**Five Mailgirls**

by donnylaja

1.

It was the top (twenty-sixth) floor, and the blinds had to be drawn. Not because of the need for secrecy; no one could see into these big bay windows, not even the Guoanbu (the Secret Police). Of course both the Guoanbu and the Hsa Corporation were mutually aware of that. But the snow and ice of downtown Harbin were so bright this January morning that otherwise it was impossible for the thirteen officers to see each other across the big oak table up here in the penthouse boardroom.

This was Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang Province, booming like most Chinese cities these days, now with a population of 6 million, despite its location, up past North Korea, bordering on Siberia. Today the temperature was minus 12 Celsius, or plus 10 degrees Fahrenheit, normal for this time of year. In keeping with conservation guidelines issued by the Ministry of Power, the heat was turned down to 18 Celsius (65 Fahrenheit). Consequently the executives, fourteen men and eight women, wore sweaters over their well-tailored Western-style business suits.

The CEO, Mr. Chen, waited for everyone to settle in and then began. “You have all seen my memo,” he said, in impeccable Mandarin, with his usual stern gaze. They all knew what he expected of them. Yes, everyone had seen the memo; in fact, read it three or more times. “Your thoughts?”

“I don’t think it is a good idea,” said Mr. Zhou, a small bald man who gestured with wrinkly hands. Chen was a smart CEO. He didn’t surround himself with yes-men; he had hired these officers for their experience and abilities and wanted the benefit of their viewpoints. It was understood that thoughtful dissenting views were invited. “There are too many spectacular aspects to it. I know the decision has been made but we must minimize the affronts to traditional sensibilities.”

“I think it is in violation of the Beijing Declaration,” said Ms. Hua, an older woman who, despite the current fashion, had let her hair go gray. She was referring to the 1995 Declaration and Platform for Action, the official Chinese Communist Party document which guaranteed equal employment opportunities for women.

“I disagree,” said Ms. Sun, a generation younger than Ms. Hua. “It in no way affects the status of women in the Corporation. We have all the rights under this arrangement that the men have.” She and Ms. Hua looked at each other. There were six other women at the table; the Hsa Corporation had embraced the Beijing Declaration from the beginning. In fact the last CEO had been a woman.

The Comptroller, Ms. Ling, stood up, as she often did for emphasis. “As a woman it is best for me, I think, to make this presentation.” Only briefly glancing at her notes, she said, “The ‘Mailgirls’ program has been tried with a surprising degree of success at American corporations. There is no denying the benefits of having a dedicated cadre of messengers within a building, or within a complex. As far as the, uh, nudity aspect of it, clothes just get in the way. Once the issue of modesty is conquered, both from the aspect of the girls themselves, and from the aspect of Hsa personnel who learn to be undistracted, the program is remarkably efficient. And of course there are savings in laundry, uniforms and so forth.”

“There is a subsection in the Index to the Appendix that says, ‘Uniforms’,” Mr. Chi pointed out. “I wish we were given the full Appendix, not just the Index.”

Mr. Chen broke in. “That is only definional. ‘Uniform’ is defined as ‘complete and total nudity at all times’.”

“What about shoes?” Mr. Yang said. He spoke with a Cantonese accent, being from the South. “These girls spend the whole day running. It would be good branding if visitors could see them wearing Zhe-lings.” Zhe-lings were a popular line of running shoes produced by a Hsa affiliate in Yang’s home town of Guangzhou.

“I am aware of that opportunity,” Ms. Ling said, “but bare feet is much better. We save on footwear, and studies have shown that there is actually more risk of sprains if sneakers are worn. Footwear tends to weaken the natural tendons. Running in bare feet restores them to their natural strength, critical when turning up stairs and dodging past people in hallways. Also the girls are trained to run on the balls of their feet, which reduces shock to the spine.”

“Toe stretching and other exercises are preliminaries to being accepted into the program,” Mr. Chen said. “Also in a short time the soles get toughened. I understand that in three years not a single Mailgirl has reported so much as a splinter, let alone any ankle sprains or stubbed toes.”

