**MGX (Coming Soon)**

by sbjdaniels

**Story Title: MGX (preview)**

I’m in motion, the whole city is in motion. Traffic flows through the busy streets like blood circulates a body; constant motion keeping the body alive. Right now I feel like I am part of it, part of the pulse, one with the motion, breathing in time. Alive, like the city itself.

I’m hunched over in speed-skater stance, pushing one side then the other, working the edges of my Rollerblades to get the maximum out of every stride. I’m in the zone, relaxed and focused, taking note of every uneven crack, manhole cover, and sewer grate in the pavement and adjusting my stride accordingly, all while maintaining my distance from the truck bumper in front of me. I have to be cognoscente of the car behind me too, sometimes drivers creep up a little too close for comfort. They already have a good view, sometimes they want better.

“Beep-beep” sounds the silver BMW in the fast lane next to me. The passenger-side window smoothly lowers and I see the middle-aged driver, from his business suit to his thinning hair, smiling at me as he shouts “Hey Number Eight! Looking good this morning!”

I have no idea who this is.

I give a little smile, unable to shout back because all the air in my lungs is going towards propelling me forward. I’m not smiling because I like the catcall. I’m smiling because I need that lane. I extend my left arm, palm flat and facing down. He glances at me and at the road a couple times. He’s not getting it. I open and close my hand a few times, extending all my fingers and my thumb, this is the best I can do for a blinker.

He nods “Okay” and gracefully his silver sedan eases back and gives me an opening.

I take the lane, give him the little “Thank You” wave and double my efforts. The slow lane gets up to about twenty miles and hour, the fast lane gets up to thirty. No one goes much faster in the Financial District because there is a stoplight every block. A lot of times I have ways to scoot around those red lights, circumvent traffic completely, but this time I do not have to as the intersection ahead looks clear. I have a green arrow and I can make it if I hustle.

Sliding into the turn lane I throw out my hand signal again. The BMW speeds up next to me on the right and the window lowers, “You look amazing Number Eight! That body is incredible! If I wasn’t married-”

I smile, nod, and breathlessly gasp “Have a… Nice day…” as I lean in to the turn up the cross street.

“Best ass in the city!” He shouts as he speeds off.

I ignore that, crouching and leaning into the turn, crossing over with my feet and extending my legs as far as they can go, gaining a lot of speed in the turn and exploding into the straightaway. That is the real difference between good skaters and bad skaters; good skaters gain speed in the turns, bad skaters slow down.

Having gained so much speed and with no traffic next to me I cover half the block in ten seconds, a damn good pace. Drifting from the fast lane to the slow lane, I ease onto the green strip of the bike lane just as traffic catches up to me.

“Your destination is on your right,” The computer voice says into my earbuds. Checking the display on the smartphone strapped to my arm I see I have nearly three minutes to spare.

I stand up on my skates and coast, breathing deep, hands on my bare hips as another car rolls by and honks. I give the little wave and smile as I gasp, a girl’s got to be nice; you never know who the next customer will be.

Scooting between parked cars I hop onto the sidewalk, past the gawking pedestrians and across the smooth concrete of the skyscraper’s plaza. Thirty stories of glass and steel shimmer down on me as I skate past the corporate art sculptures and up to the revolving door. I catch a glimpse of my reflection in the morning sun, still a little stunned at the sight; nearly six foot in my skates, almost unrecognizable with my helmet and sunglasses on. Elbow pads, knee pads, and wristguards looking over-sized on my slight, muscular frame, basically nude.

I stare at myself the same way the pedestrians do, gawking for a moment at my tight little body; small breasts rising and falling with every breath, beads of sweat tricking down the bumps of my developing abs and running all the way down to my clean-shaven vulva. The sun has bronzed my skin to a deep golden tan, the benefits of my Taiwanese heritage, smooth and unblemished except for the thick number “8” printed on top of my left breast and each hip, a reminder of what I was contractually bound to do-

The thought was interrupted by the buzzing of the smartphone. “One minute remaining,” it said into my earbuds, “please arrive promptly to avoid demerits.”

