kept on her wrist. Patting Thirteen on the ass, she dismissed her. The inspection was through, Thirteen had passed, and now she had been tasked with doing her hair up in pigtails. Mistress Zero, meanwhile, moved on to Fourteen, to perform more-or-less the same inspection.   
  
It was odd, at least in the morning pre-shift, to be alone at the sink counter. Behind her, in the reflection, Thirteen could the other girls -- Fourteen, Fifteen, Sixteen, and so on -- lined up at their lockers. Fourteen was standing on her toes, hands behind her head and elbows out, while Mistress Zero looked her over. The others were on their knees, hands behind their backs, and eyes down facing the floor. Thirteen didn't linger in doing her hair; there was something discomforting about being free while the rest of the mailgirls were locked up. She felt a pang of guilt in that discomfort, the thought of leaving all of her fellow mailgirls behind when she returned to Connecticut. She decided not linger on the guilt, either.   
  
Hair now up in two matching pigtails, Thirteen returned to her locker. Mistress Zero had progressed further down the line, and was in the middle of inspecting Twenty-One, whom she'd been harder on -- deservedly, in most of the girls' opinions -- over the last few weeks. Thirteen, though, paid the inspection no mind, instead reattaching her own leash to her collar. After the familiar "click" of the lock, she took her place on her knees, and sat back on her heels with her hands behind her. She glanced down, awkwardly, at the smartphone on her arm.   
  
Another seven minutes and thirteen seconds before seven o'clock.   
  
She stared down, blankly, at the tiled floor in front of her, fixating on one particular spot. The seconds ticked by, and Thirteen comforted herself with the fact that every minute, every second, that passed got her closer to the end of the day. The end of her time at USF.

**Life Among the Mailgirls Ch. 02**

Mailgirl Number Thirteen knelt, naked, on the middle of a well-decorated office on the 26th Floor of US Financial Plaza. Her head was bowed, and she stared emptily at a point on the carpet a few feet in front of her; a mailgirl dared not to make eye contact with her superiors without express permission. Her arms were behind her, her right hand locked around her left wrist. But her shoulders were back, so as to better project her naked breasts into the room. She was on her knees, with her thighs spread so that her bare pussy – warm, wet, and expectant – was entirely exposed. Her buttocks were back on her ankles, so that she could rest.   
  
In front of her loomed the desk of Joe Hoblitzel, an Executive Vice President in USF's Asset Management group. He sat, mostly ignoring her, while he bounced between typing something on his desktop and flipping through pages of the Wall Street Journal. He was middle-aged – late forties, maybe early fifties – but handsome nonetheless. Dark hair, dressed in an expensive suit, with a strong, clean-shaven jawline and a solid build. He was too old for her, of course – almost twice her age – but the twenty-six-year-old couldn't help but find him attractive. He reminded her, ever-so-slightly, of her step-father – a realization that, once made, somehow only made him that much more attractive in an honest-but-uncomfortable way.   
  
Thirteen had been coming to Hoblitzel's office regularly, for the better part of the last month, but she still couldn't have explained exactly what his job was. He was in Asset Management, she knew, and he had a team of portfolio managers that all rolled up under him; she'd be making the rounds to them next. Number Three could have told her, if she'd asked, as Three had worked in this department before "volunteering" to become a mailgirl. But Thirteen had replaced Three in this little morning exercise that Hoblitzel put her through each and every day. And, as much as Three was probably relieved by the fact that she no longer had to routinely traipse through her old department in the nude, Thirteen didn't want to tip her own hand, and accidentally give Three the impression that she actually enjoyed her mornings on the 26th Floor.   
  
Because, even though she was loathe to admit it, Thirteen's mornings with Hoblitzel were the best part of her day at the Plaza. He was kind to her, relatively speaking, even if it was in a dominating and sometimes demeaning way. Sure, he'd pat her on the ass on the way out, an act that was technically against the rules but often overlooked – especially among executives at his level. But he meant it as both a compliment and a sign of encouragement. And he often had a piece of hard candy for her – peppermint today. Which, although being the smallest of kindnesses and although she to take it out of his hand with her mouth only, was nonetheless a rare kindness in the life of a mailgirl.   
  
The truth was, if Joe Hoblitzel had unzipped his fly, and produced his cock, Thirteen might have happily taken that into her mouth, as well.   
  
Luckily, Thirteen had not been faced with that temptation. Even among the most senior staff, full-fledged sexual activity with the mailgirls was strictly, strictly forbidden – even outside of work hours. Any such act would result in immediate dismissal of the colleague involved, and an investigation into the direct supervisor and the department itself for letting such an act occur. And then, since there was almost no way a mailgirl could actually be fired, that mailgirl (and her peers) would be punished severely.   
  
There were flaws in that system, of course, as Twenty-One had exposed a few weeks prior. Namely, follow-up required a mailgirl, the lowliest of lowliest within the company, to come forward and report the incident. Thankfully, none of the girls – Thirteen included – had yet been the victim of such an act; even in Twenty-One's case, it had been Twenty-One herself who'd initiated the "relationship." A pinch or a pat on the ass here or there, a tweaked nipple from a particularly bold executive, an intentional-but-made-to-look-inadvertent brushing up against a naked girl's body? Sure. Of course. But, certainly nothing that rose to the level of the horror stories Thirteen had read about elsewhere; USF's program was a nunnery, comparatively speaking.   
  
But Thirteen knew just how slippery that particular slope was. And the reality of the situation was that at least half of the girls – again, Thirteen included – might have accepted complete and total sexual slavery if it were to be asked of them. Not because they'd been so humiliated and beaten down, because they had. Not because they increasingly thought of themselves as full and unconditional property belonging to USF, because they did. But, rather, because they all confessed to just how turned on they got as mailgirls.   
  
For Thirteen, it was no different. If Hoblitzel had called her to him, bent her over the desk, and began laying into her, Thirteen would have accepted happily. She couldn't deny just how sexually excited she was at that moment, kneeling naked and submissive in a powerful executive's office. The fact that he was pretending to ignore her only made it hotter, somehow. She was wet – not unusual for her, granted – so wet that she could detect her own scent. She wondered if Hoblitzel could, too.   
  
It was a bit of a status symbol among executive management just how long they could hold onto a girl. The mailgirls were expected to deliver the regular mail and interoffice to anyone and everyone, but it cost a certain amounts of credits (or, "chits," as they were called here at USF) to send memos via mailgirl. Executives were granted significantly more chits than the masses, and they could up their spend in the system for a "rush" delivery – ensuring that a mailgirl was forced into a full-on sprint to hit her deadline, and almost guaranteeing she'd receive a demerit or two. They could also utilize their chits to hold a girl in their presence for longer than might have otherwise been required. The concept had been to keep a girl in place until an employee finished a last-minute memo, but in practice it had become a bit of a pissing contest among certain department heads.   
  
It had been just past eight when Thirteen entered Hoblitzel's office. Though she didn't dare look up at the clock on the wall now, she guessed she'd been here the better part of half an hour.   
  
In Hoblitzel's case, Thirteen believed it was less about proving his status, and more about Thirteen herself. At least, that's what she liked to believe. He'd summon her (always Thirteen, specifically) to his office each morning, and have her wait while he flipped through the news and composed a memo to his senior staff about trends and things to look out for that day. And then he'd send her on her way, to make her rounds through Asset Management and his direct reports. Nothing he sent couldn't have been delivered via email, but Hoblitzel felt – as the program intended – that his team would pay more focused attention if the message were delivered by a naked mailgirl.   
  
And, as attracted as Thirteen was to Hoblitzel, she told herself it was mutual. He used to task Three with the same job, dashing from desk to desk to desk and delivering Hoblitzel's musings on the market to her former peers. But whether he'd felt some pang of empathy for the girl and freed her from the routine, or whether he'd just happened to notice Thirteen on an unrelated mail run and decided to upgrade, he had never kept Three in his office as long as he regularly did Thirteen.   
  
Thirteen felt his eyes on her. He glanced up at her every now and then, as if looking for inspiration, before returning to his work.  
  
In another life, Thirteen could have dominated him and wrapped him around her finger. She was young, she was blonde, she was pretty, and she knew that she had something he wanted. He'd buy her presents. Treat her to a dinner date. Take her out dancing. Beg, beg, beg for a night with her, for the honor of going down on her, for a sniff of her pussy. Thirteen, of course, had never been that girl; but still, she fantasized about holding someone like Hoblitzel in the palm of her hand.  
  
But, if Thirteeen was being honest with herself – and being stripped of everything, from her clothes, to her identity, to her very personality, forced a liberating sort of honesty – dominating Hoblitzel didn't turn her on half as much as being dominated by him now. It was an uncomfortable thing she'd learned about herself over the summer, an uncomfortable realization that most of the other girls shared with her. Nothing, it seemed, got her quite as turned on as being entirely under someone else's thumb.   
  