“I understand also that psychologically the girls have to realize that they are fully naked,” Ms. Ling continued. “And being shod one actually feels partly clothed. Further, though their soles get very tough — by a certain point they can walk on nails or broken glass — they also get very sensitive. There was one case where a Mailgirl reported a warm floor and it turned out the boiler below was overheating. Another time unusual vibrations, detectable through the floor only by a barefoot Mailgirl, alerted staff to an elevator issue.”

“I thought these — Mailgirls — were not supposed to speak except in connection with deliveries, or when spoken to,” Mr. Yang said.

“They are permitted to notify staff on their own initiative of . . . what’s the phrase here . . . ” She looked down at her ipad and scrolled through the contract. “‘Dangerous or incipient conditions’.”

“So they have to be smart enough to do that,” Mr. Yang said.

“Yes,” said Ms. Ling with some irritation, “and I wish you would get over the idea that these girls are just pretty bodies. These are intelligent and accomplished young women. In America they’re simply working off a punishment of some kind, that’s all.”

“Well . . . ” said Mr. Wang, a portly man with a habit of fumbling with the key chain on his three-piece suit, “I do think our system would be better. It’s bad enough the girls have numbers imprinted on, what, both hips, on the lower back, and over the left breast. We don’t want them to be like prisoners on some kind of chain gang.”

“No, of course not, and I’m glad you brought that up,” Ms. Ling said. “As you know we will draw our Chinese mailgirl candidates from the lottery pool.” This was the group of female applicants to Beijing Technical University, the most prestigious and selective STEM college in the country, whose grades were exceptional, yet not quite high enough for automatic admission. “These girls are highly motivated to do what it takes to get into BTU.”

“Motivated enough to spend a year being displayed totally naked?” Mr. Wang said. “I know some of these girls are from the outlands, desperate to do good for their families, but . . . ”

“You would be surprised what gifted, driven young people would do, especially from poor areas.”

“Even though those places tend to be the most culturally conservative!” Mr. Wang said. “I hear that out in Xining the girls don’t even like to be seen in sleeveless blouses!”

“Well we can’t help that.”

“To return to my main concern, as to objectification,” Ms. Hua said, “the girls who apply to be Mailgirls have to conform to various . . . physical standards. They will be judged by their bodies.”

“That is another thing we can’t help. Girls who are overweight, or who are not in good physical condition, or for some reason are unable to spend much of the day running, cannot be mailgirls. This means they must be slender. Also we cannot use girls who might be thin but have very large breasts. Their breasts would be jumping around as they run and an impediment to quick service, not to mention painful for the girl.”

“What about putting the really busty girls in bras?”

“That would introduce an element of clothing, and other logistical issues that would complicate the program. Remember: the great virtue of the Mailgirls idea is simplicity. No uniforms, no footwear . . . and because they live on site, their diet can be strictly regulated and housing costs are for all practical purposes nonexistent.”

“They sleep with no pillows or blankets, apparently,” Mr. Wang said, looking at the scanned materials.

“Yes, another saving. Just towels for after they shower, which they must drop as soon as they are dry. Being covered while sleeping creates the desire for covering during the day, which must be strictly avoided.”

“This is just during business days, five days a week, right?” Mrs. Hua said.

“Yes, though they can work late if needed. They can go out on weekends though as always they must avoid clothing, and they return to the building to sleep. We will arrange places within the city where these naked girls can go without causing disruption.”

Mr. Zhou grunted and said, “One final issue and it’s so obvious that I hardly have to say it. Why here? Harbin?? The coldest city in China! A strange place to have girls running around without the benefit of clothing.”

Ms. Ling said, “The American Mailgirls have been able to scurry from building to building on days as cold as this. Only a minute or two outside does not harm them. And once the program succeeds up here, it would be hard for any other prefecture to object. After all, if naked runners are feasible in Harbin, they could be feasible anywhere in China!”

“Indeed,” Mr. Chen said. “This could easily become a national program, approved by the Ministry of Employment. And it would start right here in this room! We will be well recognized I’m sure.” There was a slight pause. In a lower voice, with an eye-flick to the blinds, he said, “I wish I knew how we got this chance. Apparently some back channel deal with the Americans, the idea is copyrighted, or something like that. But as usually happens, the Americans might come up with an idea, but bring it over here and we will do it right even when Americans are screwing it up.”

Mr. Wang snorted. “Americans. Money, but no brains.”