“Come on Carli, get it together.” I say to my reflection, “That’s not you. That’s Mailgirl Number 8.”

Managing to break my gaze off the reflection I ignore the onlookers and skate my way through the revolving glass door. The difference between the outdoor plaza and the indoor lobby was night and day. The air-conditioning sent an immediate chill through my body, I was nearly blind in the relative darkness and had to take my sunglasses off, the texture of skating across the smooth black marble is reminiscent of ice. The screen of my smartphone switches from red to blue as it detects that I made my destination on time. I glide across the smooth floor and admire the tasteful decorum as I approach the reception desk.

The receptionist, a kindly middle-aged woman named Jill (although I’m no longer permitted to call her that), smiles uncomfortably. She was always nice to me the few times I came here for meetings before my situation changed. Now she was visibly uncomfortable at the sight of me.

“Mailgirl Express,” I announce as I coast to a stop, “I’m here for a pickup.”

Jill had a worried look, “No one left anything up here for you.” I could hear her acrylic nails clack and clatter on her computer keyboard, “And I’m not seeing any messages either. Please have a seat while I call upstairs.” Jill motioned to the lobby seating area out of habit, her face instantly turning sour. My eyes are drawn to the cushy looking black leather couches and overstuffed chairs as a pang of jealously stabs me in the belly. Luxury like that is definitely off limits to a naked Mailgirl like me. While the MMU app in my smartphone would not detect me sitting on a chair any passerby with the MMU app on theirs could issue a demerit. Mailgirls are not to use the furniture, it’s not sanitary; and as this was a satellite DDE office I’m sure everyone has the app.

“Force of habit,” Jill said as she called (presumably) upstairs on her desk phone, “Sorry Ms. Lee.”

“No worries, Jill. I prefer to stand. And it’s Mailgirl 8 when I’m on duty.”

My MMU did not go off. Good. It recognized the correction I did to her speech. The MMU app knows a Mailgirl’s real name, common nicknames, anything from the employee file or parsed out of emails on the corporate servers. When in uniform with the MMU active a Mailgirl should only respond to certain names, it enforces the emotional distancing required for the efficiency of the Mailgirl program. The MMU app gives a Mailgirl ten seconds to correct a designation error. If they do not it results in a demerit. While I personally felt the system was draconian I was jealous of whoever programmed it. Speech parsers are some complicated code and from what I had experienced so far that part of the system was working very well.

I had plenty of time to think about that sort of thing as I stood on my skates, a dozen feet away from the reception desk, arms behind my back, chest out, like some soldier with an X-Games fetish. I would love to take the kneeling position but there was no resting mat in the lobby. I don’t want to leave a sweat puddle or a smear on the black marble floor. That would definitely be a demerit.

So I stood, waiting.

Business people walked past a few times, in singles and pairs, each taking a little look at me before proceeding to the exit or the elevator. For now I was just another piece of corporate art, a living sculpture worthy of no more attention than a plastic plant. Somehow it was more degrading than being leered at on the streets of San Francisco.

Why do I put up with this? Is it really worth it? I should be making millions off the work I’ve already done, but instead… this!?! I can walk away, sue the pants off the jerks who did this, eviscerate them in the press and bring the whole damn thing down-

“Mailgirl Number Eight,” Jill said as she hung up the phone, “Jon Linden will be down to see you in a minute.”

I nod, say “Thank you”, and try to get my anger to subside. My face gets flushed when I get mad and I don’t want a smug jerk like Jon Linden to see me worked up.

I can take this. I’m not some broken thing like other Mailgirls. I’ll be worth millions if I can just get through this humiliation.

As I finish the thought Linden comes strolling out of the elevator, says a quick thank you to Jill, and struts up to me with a bunch of junk in his hand; A post-it note and a package of sweat socks. WFT? He looks like every jerk yuppie you’ve ever seen in movie. “If it isn’t my favorite Mailgirl, Carol Lee.”