Hoblitzel cleared his throat. He looked down at his smartphone, and then up, confusedly, at Thirteen.   
  
"This says it's your last day here at the Plaza?"   
  
"Yes, sir," Thirteen answered. No eye contact.   
  
Hoblitzel hesitated, and then asked, "I thought you all signed two year contracts?"   
  
Two years was the standard length of a mailgirl's contract worldwide, not just at USF. The length of subsequent contracts, when a girl re-upped, tended to vary a bit more; but, even then, two years tended to be the accepted standard. Thirteen, however, was here at the USF Plaza for just three months.   
  
"Yes, sir," Thirteen replied. "It's just me. I'm was only here for the summer."   
  
Hoblitzel looked confused.   
  
"I'm a graduate student at Yale, sir. Anthropology. I'm studying mailgirl culture for my thesis."   
  
"'Mailgirl culture,'" Hoblitzel repeated, as if he could not understand how Thirteen didn't realize how inane the idea was. He shook his head, stood, and came around to the other side of his desk. "Jesus. You don't even work here."   
  
She did, technically, work here – albeit as a mailgirl, for another ten-plus hours. But she understood what the executive in front of her meant, and she saw no upside in correcting him.   
  
"And I thought Amanda was stupid..." he amended, but allowed the thought to trail off.   
  
"Number Three, sir," Thirteen corrected him this time. She was required to.   
  
Hoblitzel just raised an eyebrow. He paused, looked down at the naked blonde kneeling alluringly on his floor, and then bumped his phone against the device on her arm. "Yes," he conceded, "Three."   
  
"Here," he said, turning back to the desk, and fished another piece of hard candy out of his bowl. "One more, as a thank you." He unwrapped another peppermint, and then – without asking permission, held it up to Thirteen's lips.  
  
Thirteen took the candy graciously, even as Hoblitzel's forefinger ever-so-gently welcomed itself into her mouth – touching her tongue, running absently over her lower lip, and then cupping her chin so that she was finally forced to make eye contact. She wasn't sure, exactly, what he wanted from her, so she met his eyes briefly, offered a submissive, "Thank you, sir," and then averted her gaze.   
  
His dismissed her, this time with more of a pinch of her than a pat. He closed his office door behind her, and the counter on Thirteen's smartphone buzzed to life.   
  
In another world and in another life, Thirteen might have needed a moment to collect herself, to cool herself down. The thought of servicing Hoblitzel with her mouth, or the thought of bending over and servicing him with her pussy, had been all she'd thought about over the last half hour. He was in the position of power. He was in control over her. And she was nothing more than a set of tits and ass. In another world and another life, she likely wouldn't have gotten so turned on in the first place.   
  
But Thirteen now had a delivery to make and a deadline to meet, and so her entire being was making that delivery; she had just thirty seconds to dash – walk swiftly, in this case – down the hallway to Mark Stansbury, the first of six recipients. As she passed Hoblitzel's assistant and the analysts seated in cubicles outside his office, she paid no attention to those who lifted their heads to watch her go by. She paid no attention to the leers, the whispered derision, or the catcalls.   
  
Hoblitzel had referred to the idea of mailgirl culture as "inane," something that could have easily been applied to very concept of mailgirls itself. Thirteen, when she'd first heard of the idea, had thought it was a joke. Companies tapped young, female employees, often in management track positions, to take on delivery duties for the duration of a two-year contract. These were girls with MBAs and JDs and other Masters degrees, girls who otherwise would have been groomed for department heads and strategy leaders. And yet they were approached to apply for positions ostensibly in the mail room. Even excluding Thirteen - who was still a year shy of completing her doctorate - USF's roster included a full PhD; Mailgirl Number Five was technically "Doctor" Five, and had been plucked from Quantitative Investments.   
  
And, of course, all of the girls were expected to deliver the mail naked.   
  
It made no sense. Even leaving pornographic and misogynistic fantasies aside, it made no sense. All of the girls at USF had been making good money even prior to becoming a mailgirl, and most of them had actually received a bump up in annual rate to take on mailgirl duties – albeit in the form of a few big lump sums that could be affected by how many demerits a girl racked up. USF, like other companies, even sweetened the pot for some of girls they selected – paying off student loans, buying out a girl's credit card debt, and so on. They guaranteed career advancement, in some cases, upon completion of the contract; Number Seven, for example, had been promised a fast track to Associate General Counsel. All to run memos from one corner of the USF Plaza to another, to deliver interoffice envelopes, to do something as mind-numbing and thankless as delivering the mail.   
  
But the mailgirls were not mailgirls simply because the company needed someone to deliver the mail. The original program, initiated in Tokyo within only the last ten years, had been a morale-boosting stunt. But it was a morale-boosting stunt that had gained surprising traction – first in Asia. Then in Europe. Then among gaming companies and dot.coms on the West Coast. And now, inconceivably just a few years prior, here in New York, among more conservative financial service firms like US Financial.   
  
As much of a stunt as the early mailgirl programs had been, it was the impact upon the bottom-line that titillated senior management even more. What companies found, time and again, was that mailgirls justified their lavish salaries and sign-ons dozens of times over. Sure, attrition overall spiked when a program was announced, especially among women; USF had been no different. But then, once things had normalized, attrition plummeted to levels unseen of before the mailgirl programs were rolled out. Among women, the decline was even more defined – it was one of those weird, unexpected, and paradoxical results that Thirteen was digging into from a research perspective.   
  
Similar impacts could be seen in a company's actual business. When a program was announced, there were clients who no longer wished to work with a company who'd treat any of their employees as the mailgirls were treated. Some of this came from a place of upright moral rectitude, but more often than not it was little more than PR. But as mailgirl programs became more and more common, they were less and less of a PR risk for a client. And, even in those cases where a client was truly and permanently lost, companies like USF more than made up for the lost revenue with new clients; client meetings had tripled at the Plaza over the last five months, as eager, prospective customers made excuses to see a mailgirl in action with their own eyes.   
  
Productivity gains, when quantified, were remarkable. Usage of vacation time and sick days was reduced. Leaves-of-absence were down, as was Short Term Disability, Long Term Disability, and FMLA. And all of that was ancillary, less important than the true driver: confidence and superiority.   
  
It was a working theory that Thirteen still needed to better define and elaborate upon. But it held that the rank-and-file inside a company with mailgirls performed better, simply because they felt superior. By just about any quantifiable measure, the data proved her right – even USF had seen noticeable gains since just April, when the mailgirls program came online. Men performed better across the spectrum. Women, too, performed significantly better, with younger women – perhaps fearful of potentially being drafted into the mailgirl program itself – seeing exponential gains in quantitative performance. The qualitative data, though, suggested that young, attractive women were performing worse – but Thirteen discounted that finding as misleading, as it was often management's way to coerce a girl into taking a mailgirl position.   
  
And so, the fact that Thirteen was stark naked here in a place of business – save for a lycra armband and a dog collar – was secondary. It wasn't her nudity that helped make the program successful, but the humiliation she felt from that nudity. It was in her debasement and her suffering that she brought value. As she worked her way down the hall with her naked breasts ever-so-slightly bouncing through Asset Management, her very presence brought about a feeling of superiority in all she passed.  
  
Mark Stansbury's door was closed when Thirteen arrived. And, after risking a glance down at her armband to confirm she still had a few seconds to spare, Thirteen knocked gently.   
  
She was beckoned in, and any pretense of respect that Stansbury had for her as another human being was completely absent. He grunted an acknowledgement of her presence, and then raked her up and down with his eyes, taking in the full picture of the naked girl in front of him. Decent-sized C-cup breasts, nipples hard and at attention. Shaved pubic area, with her slit fully exposed. Long blonde hair, done up in childish pigtails. Slave collar. Armband. A touch of make-up and lipstick, but nothing more. And a number "13," prominently displayed on her hip in black marker.   
  
Thirteen had taken a step into Stansbury's office, but no further. Instead, she stood in "Feet" position – feet flat on the ground, legs parted, arms behind her back, chest pressed forward, and a vacant, submissive gaze directed at the floor. She waited for Stansbury's order to come closer, so that he could retrieve Hoblitzel's memo from her smartphone, and endured his examination patiently. She was little more than a piece of tits and ass to him; but then, it was her job to be little more than a piece of tits and ass to him.   
  
Thirteen was nowhere near as attracted to Stansbury as she was to Hoblitzel, but she suspected that was partly due to the power that Hoblitzel wielded. Stansbury was not unattractive; he was in his early forties, maybe even late thirties, well-dressed and well-groomed, just another one of a dime-a-dozen Wall Street types that worked here at USF. But, unlike Hoblitzel holding her for the better part of a half hour, this interaction with Stansbury was more routine.   
  