“No work ethic either,” Ms. Sun said. “I bet when our girls get trained they will be twice as productive as the American girls.”

“That would follow the usual pattern,” Mr. Chen said. “Though from my understanding, the Mailgirl they sent, to serve as a model for our trainees, is a star, the absolute best.” He looked at Ms. Ling. “Is she ready?”

Ms. Ling said, “She has been waiting in my office for an hour.” She pressed the intercom in front of her. “Shay-lin, please bring in the American Mailgirl.”

2.

The big oak doors opened and the officers and directors turned their heads. Those near the doors moved their chairs back so that all could see. Shay-lin closed the doors behind her and stood there at attention.

The girl was without a trace of tan lines, fit, and beautiful. She stood before them, looking dutifully at Mr. Chen, hands at her sides, feet about half a meter apart, with lush pubic hair at the junction of her lithe thighs. A large number “1” was printed over her left breast, and on both hips. She turned around, following preset instructions. She had strong but thin legs, a tight little butt, and another “1” printed on the small of her back. She turned around to once again face them.

“Ladies and gentlement, fellow officers of Hsa Corporation, our first Mailgirl, we will call her Mailgirl Number 1. Or as you will call her, simply, ‘1’.” Mr. Chen let the sight sink in for a moment. Then he read off, “Age 20, height 1.65 meters, weight 50 kilos.” Then he said, “You will notice her perfect physical condition.” He nodded to her. Again as if on cue, Mailgirl 1 approached the table, and bracing herself with her hands, climbed onto it. They saw her toughened soles and widely-spread toes grabbing onto the gilded purfling at the table’s edge, then the rough bare feet striding across the exquisitely polished top. She got to the center of the table and stood upright at attention, her head about a meter below the big chandelier.

“Shay-lin, if you could,” Ms. Ling said. The assistant went around the room and opened all the blinds, which took about a minute. Almost blinding sunlight flooded the room, some direct, some reflected from the bright ice and snow below. Mailgirl 1 stood still, looking out onto downtown Harbin as it came into view. The officers looked at the girl now illuminated from all sides. They noticed the nipples, stiff in the chilly boardroom, and the goose pimples.

“As you can see from her nipples, she is cold right now,” Ms. Ling said. “But Mailgirls are always on the run so the cold does not bother them. In fact on their runs they tend to get sweaty.” She looked up at the girl’s face. “1, demonstrate your body.”

The Mailgirl bowed stiffly and politely, then stretched her arms up toward the ceiling, showing the well-defined yet thin muscles of her shoulders and arms, the firm, out-thrust breasts with the hard nipples extending out further, and lower down the almost freakish narrowness of her concave tummy with a tracery of abs. She spread her legs and arms into a big “X”. Then she turned around so that the others could get the same view.

“A low-fat diet and a strenuous life style will produce results,” Ms. Ling said. “Indeed!” said Mr. Wang.

“I see she doesn’t shave her armpits,” Ms. Sun said.

“True, nor does she shave her legs,” Ms. Ling said. “The armpit hair, which as you see is quite sparse, prevents chafing during a day of running. The leg hair is barely visible but it serves a warming function.”

“Let me now introduce our first crop of applicants,” Ms. Ling said. With a nod to Shay-lin, the door opened again and four little girls gingerly padded in on squirming bare feet.

No, they weren’t “little” — they had all reached 18 and were legally competent to sign their contracts. This everyone knew. But their nervousness and shrinking hesitancy made them seem smaller and younger. They were dressed in nothing more than short school skirts and bra-style halter tops. Clearly they were naturally modest and conservative girls who were embarrassed at being so exposed. The cold made them more nervous. As they assembled at the four corners of the room they tried to rub the goose pimples off their arms and covered one bare foot with the other.

“Please, girls!” Ms. Ling said strictly. The four recruits promptly put their arms at their sides, and separated their feet. They stood with straightened backs. Their little nipples poked through the thin white halter material, no doubt to their acute mortification.

“As you can see they are only partway along the road to the mentality of a Mailgirl,” Ms. Ling said. “With Mailgirls, I understand, comraderie is important and they will be kept together, supporting each other.”

The officers looked at the teenage girls one by one, as the girls tried to fix their gaze on the table, somewhere near 1’s feet.