“It’s Mailgirl Number Eight when I’m in uniform, sir.”

“Is it?” Jon Linden smiled his best conceited smirk. “What’s your full official title now, Number Eight?”

I sigh and try not to roll my eyes. “Mailgirl Express Agent No. 8, sir.”

His smirk turns into a smile. “I’m going back and forth with the marketing guys about that. While the rest is good I’m not liking the ‘agent’ part. Makes it sound like Mailgirl’s have agency, like they can make decisions for themselves, but the MMU tells a Mailgirl what to do, right?”

“Yes sir.”

“So there really is no agency per se.” His smile gets so wide I can see the caps on his teeth. “So how about we go with ‘unit’ instead of ‘agent’. Try that on for size for me Carol.”

The anger starts to well up in my chest but I choke it down. “I am Mailgirl Express Unit Number Eight, sir. Please refer to me that way when I am on duty and in uniform.” I had to add that last bit in for the MMU. He called me ‘Carol’ again, the smug jerk.

“Isn’t that more fitting, Number Eight? More logical?”

The anger sank to my belly and went cold. “Yes sir.”

“Good. I’ll let them know the lead developer supports the name change.” Full of himself, the fool turns to the stuff in his hand. “As fun as all that is, I need you to deliver this package over to Brett Stahl at U.S. Financial, and make sure he gets that note too.” He handed me the sweat socks. “Also we’ve added Cambridge & Caine to the closed beta, you’ll need a badge to enter the building so have your Mailgirls head over there and go through security this afternoon. That way we will all be ready for the add Monday morning. OK?”

“Yes sir.”

“Good. So try to get all that done and remember we have the development meeting at 3pm at Hiromoto Plaza. The top brass will be there so look your best.”

Asshole. “Yes sir.”

I wait there for a second. He stares at me for a long moment and sits in one of the overstuffed chairs.

“Sir? You are supposed to load the address in to the app.”

Jon Linden pulled his phone out of his pocket and sat back. “Think you can do that for me? I’m a little busy.”

Ug. He was being difficult just to be difficult. I hug the socks to my chest and begin typing on the smartphone strapped to my arm with the other hand. Only being able to type with one finger it takes more than a minute. While I’m at it I set a reminder for 2pm. That will give me time to get cleaned up and get to the Hiromoto Plaza meeting. Only the Japanese would set up a meeting at three o’clock on a Friday, they love testing employee loyalty.

As I’m about to take my leave I hear the sound of a cell phone taking a picture. I glare down at Jon. His phone was aimed right at my crotch.

“Oops.” He says, shrugging innocently. “Sorry Carol. My finger slipped.”

“Delete that;” I say as coldly as I can, “and it’s Mailgirl Express Unit Number Eight when I’m in uniform and on duty, sir.”

“That’s my girl.” Jon says, the smug smile returning. “I’ll take care of this and you take care of that. See you at three?”

“Yes sir.” I grit my teeth and skate over to the receptionists desk, sure his eyes (and probably his camera) was on my ass the whole time. Fucking scum.

Jill gave me a knowing look. “That guy takes everything a step too far,” she whispers, “someday it will cost him dearly.”

I grin. “Hope I’m around to watch him get burned.”

“Five years,” she says matter-of-factly. “I see young executives like him pop around every five years or so. They make a big splash when they show up, sales go up for a six months and then it cools off twice as fast as it came. Then a year or two recovering from the damage they did on the way out and then the next hotshot shows up. Five years, Ms. Lee. Mark my words.”

“I will.” I told her as I took the drawstring backpack off my shoulders, “and now it’s Mailgirl Express Unit Number Eight when I’m in uniform and on duty, ma’am.”

She covers her mouth to stifle a giggle. “His idea, I assume?”

“Yes ma’am. You should have heard it. He’s loud enough.”

“All I overheard was that you were going down to US Financial?”

“Yes ma’am.”

She handed me a few letters and a package. “Then perhaps you can save us the postage?”