He called her closer. He tapped his smartphone against hers, waited for the memo to transfer, and then sent her on her way. No pat-on-the-ass, no derogatory comment, no hoops to jump through. Thirteen could only hope that all of her deliveries that day went so smoothly.   
  
From Stansbury, it was off to George Strunk. Then Mitch Miller. Debbie Truesdale. And so on. After Asset Management, it was an interoffice envelope from the 26th Floor to the 28th via the stairs. And then another, from the 28th to the 24th, again via the stairs. A standard mail delivery. Another interoffice. A series of memos back and forth between 23rd and 21st Floors. And so went the morning, dashing from one mail stop to the next, one associate to the next. It was routine, and in that routine, Thirteen allowed herself to operate on auto-pilot.

She picked up two demerits for being just over a minute late on an interoffice delivery to a junior executive on the 30th Floor, and then another when she missed a deadline only by a few seconds. Risking a glance up at a clock down on the 16th, she confirmed that she still had a while before the girls would begin to be called back to the locker room in waves for their first break. At twenty-four demerits, and the bulk of the day still ahead of her, she knew that hitting number twenty-five and the punishment that followed was inevitable. But, she hoped against hope that she could avoid another until after her break; better that a spanking (or paddling, or whatever Mistress Zero was in the mood for today) eat into the thirty minutes she was allotted to at lunch than the fifteen minutes she had for break.   
  
It was up on the 33rd Floor that Thirteen had her first moment of rest, a rare lull in delivery activity that allowed her to catch her breath. She'd just delivered a memo to a manager in the Products & Segments division, and – without a notification pinging on her smartphone – made her way to the floor's reception desk, where she knew a mailgirl mat would be waiting for her. She passed the dour, uninterested receptionist, who didn't even bother to look up, and found Mailgirl Number Ten already there, on her knees.   
  
There was a single pink mat on the floor, pressed almost up against the wall to the right of the elevators, below a nondescript piece of corporate artwork and to one side of a silver dog bowl half-filled with water. It was no thicker than a traditional yoga mat, stamped with the official USF logo, and just big enough to accommodate two mailgirls in close proximity to one another. If two girls had already been kneeling there, Thirteen would have been forced to seek out another, similar resting spot on the 34th or 32nd Floors. But, thankfully, it was just Ten, and so Thirteen got to her knees beside the other girl as she scooted over.   
  
Knees on the ground, thighs parted, and sitting back on their haunches. They weren't allowed more than a quick moment or two of eye contact, but they smiled and greeted each other before bowing their heads. And, in their only deviation from the rigors of standard "Knees" position, Ten took Thirteen's left hand in her right, interlocking their fingers and holding hands. Though technically out of position, and theoretically risking a demerit from someone petty enough to assign one, holding hands was one of those rare transgressions that Mistress Zero and Human Capital seemed to look the other way on. All the mailgirls did it, whenever they found themselves paired up and resting on a mat together. It was a sign of camaraderie and commiseration, and took place even between two girls who might not have otherwise gotten along – such as the veiled, passive aggressive competition between One and Fourteen, or the falling out between Eleven and Eighteen when they stopped sleeping together.   
  
Thirteen, for her part, felt a mixture of awkwardness around and jealousy towards Number Ten. Whatever Thirteen's ever-so-brief relationship with Seven had been, and despite the fact that it had been Thirteen who'd wanted to keep her distance and her objectivity, it still stung a bit when Seven moved on to Ten so quickly afterwards. And to a combination of Ten and Nineteen after that.   
  
But Ten felt no such awkwardness around Thirteen, so far as Thirteen could tell. Her own relationship with Seven – if you could even call it that – was both casual and utilitarian. And the inclusion of Nineteen only seemed to underline the fact that it represented the "letter-carrying lesbian" phenomenon more than it did an out-and-out serious, monogamous lesbian pairing, like the one that Two and Three shared.   
  
"You're sweaty," Ten whispered. Not a "hi" or a "hello."   
  
Thirteen didn't apologize for it. "I just did 21 to 33 on the stairs, on a rush order, and got there six seconds under deadline."   
  
It was perhaps a weird thing to be proud of, but one that Ten, at least, appreciated.   
  
Ten was tall, slender, and blessed with long, well-toned legs that would have turned heads even if she'd been wearing clothes. Her breasts were on the smaller side - relatively, at least, as there were no flat-chested mailgirls. Thirteen guessed she might have been right on the line between a "B" and "C," and laughed to herself – not for the first time – how casually she now found herself evaluating other girls' chests. Ten had straight, shoulder-length brown hair that, at the moment, was spilling down freely on either side of her face. She was tanned, though not excessively so, and beautiful in a smart, East Coast sort of way.   
  
Ten was a few years older than Thirteen. Twenty-nine, Thirteen thought she remembered from the girl's file. She'd been at one of the big Swiss banks before getting her MBA, and had joined USF out of business school the previous summer. Her role with USF had been a strategic one, focused on client management and customer experience within Private Wealth Management, a role in which she'd caught the eye and the attention of a particularly deep-pocketed client. When USF first announced its mailgirls program, it was that client who'd first asked – of Ten's old boss – whether or not the young brunette was being considered. The promise of the mailgirl bonus, tuition reimbursement, and an eventual portfolio of wealthy clients all her own had been enough tempt her, and Ten had been a part of the May roll-out – only a few weeks before Thirteen arrived in New York.   
  
Her real name was Katherine. Or, at least, it had been, once upon a time - Thirteen thought of her only as Ten. Even the few girls who'd known each other prior to volunteering for the program referred to one another by their numbers now, both inside and outside the building. This was partly due to the fact that they were strictly forbidden from using each other's real names at work, and it was dangerous to get out of the habit while out for drinks or over the weekend for fear of slipping up while at the Plaza. But Thirteen suspected it was also partly due to an attempt at disassociating what they were forced to do as a mailgirl and who they really were: it wasn't Katherine who was forced to strip naked and parade through her old place of business, but rather Mailgirl Number Ten. Thirteen had taken a similar approach earlier in the summer, but she had to confess that the two versions of herself had begun to bleed together, and that her "true self" was more Mailgirl Number Thirteen that she felt comfortable with.   
  
"Getting a little salty," Ten giggled, using the term the mailgirls tossed around to refer to the particular combination of sweat, body odor, and pussy that they all succumbed to at various points in the day.   
  
"You've got no idea," Thirteen whispered back.   
  
"I've got some idea," Ten responded, squeezing Thirteen's hand in her own. "I got sent to the garage this morning."   
  
To the uninitiated, it sounded like a change in subject. Thirteen, however, knew what the other girl was driving at. They spent so much of their time at USF hurrying along among cubicles and offices, filing rooms and board rooms, and they'd all been naked day-in and day-out for so long, that it almost became easy to forget just how abnormal it was. It was embarrassing to be naked, sure, and Thirteen hadn't exactly stopped being embarrassed. But it was familiar. It was an embarrassment that she'd suffered countless times before and would suffer countless times again. Being sent somewhere new, on the other hand? Or, out of the ordinary? Suddenly, it was like being stripped naked again for the first time, being humiliated in an unfamiliar place in an unfamiliar way.   
  
It was also exciting.   
  
It was thrilling, in a naughty and exhibitionist sort of way. Ten had confessed to that dichotomy earlier in the summer, out for drinks at the Imperial. And Thirteen, for her part, had to agree. Being sent down into the shops on the first floor for one excuse of a reason or another, or out to the front desk to pick up a package that didn't go to the mail room first, or down the garage – it was a reminder at just how embarrassingly naked they were. But also a weird, deep-seated turn-on that nearly all of girls had owned up to.   
  
"Fucker got a personal delivery here in the office," Ten recounted, "and had me take it to his car for him. Big, heavy-ass box, and I needed two hands to carry it. Guess where I had to carry his keys?"   
  
Thirteen cringed and thought back to other mailgirl programs she had read about. No, not here. Not at USF.   
  
Ten took a hold of the D-ring on her own collar. "He just looped his whole key ring right here."   
  
Thirteen had to laugh a little.   
  
"No key fob, of course," Ten continued. "So picture me in the garage, bending down at the waist and mashing my face up against his Mercedes, so that I can unlock the driver's side with a key attached to my neck."  
  
"It's a sight."   
  
Ten paused, and then whispered, "But joke's on him. I wiped juice all over his leather seat."   
  
Thirteen laughed politely, but she wasn't exactly sure that the joke was on Ten's unnamed "fucker." Smearing a bit of pussy juice on the inside of some guy's car seemed like a minor victory, one that Thirteen was sure more than a few men would get off on. But Thirteen understood where Ten was coming from; it was one of those minor acts of retribution and defiance that a few of the girls – Fifteen, most often – seemed to need to get through this life. Thirteen, for her part, would never have been so bold, and even this seemed out-of-character for Ten.   
  