“To show her lack of a sense of modesty, while also showing respect for her superiors, 1 will now do what are called the ‘presenting positions’. First, the front. She will open her vaginal lips while looking at you. The protocol is for you to look her in the eye, then look into her vagina, then look her in the eye again. As you might imagine this demonstrates the absence of bodily modesty, which makes for more efficient Mailgirl service, while at the same time subservience. Mei-lin, perhaps she can start with you.”

1 sat down in front of Ms. Hua, then leaned back on her elbows. She spread her legs wide, then with practiced fingers reached down and spread her labia majora, then the labia minora. Ms. Hua, after some hesitation, looked up into the naked girl’s eyes, then bent down a bit to look into what Ms. Hua and indeed most women consider their ultimate feminine secret. The light was so bright from outside that Ms. Hua, the Director of International Relations, could easily see the pink cave within, even back to the cervix. Then the highly accomplished, immaculately dressed Ms. Hua looked up at the naked girl and once again made eye contact. Female spoke to female wordlessly. The naked girl’s eyebrows knitted ever so slightly, with emotions that no one could guess.

Now 1 scooted over to Mr. Wang, whose masculine gaze was quite a bit different from Ms. Hua’s. He was also more aggressive in his perusal of 1’s interior, and his eyes were hungrier as they met the girl’s. Such was probably unavoidable.

1 went over to Ms. Ling, then Mr. Chen, and then around the table. The entire exercise took about ten minutes, during which the girls at the corners almost shook in their nervousness, creeping terror showing in their eyes.

“Now the rear position. In this setting 1 will look the opposite person in the eye as she displays her anus.” The naked girl, evidently used to such exposures, got up on her knees in front of Ms. Hua, turned around, spread her knees, then reached back and pulled her buttocks apart. The brilliant winter sunshine made every crease and wrinkle in 1’s anal sphincter starkly visible. She looked across the table at Mr. Zhou and made prolonged eye contact. It was too intense for Mr. Zhou who broke the gaze.

Again 1 went around the table, displaying her anus to all the officers in turn and then to Mr. Chen and Ms. Ling. Most of the persons she looked in the eye could not return the look for long. It was almost as if she was daring them to stare as long as possible. A couple of them got a glimpse also of the truth, that 1 was a stronger person than they were.

It went on for what seemed to the officers like an unbearably long time. Finally after the last anal exposure 1 again stood up on top of the table.

“Girls, you may go now,” Ms. Ling said. Shay-lin escorted the four frightened teenagers out.

Mr. Wang coughed. His throat had gotten very dry. “I — don’t think those youngsters are ready.”

“Don’t worry,” Ms. Ling said. “1 will train them. We are not in a hurry. And if they ‘wash out’ there are others to replace them. Many girls want to get into that university. And it is a Party directive.” This harsh fact, of course, superseded all other considerations.

“Now let’s bring down the screen, and Shay-lin, could you draw the blinds again.” With a tap of a key on Ms. Ling’s laptop the big screen was filled with a diagram of the building. “1’s service will begin next Monday. Notice the dedicated stairways for Mailgirl passage. Also you might have noticed that the lobby was blocked off for construction. This is what is being built.”

The screen switched and they gasped. This was not in their briefing materials. Mr. Zhou, when he finally caught his breath, said, “You mean — these girls will — sleep in the lobby?”

It was a platform, so as to provide better viewing, upon which was a bare mattress, an open shower, a shelf with soap, shampoo and a toothbrush, and a toilet.

“And eliminate her — bodily wastes — with the public coming in?”

“It’s not as bad as it seems,” Ms. Ling said. “1 has no inhibitions, of course. And it is thought that our participation in the Mailgirls program should be announced to the public in a forceful way. Otherwise, with 1 scurrying around the building, she might not be seen.”

“This I am opposed to,” Mr. Zhou said. “We don’t want to be known as the business with a public sex show.”

“What the Mailgirls do with each other, after hours, is their own business of course,” Ms. Ling said. “But they are not to engage in sexual activity during work hours. As for napping, eating and ‘doing their business’ in public view, surprisingly, after the first couple of weeks everyone takes it as a matter of course. To a certain extent Mailgirls become invisible.”

“That’s hard to believe.”

Ms. Ling shrugged. “It’s true.”