Actual mail. Who would have thought it. “Yes ma’am,” I say probably too eagerly, “thank you, ma’am.”

“Please call me “Jill”, Number Eight. This “sir and madam” language is too formal for the City by the Bay.”

I try not to roll my eyes as I recite from the manual; “A Mailgirl is required to call a patron by a formal title and never a familiar name. Would you prefer I call you “receptionist”, “secretary” or “ma’am”?”

“In that case “ma’am” will do fine.”

“You got it Jill.” I smile and whisper the last; I know the MMU speech parser is good, but not that good. I was just covering my back while Jon Linden was still in earshot.

Getting to the task at hand I added the new items to my MMU and slipped the parcels into my drawstring backpack, cinch it closed and sling it onto my back. The shifting weight caused me to roll backwards slightly and Jill gets a concerned look on her face. I squeak to a quick stop on my Rollerblades to show her I’m in control and I strap the cellphone back to my arm. The face of the phone lights up green and spells out the word ‘En Route’. The twenty minute countdown starts.

“You’ll want to take Kearny Street down to Howard,” Jill said helpfully.

“I know the way,” I assure her, “I’m a pro.”

“Yes,” she says while trying not to stare, “I guess you would have to be.”

I smile and wave goodbye as I crossed the lobby to the door and through that, the busy street outside. I take a deep breath. 600 California Street to 400 Howard, Kearny Street was against traffic the whole way meaning I would have to skate on the sidewalk. That’s the problem with a city that has too many one-way streets. If I go that way I doubt I would make it on time. I know the MMU will probably want me to go down Kearny too, then cut up Sutter Street, which is a little shorter but also against traffic. Forget it. I already have a route in mind when I catch my ghostly reflection in the glass door again; six feet tall in my skates, tight bulges of muscle over my lean frame, perky little breasts, the washboard abs that just kind of popped out over the last month and formed a natural “v” between my hips and focus too much attention down to the bare lips of my vulva. That was me now; Young, strong, and nearly as naked as the day I was born.

Naked. On display for the entire city to see.

Not to say I’m not wearing anything. I have all the pads. And my sunglasses. Other Mailgirls that work exclusively in offices have only their numbers to cover them up. In comparison I’m wearing winter clothes, but a lot more people see my bare ass everyday than your average-

“Number Eight,” the computer voice droned into my earbuds, “You have not moved in sixty seconds. Are you injured? Do you need assistance?”

I checked the MMU app to find a full minute has expired. Damn. Caught up in thought again. I need to stop staring at my reflection like an idiot. “On my way, Dispatch. Just slow getting up the hill. Buildings must be giving you interference.”

I pushed the door open and roll out onto the sidewalk. The world almost comes to a stop. I hate exiting buildings now. No one on the street notices me when I’m inside, humans on sidewalks have trained themselves not to look in the lobbies of office buildings any more than they do at the eyes of other pedestrians. It simply isn’t done. But the second I go outside those social conventions disappear; pedestrians stop in their tracks, sometimes cars too, even people on the other side of the street take notice. When I’m moving it’s different, I’m distracted and so are they, but between then and now those first few awkward seconds are the worst.

It’s barely 10AM, mid-morning, and still chilly among the shadows of the skyscrapers. It’ll get hot this afternoon but that feels a long way off, best to get moving and build up some body heat again.

I’m pushing side-to-side with my feet, short powerful stokes to get some speed as passersby continue to stare. Naked people are not an entirely strange sight in San Francisco, hippie culture had almost eliminated that taboo years ago, but public nudity was more acceptable in the Haight-Ashbury or Castro neighborhoods. Not so much in the Financial District and definitely not in the middle of the day.

Four weeks of this and I’m still not used to it yet. I’m not sure I will ever be.

Getting up to the intersection of Kearny and Market, traffic speeds across the intersection. Everyone is staring. I feel a couple dozen eyes on my bare body, like I’m free erotic entertainment as we all stand at a red light. A businesswoman comes out of a Starbucks and looks me over, the paper cup up to her mouth as she pretends to drink. A guy in a red convertible pats the seat next to him and gives me a ‘come hither’ look. A child across the street points me out to her mom. Emotions start to well up in me when Dispatch crackles through the earpiece again.