It went unsaid that, owing to her trip to the garage itself, Ten had apparently been wet enough to enact this particular brand of mischief. And it struck Thirteen that she probably hadn't had an opportunity to wash her hands between then and now.   
  
Thirteen gave the brunette's hand a squeeze.   
  
"You're coming tonight, right?" Thirteen asked.   
  
"Of course," Ten answered. "We've got send you off right."   
  
It sounded like all the girls, including the half that were scheduled to come in for their designated turn covering Saturdays, were planning to attend that night's "Bitch Sessions" at the Imperial. Even without a true cause for celebration, as Thirteen's impending release was for them all, Friday nights at the bar had become a weekly tradition, and an outlet for an otherwise beaten-down, beaten-up population of mailgirls.   
  
"The Atlantic Life girls are coming, too," Ten added. "I don't know about Mountbatten, though." Atlantic Life was a staid, conservative insurance company in Midtown, which had nonetheless followed USF's lead and rolled out their own mailgirls program in July. Mountbatten Asset Management, too, had begun a program, but theirs was only a few weeks old, and consisted of only six girls – only two of whom had shown up at USF's Bitch Sessions so far. Thirteen wasn't sure which of the girls at USF had reached out and invited them to the Imperial that first time, but she was appreciative of having other, local mailgirl initiatives to compare and contrast USF's against. And she was sure that the mailgirls from Atlantic Life and Mountbatten appreciated finding a larger pool of mailgirls with whom to share their pain.   
  
"Great," Thirteen replied, sincerely.   
  
"What are you wearing? Did you bring anything special?"  
  
Thirteen swallowed, and waited a moment as two fully-dressed young women passed by, glancing down at the two naked girls holding hands by elevator.   
  
"No, I just have my regular clothes," Thirteen said, once they'd walked away. By regular clothes, she meant the pencil skirt, blouse, and heels she'd worn the office that morning – vampish and tight-fitting all around – which she'd purchased that summer with money out of her stipend from her faculty advisor. But Thirteen found it difficult to talk about clothes when she was "in uniform."   
  
Ten, apparently, didn't feel quite as tortured; Thirteen suspected that planning out her outfit for that night was one of the rare slivers of hope that got her through the day. "Don't worry," Ten responded, "I've got an extra. I've got a cocktail dress in my locker that I think will fit you."   
  
Ten was a bit taller than Thirteen, but they had a similar build, and so Thirteen was fairly confident Ten's dress would fit. Unlike a few rare mailgirl programs that celebrated a wide spectrum of female body types, USF's was generally pretty limited: thin, above-average height, with breast size running between Ten's ample B's (C's?) to Six's stately-but-not-pornographic D's. And, unlike Thirteen's Spartan cubby back in the locker room, she knew that Ten's had a few outfits hanging in there at all times.   
  
"Absolutely," Thirteen offered with enthusiasm she didn't entirely feel; she felt comfortable in her own clothes, and wasn't entirely on-board with the idea of Ten playing dress-up with her like she were a paper doll. Nevermind the logistics of getting the dress back to the brunette, given that Thirteen was leaving for Connecticut in the morning.   
  
There was a familiar buzz, and both girls instinctively looked down at the smart phones on their arms.   
  
"It's me," Ten said, dropping Thirteen's hand and standing. She looked down at the smartphone again, and complained, "Ugh. 39." Six flights of stairs.   
  
As she turned to leave, she called back to Thirteen. "Maybe I'll see you on break. Or at lunch." Referring to the dress, "If we don't line up today, just take a look yourself."   
  
"Thank you," Thirteen answered. And, "Good luck!"   
  
Ten walked away quickly, to the stairs, and then began her ascent. As the stairwell door closed behind her, Thirteen felt that much more alone. As good as it was to hold hands with another mailgirl, to have a few moments of time together, Thirteen hated to admit that sometimes she preferred to be alone. On her own, she could have had her few minutes of rest, without having to converse, without having to think of herself as anything more than naked delivery girl.   
  
Thirteen's smartphone was still dormant. Either the delivery that Ten had been called away on had been one for which Ten had been requested specifically (which required the requestor to spend a few chits), or there were simply not that many active delivery requests at the moment. With twenty-four girls spread across forty-eight floors, and the cycle of morning breaks not yet begun, Thirteen suspected that it was the former, and wondered what sort of specific indignity awaited Ten on the 39th Floor.   
  
And so Thirteen decided to use the time to do something productive.   
  
"Mrs. Shean?" Thirteen asked politely. "May I have permission to use the bathroom?"   
  
The receptionist looked up from her computer and offered and audible sigh.   
  
Bathroom breaks were tricky. If at all possible, Thirteen preferred to empty her bladder in the mailgirls' locker room. Sure, there were six, industrial-looking toilets out in the open. Three of them faced the other three. And anyone in the elevator lobby on the far side of the locker room's mirror glass could watch, albeit with Mistress Zero's desk ever-so-slightly blocking a complete view. But bathroom breaks elsewhere in the building were an uncomfortable production, one that required a typically less than enthusiastic babysitter.   
  
Mailgirls were not allowed privacy. There were cameras in the stairwells, and cameras in the service elevators. USF's non-mailgirl population naturally would have balked at similar arrangements in the bathroom stalls, and Thirteen understood that USF had kicked around a handful of alternatives, each one more horrifying than the last. Should they install open toilets in certain designated areas for the mailgirls to use? Should mailgirls be limited to using the men's room, and only the urinals when at all possible? What about mop sinks in the janitors' closets? Someone had even suggested to Human Capital's Will Barrow the "litter box" approach, which he'd thankfully shot down.   
  
Instead, the agreed-upon method involved a chaperone. A mailgirl had to ask for, and be granted, permission from another USF employee. The employee, if granting the request, had to log the break on the mailgirl's smartphone (start time and end), and then follow the girl into the bathroom. Stall doors had to be left wide open, and the granting party had to stand outside and watch. It was humiliating for everyone involved. But, for Thirteen, who couldn't be sure if her break was coming as early as 9:30 or as late as 10:15, it was a necessary evil.   
  
There were no rules or regulations as to whether a mailgirl's chaperone had to be male or female, and there were a handful of girls – Fourteen among them, Twenty-One before the "incident" a few weeks prior – who preferred men. Yes, the mailgirl then had to use the men's room rather than the women's. But most men, no matter how poorly they might treat a mailgirl otherwise, tended to ignore the rule that required them to watch. Most stood just out-of-view, around the corner from the open stall door. There was still some decency that remained at USF.   
  
But Thirteen had found that asking a man was like playing Russian roulette. Sure, they'd grant that basic modicum of civility nine times out of ten. But every now and then, you'd stumble across that perverted creep that got off on watching a mailgirl pee. Just the thought of being leered at sexually as she emptied her bladder made Thirteen's skin crawl, and she could count on one hand how many times she'd made the request of a male coworker (acts of desperation, all) since just such an incident at occurred in late June.   
  
Women were more predictable. A younger girl? More attractive than average? Fearful of being drafted into the mailgirl program herself, that girl would dutifully keep her eyes on the mailgirl as she peed, hating every minute of it. There were some who made awkward small talk, and others who saw this as an opportunity to just open up and heap scorn upon naked mailgirl. But it was just another embarrassment to Thirteen, and her skin had grown thick. Preferable was an older woman, or an overweight woman, or an ugly woman. Without fear of being undressed and sent downstairs to join the mailgirls, most acted the same way that most men did. The stall door stayed open, sure. They might take a quick peek to ensure they were at least partially following the rules. But they generally stayed out-of-sight, and allowed a girl a few, brief seconds of privacy.   
  
And so, Mrs. Shean. She was in her late fifties, and still had a decent enough figure that she might have been at risk for a mailgirl program with a fetishist streak. She'd make a show of moaning and groaning about it, but she was a reliable chaperone when Thirteen was on the 33rd Floor.   
  
"One second," the receptionist replied.   
  
"Thank you, Mrs. Shean."   
  
The proper form of address to all men was "sir," and "ma'am" to women. Never was a mailgirl to address an employee by their first name. But while "sir" carried with it little to no baggage, aside from submission on a girl's part, "ma'am" was a bit more loaded. There were older women, like Mrs. Shean, for whom "ma'am" wouldn't do, as it seemed to imply age. And, if she were being honest, addressing a twenty-one-year-old administrative as "ma'am" just felt awkward to twenty-six-year-old Mailgirl Number Thirteen. But "ma'am" was the default, unless instructed otherwise; it was up to the employee to tell the mailgirl to call them Mrs. So-and-So, or Ms. So-and-So, or even – shockingly common at USF since the program rolled out – the throwback of Miss So-and-So. Men could do the same, and so there were a handful of them throughout the building that Thirteen was allowed to call Mr. So-and-So.   
  