The screen retracted back up to the ceiling. Most of the officers seemed out of breath.

Mr. Zhou looked back up at “1”. He said, “I can’t help but be impressed by this girl.” They admired her statuesque nude form as she stood on her tough bare feet in the middle of their table, looking out into the distance, her thoughts unguessable.

Mr. Chen said, “Amusingly, there was some kind of misunderstanding in bringing her here. Someone on the American side must have been looking at the wrong form and thought she was arriving as an exchange student. A complete set of clothes had actually been purchased! Higher-ups quickly got involved and remedied the situation. When the delegation arrived the whole group went outside into the snow and the clothes were burned as she watched.”

“Typical American screw-up,” Ms. Hua said.

“It certainly was,” Ms. Ling said. “Clothes are the very last thing a Mailgirl needs.”

They looked up again at 1’s face, the pretty green eyes, the mid-length dark red hair that spilled over her shoulders but not long enough to reach her breasts. “Tell me,” Mr. Wang said. “What is your real name?”

1 cleared her throat, having not spoken for a while, aware that she was being closely watched. “Tami Smithers.”

3.

“I feel cold looking up there,” Xifeng (“3”) said.

“It’s that snow around the edges,” observed Ngo-kwang (“4”).

“It’s minus 19 Celsius right now,” Yingtai (“5”) said, smiling as usual, looking at her smartphone.

“Brrr!!” said all three girls in unison, hugging each other. Huiqing (“2”) wrapped her arms around her erect nipples.

Tami (“1”) smiled, watching the girls squirm. Her head was lying on Huiqing’s butt, part of a tangled arrangement of naked female flesh on the huge round mattress, set up on a platform for better public viewing in the cavernous octagonal atrium. Not that anyone was around to view them now. It was 9 p.m. and the Hsa Corporation’s work day had ended three hours ago. Now it was just the five Mailgirls, lying on the plastic mattress, without benefit of sheets or blankets or even pillows. They used each other’s butts as pillows. And of course bare skin against bare skin was a way of keeping warm.

Not that the air was actually that cold. By design it was a little below what the Chinese consider room temperature. But the girls had gotten used to it pretty quickly. If they really got cold there were heaters at the edges but they were using them less and less.

“This is nothing,” Ngo-kwang said. “I went to naked school when I was little.”

“‘Naked school’?” Huiqing said. Huiqing tended to be energetically inquisitive. “I think I heard of those.”

“Yes, it was true. We went to classes wearing nothing but shorts, even in winter, when we ran outside in the snow and jumped into the icy pond. It was supposed to make us tough.”

“Did it?”

“I think so . . . it was a long time ago. I don’t remember it being uncomfortable. It was like everything being brightly lit, all over.”

After a few seconds Xifeng said, “I don’t think I’ll ever get used to being naked. And everyone seeing every little part of us!”

There was a murmur of assent from the other novices. It was only two weeks into their lives as Mailgirls and they were still not used to it.

Tami said, “Don’t be ashamed. You all have beautiful bodies. They like looking at us but remember they can’t touch. And I think the female execs are jealous.”

“Maybe,” Huiqing said. “Some of those older guys though. Mr. Tung, for example, that guy with the white beard in 1702. After I delivered that blueprint to him this morning and ‘presented’, he looked right into my vagina with a toothy grin, and actually licked his lips. Ugh!” At this memory she closed her legs tight, something which would have earned her demerits if on duty.

“Then there’s Mrs. Hua,” Yingtai said. “She might be an old witch, but I think she wishes she had my body.”

“She wants you,” Ngo-kwang said. Ngo-kwang was beginning to realize she was gay and tended to fixate on such matters.

“Yuck! Don’t say that!” Yingtai said.

“She totally wants you!” Ngo-kwang said. “For me, I’ll take Ms. Sun. She is so hot!”

“Ohhh, Ngo-kwang!” Xifeng said, putting her hands over her ears. She came from Nanning, in the jungles next to Vietnam, a conservative area. Ngo-kwang enjoyed sticking pins in her cultural bubble.

The girls were talking fast, as 18-year-old girls do, and Tami’s Chinese wasn’t good enough yet to understand all they said. They helped her work on it every night, after Tami got done with her online schoolwork. Fortunately she was a whiz at academics and had no problem carrying 15 credits while still doing the 8 – to – 6 as a Mailgirl.