“Proceed south on Kearny Street and turn east onto Sutter.”

Lame.

I pressed the call button, “I don’t have time for that, Dispatch. Reroute.”

The computer processed. “You are on the fastest available route.”

I press the button quick. “That’s three blocks south and three blocks east, all against traffic. I’ll be dodging pedestrians the whole way. Reroute so I can skate on the streets and make up some time.”

The artificial intelligence was quiet for a second. The businesswoman with the Starbucks walks up next to me gives a judgmental stare, “Feeling very liberated this morning?”

I meet her gaze as Dispatch repeats in my ear. “Proceed south on Kearny to east on Sutter. Late deliveries will result in demerits.”

I have no one to blame but myself. I programmed the damned thing.

“Affirmative,” I said as there was no point in arguing with a computer. The businesswoman smirks. I was talking to Dispatch but she took that affirmative for her.

“Well, you are setting Women’s Rights back a thousand years but at least you look good doing it.”

I try to blink away the confusion.

She gives me a playful smile, “Speaking of ‘doing it’, what time do you want to get off?”

I’m speechless. Her eyes dance over my naked body again. Her sultry little smirk, the bright blue eyes. She’s older, with the red hair she looks like that woman from X-Files. I have nowhere to hide, we’re at a red light. Her attention is making me feel a certain way. I’m not gay but I appreciate the attention. My body is responding to her, cutting my brain out of the decision. Yikes. I’m lucky this is so early in the day because by mid-afternoon I need a massage so bad I would probably let her do whatever just for a good rub down.

“What’s the matter?” she says, head tilting to the side, “Cat got your tongue?”

The cross traffic light turns yellow. It won’t be long now. Ten seconds now and it’s all I can do to stop from squirming. “Who’s cat ever took somebody’s tongue?”

“I’ve had a few.” She chuckles, confidently flicks open her purse and pulls out her business card.

“I’m Cat. Catherine Bigelow. And you are?”

Before I can think my mouth defaults, “Mailgirl Express Agent Number Eight.”

Her eyebrows raise. “Mailgirl Express? Is this a service my firm can sign up for?”

“Not yet ma’am. We’re in a closed beta.” I take her card, hope she doesn’t notice my hand trembling, and slide it behind the MMU in its holster. “Our only service area is the Financial District for now anyway.”

“That’s fine,” she says, “that’s where my law firm is.”

I nod, trying not to look too eager before a possible client. “Can I put you on our mailing list?”

Cat smiles pleasantly, “Sure. And let me know when your beta opens up. I will definitely use your services.”

Ug. She’s coming on so strong. Normally that is such a turn off but right now it is really pushing my buttons. Is it just her or something else?

“I have to go now.” She says, turning away and crossing the street.

I blink. Foot traffic is all around me. It’s another second before I realize I almost wasted the whole light.

The cross signal says I only have four seconds. I push hard, side-to-side, getting the most out of the edges of my blades. I pass Cat, dashing through the light and down the sidewalk.

Wondering if she make it in time I look over my shoulder. She smiles. A sidewalk grate catches my skate and nearly sends me tumbling to the pavement. I recover, getting low and pushing forward, my attention drawn back to the sidewalk, plotting my course to avoid pedestrians and uneven irregularities in the concrete.

Instead of looking back again I glance at my MMU. Damn, less than fifteen minutes to get to 400 Howard. There will be not reprieve. U.S. Financial loves assigning demerits. I’ll need to push really hard to make it in time. That’s fine. A good sheen of sweat and no one there will be able to tell what an effect that little conversation with Cat had on me.

I’m in motion again, moving with the pulse of the city. Pedestrians step out of the way or stare at me dumbfounded. I skate around. I’m naked. They stare. I will not be humiliated. I focus on the task at hand and push myself hard. It’s the only way to get through the day.