Mrs. Shean didn't rush. She continued typing, ignoring Thirteen's request for what felt like an eternity, though was probably no more than four or five minutes. As she waited, Thirteen prayed that her smartphone wouldn't buzz, that she wouldn't be called away before being allowed a bathroom break. Thankfully, it remained dormant until the older woman decided she'd made the mailgirl wait long enough, and made her way to Thirteen. She tapped in her employee ID on Thirteen's arm, and then led the way to the women's room down the hall.

"Go ahead," Mrs. Shean instructed, and gestured to an open stall. She took up a position by the sinks, leaning against the counter, and waited.   
  
Thirteen didn't hesitate. She dutifully left the stall door open as she sat down, offering up a "Thank you, Mrs. Shean," as she did so. She was thanking the receptionist for the bathroom break itself, but there was also an implied gratitude that Mrs. Shean was around the corner and just out of sight.  
  
Thirteen wasn't the fastest mailgirl – that honor probably belonged to Sixteen or Four. But she wasn't the slowest, either. She admittedly picked up a few more demerits than average, but it was Twelve who seemed to be subjected to a punishment on an almost daily basis (to the point that some of the other girls had begun to speculate she enjoyed it more than the rest). She wasn't a "star," like One or Fourteen, both of whom had decided to embrace what it meant to be a mailgirl more than others. No, Thirteen was a middle-of-the-road performer, but a middle-of-the-road performer who'd been cursed with a small bladder.   
  
She'd suffered two accidents, both earlier in the summer, both of which still embarrassed her more than just about any other humiliation she'd suffered at USF. The first, in the actual mailroom, had been her own fault, that first week as a mailgirl. She'd simply been too embarrassed to ask, and had convinced herself that she could make it to her next break. That had been a small one, as she'd bolted to the bathroom without permission as it began to happen; she was paddled by Mistress Zero until her ass glowed. The second accident, two weeks later, had taken place more publicly, in Investment Financing, and was the result of a particularly bitchy administrative assistant who refused to grant Thirteen permission. She knew she was in trouble as soon as she'd taken her place on the mat, as she hadn't entirely learned to regulate her water intake at that point. She lost control, to the disgust and contempt of everyone in the area, and to this day hated having to go to Investment Financing more than just about any other department in the building. Custodial had been called, but it was Thirteen who had to clean up her own mess, and then carry the soiled mat down to the locker room and report the incident to Mistress Zero. She'd been paddled again, of course. But, as she apparently hadn't learned her lesson the first time, she'd also suffered her first overnight in the locker room – gagged, blindfolded, handcuffed, and leashed to her locker at the end of Evening Shift, and then left to sleep on the hard, tiled floor until Mistress Zero arrived the next morning.   
  
About half the girls had had an accident at least once, usually in the first week or two. Only Thirteen and Nine had suffered the indignity twice. And while that wasn't Thirteen's last overnight stay in the locker room, it was her last overnight stay for that particular offense; Thirteen hadn't had an accident since.   
  
Finished, Thirteen joined Mrs. Shean at the sinks and washed her hands. The receptionist then dutifully punched her employee ID into Thirteen's smartphone once more, logging that the bathroom break was over, and led the naked girl back to her desk.   
  
Bladder empty and her morning break pending, Thirteen stopped for a drink before returning to her station. She got down on all fours at the silver dog bowl, and then dipped her face down to the water. As the bowl was full enough, she sipped with her lips, but she wasn't above lapping up water with her tongue when the water level got low.   
  
"I will never get tired of looking at that!" Thirteen heard from behind her, and she knew that she and Mrs. Shean were no longer along in the reception area.   
  
She was fully aware of how exposed she was. Her head was down, her ass was in the air, and her sex on display like a female animal presenting.   
  
Thirteen swallowed, and then turned her head. She dared not look up and meet their eyes, but confirmed that there were three men now behind her. And, while she doubted that she was being addressed directly, she offered a "Thank you, sir," nonetheless.   
  
Indeed, as she returned to her mat, it was clear that the three men – all about her age – were talking to one another, about her, as if she couldn't hear them. One of them had pressed the down button for the elevator, and they continued to talk as they waited for their car.   
  
"Look at those lips," one of them offered. And, though Thirteen couldn't be sure which set of lips he was talking about, she suspected they'd moved on to her mouth. "Those are lips tailor-made for providing relief."   
  
They all laughed. "Providing relief" was mailgirl program code for a blowjob, though thankfully the practice hadn't spread to USF. Thirteen had chosen to do her research at USF specifically because the company had drawn a line in the sand of just how far they were willing to go, and "relief" was off the table, as were insertions and touching of almost every kind. Her faculty advisor, Gillian Schang, had known Human Capital's Will Barrow back as an undergraduate, and felt that with Will in charge USF wouldn't tolerate some of the over-the-line abuse that plagued any number of mailgirl programs elsewhere.   
  
Which wasn't to say that abuse didn't happen; after all, that was what the mailgirl program was all about.   
  
One of the other men glanced over his shoulder, to check if Mrs. Shean was paying them any attention. She wasn't. He ever so slowly and quietly unzipped his fly, and whispered, "Hey, Tits. Open up."   
  
Thirteen steeled herself. He wasn't going to do it. Of course he wasn't going to do it. At least, not here, not now. And so, calling his bluff, she met his eyes, opened her mouth, and dared him to follow through.   
  
"Do it," laughed another of the three men, urging him on.   
  
Thirteen could have protested, could have called Mrs. Shean's attention, and could have told them she'd report them for harassing her this way. But it wasn't worth it. She could handle this, this childish level of bullying, without sounding an alarm. It was nowhere near the abuse she suffered at the hands of Mistress Zero, and it wasn't so objectionable that she needed to make three new enemies.   
  
But before the game of chicken could go any further, the first man grabbed her roughly by the chin, and asked, "Aren't you supposed to correct him? For not using your number?"   
  
The whole thing was supposed to feel menacing, and Thirteen was supposed to feel victimized. She was naked, on her knees, and surrounded on all side by fully-dressed young men. She smiled, however, knowing full well that she'd called them out. She might have even been willing to take him into her mouth, as she'd been willing to do to Hoblitzel, confident that the repercussions to her – while painful – would be nowhere near as severe as they'd be to the three of them. To the one with her chin in his hand, she said, "Yes, sir." To the one whose fly was open, she corrected, "Thirteen, sir."   
  
"Thirteen," he laughed, starting to get uncomfortable. "Open up."   
  
But though Thirteen parted her lips and opened her mouth, the offending member never came.   
  
"Gentlemen?" Mrs. Shean called over. It wasn't a question. It was an admonishment.   
  
These three young men probably earned more in a week than Mrs. Shean did in a year, but she still held some power over them, as if she were scolding them like their mothers might have. They looked over at her sheepishly, and apologetically. And then the whole confrontation ended abruptly, when the elevator chimed and the doors slid open.   
  
When they were gone, and Thirteen was again alone with the receptionist, Mrs. Shean shook her head and wondered aloud, "I don't know how HR expects them to get anything done with you girls strutting around with all your goods on display."   
  
Thirteen knelt silently.   
  
The older woman looked over at her now, directly, and seemed to be sizing her up. Not physically, as Thirteen was used to, but deeper. Psychologically. Puzzling through the naked mailgirl's inner workings, figuring out just what made her tick.   
  
"You get off on this, don't you?"   
  
Thirteen hesitated. Three months ago, when she first started at USF, she might have issued a denial. Now?   
  
"Yes, Mrs. Shean."   
  
"That's what I thought," she responded. She went back to her typing, but not before amending, "Who knows? Maybe if I was in your position..." She trailed off.   
  
From the 33rd Floor, Thirteen was called down to the 31st. Interoffice. Then up to the 34th. Another interoffice. Then back down to the 33rd for a memo. Standard mail pick-up at the reception desk on the 28th, and then out and about amongst the cubicles on that floor. And so the morning sped on, with Thirteen running, jogging, speed-walking through the building, as the timer on her smartphone dictated her pace. And, though she wasn't called down for her break until as late as possible – 10:15 to 10:30 – Thirteen still managed to avoid another demerit. A punishment was coming, sure; likely at lunch. But at least for this morning, those fifteen minutes were all hers, to do as she pleased.   
  
Never wanting to pull too many girls off-duty at one time, Human Capital had staggered the mailgirls' breaks. The first of the morning breaks was scheduled from 9:30 to 9:45, and consisted of a random assortment of six girls, based on current activity level. From the tablet at her desk, and thanks to the geo-locators inside each of their smartphones, Mistress Zero could see exactly where all twenty-four girls were at any given time. She could see who was engaged in an active delivery, who was being "held" and expecting a delivery, who was on a bathroom break, who was currently at rest and waiting for her next assignment. She took them off duty six at a time, with their fifteen minute breaks beginning the moment they were notified by a chime from their smartphones on the band on their arms. Afternoon breaks were similar, at fifteen minute intervals between 3:30 and 4:30. Lunches, too, though they were allotted thirty minutes at lunch, and were split twelve and twelve between First Lunch at twelve-thirty and Second Lunch at one o'clock.   
  