Xifeng turned over, and because she was hugging Ngo-kwang, that girl turned over too, then all the girls repositioned. There was no danger of falling off the mattress. It was twelve feet across, with a little wooden table in the middle that the girls used as a nightstand. At present it held the five decafs that Tami had made for them after foot-stretching. For any Mailgirl taking good care of her feet was of first importance. Every night and every morning they stretched each other, usually in a big circle, massaging the muscles and tendons, spreading the toes with intertwined fingers, and at the end rubbing in the lotion that kept their feet supple yet tough. Their bare feet spent all day pounding over tile, carpet, that bristly fake grass in the lobby, and the cold gritty corrugated iron of the “Mailgirl stairs”, and had to be carefully taken care of.

Once again they all looked up at the stars, through that skylight 26 floors above them. From hearing snatches of conversation the girls had learned that it was modeled on the Bligh Tower in Syndey, Australia, designed by one RJ Tayler, an elegant man in a three-piece suit who occasionally visited. Along each of the eight sides were the darkened windows of the offices. There was no one else in the building; Harbin, like all Chinese cities, was very safe and there was no need for nighttime security. All was quiet except for the girls’ voices reverberating in the darkness, and the occasional faint whirring of the HVAC system.

The four novices had dedicated themselves to nine months of Mailgirls service and despite being denied clothes or shoes they knew they were lucky. They were winners of a lottery for those who had applied to the highly prestigious Beijing Technical University but didn’t have grades quite high enough for automatic admission. They were from diverse backgrounds, and though as Chinese girls they were to various degrees shy, modest and deferential to authority, they had different personalities. Huiqing (whose number “2” was printed over her left breast, on each hip, and on the small of her back), energetic, assertive, a sponge when it came to absorbing information, was from a suburb of Shanghai. Her father was an engineer; at BTU she would be following a family tradition. Her mother was a teacher. Xifeng (3) was a quiet, religious type, not surprising because her mother tended the local Buddhist shrine. Her father was a farmer. Ngo-kwang (4), the emerging lesbian, was a sophisticated girl from Beijing, whose parents worked for the state TV network. Yingtai (5), smiling, fun-loving, was from Zhengzhou. Her father, a widower, was an auto mechanic.

Their first few nights on the mattress were not comfortable. Unlike Tami they were not used to sleeping in the nude, and moreover without blankets. Xifeng admitted to being scared in the cavernous darkness, which was interrupted only by the stars above and the little red emergency lights up on the 12th and 24th floors. Tami reminded her, “There’s no one here but us. And things don’t suddenly pop into existence when they turn off the lights.” Then she startled them all by shouting “HELLO!!” It echoed up and down the atrium. After their initial shock the girls giggled, and soon they were shouting little “boops” so as to maximize the number of echoes. Then Ngo-kwang shouted “I want to lick Ms. Sun!!” and continued to more obscene declarations. Yingtai shouted “Huiqing has different size nipples!” Huiqing: “Yingtai has a puffy belly!” “I do not!” “Ngo-kwang’s butthole has three freckles!” “Yifeng has a stretch mark on her left boob!” Body issues, the bane of any teenaged girl, melted away like unwanted fat as the girls got used to being naked 24/7, every inch of their bodies being on full display for the world of clothed adults.

With fear of darkness overcome, a few nights ago the girls started playing hide and seek in the enormous structure, running or sneaking up and down the stairs, prowling the pitch-black corridors, and trying to surprise each other around corners, though it was hard to muffle the approaching thud of bare feet on carpet. They were getting into the habit of wandering the 26 floors, to the point where they felt they knew every byway, every flower-stand in every alcove, every painting on every wall, the feel of every section of carpet under their sensitive soles. And every office that was left open, not that they dare touch anything. They would call out across the space above the atrium and try to guess what floors the others were on. “Yingtai! Guess what floor!” one voice would echo out. “13!” “Wrong, 15!” They were giddy as kids, the huge deserted dark building their own playground, to run around naked in. The girls were not allowed to leave the building, except during the day on Saturdays and Sundays. But it was so extensive that they did not feel confined.