Because breaks included the time it took for a mailgirl to get back to the locker room, time itself was precious, and it could be tortuous to see the countdown begin if a girl were on one of the upper floors. That was what Thirteen was dealing with now, watching her smartphone tick down from 14:50 to 14:49, as she waited for the service elevator on the 42nd floor.   
  
Unlike a number of companies that Thirteen had studied on the West Coast, with their suburban campuses and office parks, US Financial Plaza posed a challenge to a commonly enforced prohibition against mailgirls riding in elevators. Most programs had some allowances for service elevators when a delivery was big enough or heavy enough, and the employee sending the delivery granted permission. A forty-eight story skyscraper in downtown Manhattan, however, made such restrictions difficult to put into practice, as the ascent from the locker room on the 2nd Floor to the Executive Offices on the 47th or 48th might well have killed a girl. Let alone the time it would take to make the run.   
  
Instead, USF had followed the lead of a handful of other programs in Tokyo and Frankfurt, and allowed the use of service elevators when necessary. What Human Capital had decided to call "necessary," however, was an ascent or descent of more than ten stories. If Thirteen needed to get from the mail room on B2 to the 18th Floor, she was allowed to use the elevator. If she needed to get from B2 to the 6th, it was the stairs.   
  
Because of the tracking and analytics that Human Capital had its fingertips, because the closest mailgirl was the one who was called (unless an executive was willing to spend a few chits to call a specific girl), and because they'd continued to refine and find efficiencies the longer the program was active, the bulk of Thirteen's deliveries were usually within ten floors and required the stairs. Standard mail and packages from the actual mail room in the basement were an exception, but a high percentage of those were taken care of early in the morning, between seven and eight, before most employees arrived for the day. A significant portion of Thirteen's daily activity was interoffice and memos, and a significant portion of those were between and within departments clustered together in the building. Which wasn't to say that use of the elevators was rare; Thirteen was on and off the service elevators all day. It was just that, nine times out of ten, she was taking the stairs.   
  
The elevators, though, brought with them their own challenges. There were only four service elevators, compared to the plethora of regular elevators that the regular employees rode. And the mailgirls shared them with each other, as well as Maintenance, Custodial, and other members of the building staff. A mailgirl might pull out her hair waiting for a car to arrive, all while the timer on her smartphone ticked closer and closer to a deadline. Delivery times, thanks to the analysts in Human Capital, accounted for average service elevator wait times - but average was just that, and Thirteen had missed more than a few deadlines because her chariot was slow to arrive.   
  
Thus, the "greater than ten floors" allowance had, in practice, mutated into thirteen, fourteen, or even sixteen floors, depending on the mailgirl herself. Climbing the stairs, even at the risk of missing a deadline, meant that a girl had at least some control over her own fate; better to make a valiant effort and fail than fail because an elevator took too long to arrive. For Thirteen, fourteen floors was about her limit for an ascent, and even then she'd at least press the elevator button and then gauge how fast she thought it might arrive. For a descent, she might decide to take the stairs for as many as sixteen or seventeen floors; again, though, she'd try the elevator button first before gritting her teeth and betting on herself, betting that she could get there faster via the stairwell.   
  
The upside was that Thirteen was now in better shape than she'd ever been. All of the girls had been thin and athletic before signing on, but a few months of a mailgirl's routine had erased any excess pounds and left them all well-toned, well-sculpted, sights to behold. There were some deliveries that required little more than a fast-paced walk, but Thirteen generally spent most of her day at a light jog, with full-out sprints required at fairly regular intervals. She'd never been much of an exercise freak in New Haven or at Pepperdine, but she now found herself going stir-crazy on Saturdays and Sundays if she didn't get in at least one, ridiculously long run per day. And, because she'd gotten so accustomed to making such runs while barefoot, that meant a long, sneaker-less session in her building's basement gym.   
  
The elevator finally, thankfully, arrived, and Thirteen immediately reached for the button to hurry along the closing doors. She pressed the button for the 2nd Floor, and then prayed there'd be no stops on her way down.   
  
As she stood, fixated on the descent from 41 to 40, from 40 to 39, from 39 to 38, Thirteen ever-so-slightly parted her legs, and used her right middle finger to begin gently teasing her clit. Masturbation was strictly, strictly forbidden anywhere outside of the locker room, but Thirteen knew what she could get away with and what she couldn't. Mistress Zero could punish her for doing even this, of course, as punishments could be as trumped up and arbitrary as her mood varied. But though there were cameras watching Thirteen even now, touching herself in the service elevator was relatively private, and out-of-sight from the regular, non-mailgirl employees for whom USF was still a place of real work.   
  
Given the limited time her break in the locker room allowed, Thirteen was priming herself in the elevator, despite the fact that she was already dripping wet, and likely required only a quick minute or two to hit her first climax. If she had allowed herself, she was sure that she could find her orgasm even before the elevator reached the second floor.   
  
It didn't help that she could smell her own scent as well as she could in the confined space; no amount of cheap, mailgirl-issue perfume could mask the musky odor of Thirteen's own pussy. The very smell of arousal only served as a feedback loop. And the fact that it wasn't just her own smell sent a current of excitement running up and down her spine. There was a time that Thirteen might have thought that smell of pussy was the smell of pussy, but she'd become a bit of a connoisseur over the course of the summer, and she knew – almost instinctively – that Seven had been on this particular elevator at some point in the last few minutes.   
  
Thirteen groaned – not out of pleasure, but out of frustration and desperation – as the elevator slowed to a stop on the 21st Floor. She dutifully took a step back, into the rear, left side of the car, and parted her legs that much further, to make sure they were shoulder-width apart. And, excruciatingly, she removed her right hand from her pussy, and clutched her left behind her back.   
  
As the doors slid open, Thirteen was joined by one of the building's many custodians. She knew the smell of sex was obvious, even to someone without as fine a palate as her own. But Thirteen doubted any of the janitors or building maintenance staff minded all that much; Thirteen suspected that it was less of a problem and more of a perk. What was more, Thirteen knew that her arousal was the least she needed to be embarrassed about. A quick glance at the older, Eastern European gentleman confirmed that this particular custodian was the very one who'd shown up on that fateful day in Investment Financing, the one who'd handed Thirteen a mop to clean her own mess.   
  
She blushed, all over. Thirteen's embarrassment only emboldened her excitement. Not so much the activity in Investment Financing itself (though, some), but rather the punishment that followed. She couldn't help it – being left overnight, with the blindfold, with the gag, with the handcuffs, turned her on.   
  
The girls' Friday night Bitch Sessions at the Imperial were for blowing off steam, sure, but they'd also become one part support group and one part confessional. And, inevitably, at least a portion of every night out, week in and week out, was a game of one-upsmanship around what screwed-up thing they had discovered turned them on that week. For a random cross-section of America, maybe folks might have confessed to being into feet, or leather, or fat girls, or bondage. Mailgirl confessions could be just as wide-ranging, but typically boiled down to some combination of exhibitionism, humiliation, submission, and punishment. A girl might cop to an inadvertent orgasm during a spanking, or to just how turned on they'd become while making a delivery to their old floor, or at their secret arousal being ogled while trying to get a signature.   
  
The confessions were met with hoots and hollers, with laughs and screams. But the power behind them was that they were all experiencing the same thing, that this wasn't a kink or fetish specific to one girl. Maybe this was due to the fact that USF had researched its volunteers, and approached only those exhibiting certain traits or psychological make-ups (they hadn't; Thirteen had checked). Or maybe they'd tapped into something more universal, something deep-seated but denied, something that had lain in wait within their collective unconscious. Most of the girls believed the former - that they themselves were damaged and screwed up, and that USF had somehow targeted them specifically. But, faced with confessions and interviews of mailgirls worldwide, Thirteen was firmly in the other camp; she suspected that anyone in this position might have struggled with the same unexpected sources of arousal.

Whether this arousal was unique to these twenty-four girls, or whether it was something more universal, the very fact that it was "normal" (or, at least, "normal" for this group) brought with it a certain freedom. Yes, Thirteen was ashamed that shame itself seemed to turn her on, but she could cop to it, own it, and act on it, because she knew that Seven was feeling the same way, and Twelve, and Fourteen, and Fifteen, and so on.   
  
Lost her own thoughts, Thirteen almost didn't get out of the elevator when it chimed its arrival on the 2nd Floor; her janitor was continuing his descent to B4. But, once awoken, Thirteen leapt to life, knowing that she was once more racing against the clock.   
  
She stepped into the elevator lobby, and then hurried through the gauntlet of toilets lining the hall into the locker room. She barely grunted an acknowledgement to either Four or Twenty-Three as she sped past them, but neither girl would take offense. Not only did they entirely understand, but they were otherwise engaged. Both were down on their hands and knees at a communal dog bowl at Mistress Zero's desk, sharing a quick morning snack.  
  
Fourteen was waiting for Thirteen at their adjoining lockers, and Thirteen hesitated momentarily, ticking through a handful of alternatives – the showers, the sinks, the locker of another girl. But the very fact that the brunette was already on her back, with her legs spread and her hand between them, was a temptation in and off itself. Not only did it mean that Thirteen wouldn't be alone, that she'd be just another masturbating mailgirl to the croissant-and-coffee crowd on the far side of the mirror glass, but – God help her – the idea of getting off next to Fourteen made it that much hotter.   
  
She glanced down at her leash, and was tempted to clip herself in, as Fourteen had done. But time was limited. Any chance she'd have to do something on her break other than get herself off, once she was done, would be at the mercy of Mistress Zero unlocking her. It wasn't a requirement, at least not until her break was over, but – again, God help her! – she'd learned from previous experience that it heightened the whole thing. And was a turn on, as evidenced by Fourteen, that she shared with others.   
  
She rolled to the floor in front of her locker, beside her masturbating coworker. Her whole body was wet and warm, and she felt sticky with sweat. The cool, tiled floor of the locker room provided welcome relief, but the girl next to her was kicking off body heat of her own. Fourteen had her head up towards and almost in her locker, her legs splayed towards the sinks and the audience beyond. Thirteen, in contrast, chose to face the other direction; she like to put her bare feet up, resting them low against the walls of her open locker. And, with no further delay, no need for any sort of foreplay, no need to ever-so-slightly tease herself as she had in the elevator, Thirteen's right hand found her pussy.   
  
Thirteen had never been an overly sexual person. She'd had her fair share of boyfriends. Though, maybe "fair share" was misleading, as she'd slept with a grand total of four men before that summer, and lost her virginity well into college. She was no virgin, though, and had even been in a mildly scandalous relationship with an Assistant Professor in the Psychology Department as late as that spring; she'd broken up with Christopher just prior to agreeing to spend her summer with USF, and had never shared with him the excruciating decision she had been forced to make. Everything with Christopher, with Brad, with Luke, with Mark, had been ordinary and run-of-the-mill. There was no role-play. There were no whips or handcuffs. There were no exhibitionist runs through a public park or late night in a hotel. There were no threesomes or lesbian leanings. Doggy-style, though still very much a turn-on, was as wild as Thirteen had got prior to becoming a mailgirl.   
  
It was sex. It was fine sex. It was acceptable sex. After she'd first slept with Mark, it was probably the better part of two months before she finally had an orgasm. Even then, it was due to oral. Her subsequent partners had been slightly more skilled lovers than Mark, and Thirteen herself had grown more confident in pursuing her own orgasm, so things had gotten better, and she'd been able to climax almost a third of the time with Christopher.   
  
Masturbation was obviously more successful, but Thirteen had masturbated infrequently. She'd go through a brief phase where she'd get herself off two or three nights in a row, but then it might be another three or four weeks before she did so again. She hadn't owned toys or vibrators. She hadn't watched a lot of pornography. She hadn't had intricate and detailed fantasies.   
  
Back in the locker room, Thirteen ran her right middle finger between her waiting pussy lips, back to front. At this point, she was no longer surprised at how wet she got after a morning on-duty. Her finger plunged deep inside her, finding no resistance to speak of. And, with the palm of her hand, she began grinding against her clit.   
  
Somewhere in the distance, she heard Mailgirl Number Eight yip in that unique combination of pleasure and pain, and she knew that Eight had earned enough demerits to necessitate a visit to spanking bench. Beside her, Fourteen moaned softly; she was a bit of an actress, but as the mirror glass was nearly soundproof, Thirteen knew that this was either sincere or for Thirteen's benefit, and probably a bit of both. But Fourteen, Eight, Twenty-Three, Four, and whoever the sixth girl on break happened to be – none of that mattered at the moment. The only thing that mattered was Thirteen's own pussy.   
  
No, Thirteen had never been a particularly sexual person prior to becoming a mailgirl. But she'd never cum like she'd cum that night in June, after her first day at USF. She'd cried after, and that first night had been the hardest night of the entire summer. But she'd hit her first climax and just kept going – two, then three, then four. She had thought about being stripped in Will Barrow's office. She had thought about shadowing Number Seven on deliveries. She had thought about showering in the locker room, very aware that she had an audience on the other side of the glass. She had thought about catching One masturbating at the sink. And she'd exploded in wave after wave of pleasure, losing herself to the thrill and shame and excitement and embarrassment of the day.   
  
With her left hand, Thirteen ran her palm over her sweaty forehead, and then up into her hair. Her fingers found traction in the tight, blonde hair. She pulled one pigtail loose, knowing full well that she'd have to do her hair up again before she went back on duty, but liked the sensation of maintaining a firm grip on her locks. With her right, Thirteen lost another finger deep inside of her, her ring finger joining her middle inside of her soaking, sopping pussy. With her palm, she continued to grind – back and forth, up and down, in forceful, circular motions.   
  
Masturbation was tolerated at USF, but there was no general, accepted consensus when it came to programs elsewhere. There were some (and USF had almost, apparently, been among them) who banned it outright, believing that it was a crude step too far. And there were others for whom any allowance to the mailgirls was unthinkable. Thirteen had read of programs where a girl was only allowed to touch herself with permission from her supervisor or another non-mailgirl employee, and others that allowed a mailgirl to touch herself, but not orgasm, without that same permission. There were still others for whom masturbation was like a trick to be performed upon command, and more than a few more whose mailgirls were indistinguishable from full-on sex slaves and were expected to derive their pleasure from their work alone.   
  
What Thirteen had found was that programs who banned the practice altogether did so with marginal success. More successful programs accepted that allowances had to be made, that mailgirls would otherwise sneak off and do so anyways – punishments and consequences be damned. They simply couldn't help themselves. And so the program at USF had strict rules that forbade the girls from masturbating while on duty, or from doing so anywhere but the mailgirls locker room. Even on break, it had to be reported to and logged by Mistress Zero, which meant that anyone who bothered to pull up the mailgirls app could count just how many times Thirteen had gotten herself off at the Plaza that week.   
  
But it was an allowance nonetheless, one in which most of the girls partook. Only a handful – Twenty-Four, Eight, and Five – had the willpower to resist, and both Twenty-Four and Eight had confessed to Thirteen that still did so, excessively, on their own time. Crowds, apparently, had begun to gather in the elevator lobby from 9:30 to 10:30, from 12:30 to 1:30, from 3:30 to 4:30, and at the end of the day, to gawk at the naked girls and watch them finger themselves into ecstasy.   
  
The program at USF, when it first launched in April, followed a similar trajectory as Thirteen had read about elsewhere. Among the initial class, there'd be hesitance and denial, girls insisting they wouldn't give into their baser impulses and willfully join in and play a part in their own public shame. They had self-control, after all. And, despite the fact that they were stripped naked and forced to parade around their former colleagues in the buff, none was eager to give in or give up, none was willing to show how much their new life was turning them on. But at USF, like other programs, someone finally broke; it had been One, just four days in, who'd first gotten herself off in the showers after a long, hard day.   
  
Never, in the history of the programs that Thirteen had researched, did a mailgirl stop after just one time. Once the initial taboo was broken, there didn't seem to be as much of a hurdle stopping a girl for going back a second, third, or fourth time. One had touched herself again the very next day, again in the showers, again after another long, hard day. She had been met with derision and scorn from most of her fellow mailgirls, as the first girl to masturbate often was. The original Mailgirl Number Four had been one of One's harshest critics, but she'd abandoned her job over the following weekend. By Monday morning there was a brand new Number Four and less resistance in the locker room.   
  
Three was the next mailgirl to break, and then Two and Six shortly thereafter. The new Number Four followed. Amongst that first cohort, all five of the "participating" girls wrestled with what they were doing, and had periods of restraint and self-discipline that typically lasted no more than a few days. As new mailgirls joined, it became an accepted behavior and a part of the girls' overall culture here at the Plaza. More than that, it became expected of them, and even Thirteen had to confess she felt annoyed at Five, at Eight, at Twenty-Four; the very fact that those girls weren't touching themselves regularly reflected poorly on the rest of them. But now that Twenty-Four was single, Fifteen and Fourteen were taking bets on when she'd finally succumb; Thirteen was surprised that Twenty-Four had made it through the week, but was extremely skeptical she'd last through next.   
  
The May class knew what the April class was doing, prior to the May class joining the program. And so it took less time for the first girl of the next group to break; Nine had masturbated on her very first day. Thirteen, for her part, had come into the program with eyes wide open, knowing full well that she'd likely join in – if for no other reason than to truly and completely experience life as a mailgirl. She'd even made the decision ahead of time that she'd wait until her second week, so as to "adjust" to the other humiliations that her advisor Gillian was asking of her, and to keep from coming off too slutty. But what Thirteen hadn't counted on, and what other girls who insisted "never me" didn't expect, was just how sexually intoxicating the life of a mailgirl really was. Being no more than a piece of meat, a set of tits and ass, a sexual object, left a mailgirl feeling sexual.   
  
Thirteen had given in on day number two.   
  
The night before, she had cum like she'd never cum in her entire life. But even that didn't touch the first time Thirteen had done so at USF. It left her feeling red-faced and embarrassed, sure, but she was one girl among many. And the truth of it was that she'd never felt so weak-in-the-knees and satisfied before. Satisfaction, though, turned out to be short-lived, and touching herself at work quickly became both a part of Thirteen's regular routine and so, so, so very necessary.   
  
It had been just barely over a minute on the floor in front of her locker, and Thirteen could already feel her first orgasm coming on. She'd been on edge and excited all morning, from stripping and being inspected, from waiting on the floor in Hoblitzel's office to making her rounds, from holding hands with Ten to riding the elevator with the janitor. None of the specific scenes, alone, lingered in her fantasies for long. Rather, it was the combined weight of the entire morning that had her as hot as she was, and it was the realization that she still had three-quarters of the day to go that sent her cresting for the first time.   
  
Her whole body convulsed violently. Her toes curled. Her jaw clenched. And she bucked her hips into the air, meeting an imaginary lover. She used her left hand to brace herself against the tiled floor, but it wasn't enough to keep her entirely in place. Her bare right arm was now touching Fourteen's bare right thigh, and neither girl was capable of pulling away. Whether it was the sensation of skin against skin or the sound of Thirteen's orgasmic exhalations, Fourteen was now, too, in the throes over her own climax.   
  
For Thirteen, her first was always easy. But her second orgasm was always even easier, and bigger, provided that she never let up from her first. She still couldn't believe that she'd ever, ever stopped masturbating after a single orgasm; but, then, she'd never been as aroused in her prior life as she was now regularly aroused in her life as a mailgirl. Her middle and ring fingers were extracted from her depths, covered in pussy juice, and took the place of the butt of her palm against her clit. They moved rapidly, desperately, back and forth, working in a frenzy to chase her second climax. She knew she was touching, bumping, and rubbing up against Fourteen. But Fourteen was squealing to herself just loud enough to reverberate through their end of the locker room, lost in her own orgasm. And even if one or the other hadn't been lost in herself, neither likely would have objected.   
  
USF allowed the girls to masturbate, but they had drawn the line at out-and-out lesbian sex. The "letter-carrying lesbians" phenomenon among mailgirls was common everywhere, but it was forbidden here in the building. It seemed to be an arbitrary line-in-the-sand, but one that Thirteen felt kept her baser instincts from running away her; even now, she had to fight the urge from rolling over and grinding her crotch against Fourteen's naked body. The fact that they were touching, even, risked the ire of Mistress Zero, but they were probably on the right side of the regulation. Which was laughable, considering that the side-by-side masturbation Thirteen and Fourteen were engaged in now was arguably more intimate and honest than anything she'd ever experienced with Christopher.   
  
Thirteen gasped for air, and felt her second orgasm begin to overtake her. Her thighs clamped together around her hand, and her feet were back on the floor. Her left hand found the metal collar around her neck, and held on tightly. Her lips parted, her eyes closed, and she let loose a deep, low, guttural moan.   
  
Fourteen, meanwhile, had finished her whinnying and whining, and – with an eye out for Mistress Zero – had pulled away from the naked blonde beside her, if ever so slightly. Thirteen couldn't have been sure if that particular orgasm had been Fourteen's second or third, or if it had been a one-and-done, but there was no doubt it had been real, as the brunette worked to regain her breath. Fourteen, like One, seemed to understand better than most girls that what they were engaged in was a bit of a show, and committed to her role. Thirteen had watched the girl masturbate in the showers before; while there was no doubt that she'd been turned on, and while there was no doubt she was getting herself off, her performance was over-the-top in parts, more pornographic than true desperation.   
  
For Thirteen, it was true desperation through and through. Her second orgasm was every bit as powerful as she'd expected it to be, originating deep inside of her and shooting bolts of sexual energy coursing through her entire body.   
  
But two wasn't enough. And, though Thirteen was racing against the clock, and though she knew chasing number three would be marginally more difficult than hitting one and two, she could not help herself.   
  
There'd be no number four. Or, at least, not now. By the time that Thirteen crested a third time, she knew her fifteen minutes were nearly up. And, as her ass came back down to the floor, it struck her just how much she was sweating. Unlike Fourteen, who was still chained up beside her and dutifully doing her best to give Thirteen her privacy and space (but whose knowing smirk signaled otherwise), Thirteen wanted to get in a rinse before heading back into the building. Fourteen probably could have benefited from a quick shower herself, as she, too, smelled of sex; but she wasn't perspiring as much as the blonde next to her.   
  
Thirteen looked at the smartphone on her arm, and confirmed that she had less than two minutes to get into position back at her locker. She wasted no more time, shedding the lycra armband and the smartphone itself, and then walked briskly to the showers. There was no need to wait for the water to warm up; even if mailgirls had been allowed a creature comfort as negligible as warm water, Thirteen knew she'd benefit from a cold shower. She needed to cool herself down inside and out.   
  
In a perfect world, she would have left herself enough time for a trip to the toilets, as well. But Thirteen did not live in that perfect world – far from it – and so she squatted in the shower itself. It was a common enough practice among the mailgirls, one that Thirteen regularly employed on her morning breaks, so that she could maximize the amount of time she spent on her most pressing urge. It struck Thirteen, not for the first time, that only a panel of mirror glass separated her from the elevator lobby beyond, but she didn't linger on that thought – it was out of her control.   
  
Paradoxically, it was that very lack of control that Thirteen found so freeing. She was a mailgirl – of course she wore no clothes. She was a mailgirl – of course she would get herself off in the middle of the day. She was a mailgirl – of course she'd subject herself to inspections and spankings and whatever else Mistress Zero and Human Capital chose to throw at her. All of this was expected of her, and it was only in pushing back, in demanding some measure of dignity, that she called attention to herself. It was what Thirteen felt that Five didn't understand, what Eight struggled with, what Twenty-Four would only soon likely come to realize – things were easier if a mailgirl just bent with the wind, and accepted her place.   
  
Maybe it was easier for Thirteen, as she hadn't worked at USF prior to becoming a mailgirl and would be leaving the company and the people behind that afternoon. Maybe she was in no position to judge. But she saw just how miserable Five and Eight were, in particular, and couldn't help but believe that they, too, would find freedom in submission, just as the other girls had done.

Freedom, and maybe something more. The summer had been eye-opening for Thirteen, and she'd shed any number of preconceptions about who she was when she'd shed her clothes. The girl she'd been three months ago seemed almost unfamiliar to her now – prudish and uptight, stressed out over longer-term deadlines and tuition bills. That girl had never, truly been looked at as a sexual object, and had never experienced just how surprisingly good it felt to be objectified, to be an object of lust. That girl had never cum like Thirteen had just cum now, had never had an orgasm that belonged in the same conversation as the orgasms she'd had that summer. That girl had never streaked through a public place, had never had a one night stand, had never had a girl-on-girl experience. That girl had never felt the us-against-the-world camaraderie she'd felt while holding Ten's hand in Products & Segments that morning, or the open and honest sharing she'd be a part of tonight at the Imperial. Thirteen wasn't looking to run out and volunteer to become a mailgirl somewhere else, and she felt plenty of sympathy for the girls who still had twenty-some more months to go. But with her summer now almost over, Thirteen could admit that at least part of her was happy she'd experienced life among the mailgirls.   
  
She rinsed her body, but was careful to avoid getting her hair wet. One of her pigtails was out, but she knew – if pressed for time – she could re-do it at her locker. Soap and water washed away the sweat and the sex, and even some of the grime from Thirteen's bare feet. It wasn't a full shower; she wouldn't take a long, complete, scrub-every-part shower again until the end of the day. But it was one of a number of periodic rinses throughout the day, to make sure that her "uniform" remained presentable.   
  
She toweled herself dry with one of the rough, white hand towels the girls were provided, rolled on a fresh coat of the girls' communal deodorant, and misted herself with conservative amount of perfume. And, even as she returned to her locker, she was already doing her hair. If she'd had more time, she might have checked her reflection, but time was a luxury that mailgirls rarely enjoyed. Thirteen was well-practiced at this, however, and knew she was in good shape as she took her place beside Fourteen at her locker. Down on her knees, thighs spread, arm band back in position, and now leashed to the floor, Thirteen was now ready for the rest of her morning.