After the first few days sleep became easier, partly because they were exhausted as their duties were revved up, partly because Tami helped out by serving warm milk before the suggested 10:30 p.m. bedtime. Soon the girls found themselves waking up spontaneously a minute or two before the 6:30 a.m. alarm, ready for another day.

The milk was from the well-stocked fridge next to the mattress, not on the platform but on floor level. The mattress was five feet up, which not so coincidentally put the girls’ bodies at eye level for passers by. The mattress was where they typically returned for lunch and for their 15-minute breaks. It was their home, exposed though it was. A set of four stairs to the side led down to the floor level, though they could jump down too, breasts bouncing, bare soles slapping onto the terrazzo. The fridge was part of a little kitchenette, with no walls of course. Everything the girls did was on unobstructed view. To the other side was a shower with clear glass sides and a toilet. Next to the toilet were the enema bags; a Mailgirl’s anus is often on display and has to be clean inside and out. Another little table had a sink and toothbrushes and cosmetics and a little mirror, and the drawer where the Mailgirl Monitoring Units (MMU’s) were kept off hours. Such was the layout of their “dorm”.

During the day the atrium was filled with official people going here and there. Most gave the girls a glance. A few stopped to look for a moment or two, particularly if one of the girls was relieving herself. The toilet (like everything else) was set up so that the girls were always facing outward. They had to face the public as they pooped. Still, extended gawking was frowned upon. The only exception was an artist named Slice Reality, who set up an easel a few times a week and naturally he could gaze at them as long as needed for his work. He had some kind of connection to the worldwide Mailgirls operation and was probably creating material for their publicity. The girls were not allowed to ask, or even to talk to him. In fact aside from reporting on deliveries, they were not allowed to talk to anyone, technically not even each other, except during breaks, though they often engaged in their naked-girl-talk when they passed each other on the Mailgirls stairs during deliveries.

Being a Mailgirl, as one might imagine, put one in perfect physical condition. Even after only two weeks the novices noticed their waists getting smaller, their bodies more muscular, with more spring in their step. The food they were provided was vegan and also low-calorie, high-fiber, and high-protein. Despite all these prerequisites it was also delicious. In fact the mattress, the platform, the nightstand, the kitchenette — it was well thought-out and obviously very expensive. It seemed that whatever Hsa saved by not giving them clothing or private quarters, it spent on them in other ways; their bodies had been stripped but were also being taken very good care of. There was even a set of shiny dumbbells so that the girls could compensate for all the exercise their legs were getting by developing upper body mass. They took turns on them after breakfast. Huiqing was proud of being able to heft the 5-kilo weights. For Tami, of course, even the 10-kilos were no great challenge.

To the other girls, Tami was some kind of naked Superwoman. Besides being their trainer she was also their big sister and their counselor. Xifeng got homesick the first week. That night she snuggled against the older girl, her head against Tami’s breast, brushing against the erect nipple.

“I know how it was,” Tami said, stroking her hair. “My first week away at college, I was homesick too. . . I cried so much the sleeve on my shirt got soaked.”

“You – you wore a shirt? I thought you were a nudist!” They had heard a few things.

“Well . . . um . . . it was actually my friend’s shirt.”

Xifeng looked out into the distance, then wrapped her foot around Tami’s hips, her toes brushing against the small of Tami’s back. They did not scrape. Per regulations, the Mailgirls’ toenails, like their fingernails, were closely clipped. “I heard you came here with a suitcase of clothes, it was some kind of mistake. It was snowing and they went out there and burned the clothes with you watching. . . I bet you were glad those clothes got burned, right in front of you!”

Tami didn’t answer.

Xifeng went on. “You’re so dedicated to being a nudist. I couldn’t be like you.” She sniffled, slowly recovering from her sadness. “I’ll count the days until I get to wear clothes again. I’m not like you. I want clothes, I need clothes!”

Tami’s throat got dry. She cleared it and said, “You mustn’t think like that. Be proud of being naked. I see how you run. You can’t be a good Mailgirl and always be holding your arms in. It’s a way of trying to cover your breasts. Pump your arms.” This was something she said to all the novices.

“I know the work seems repetitious,” she said the other night to all four girls. “But be the best at it that you can be.”

“We’re just Mailgirls!” Huiqing said. “All we do is be naked and deliver blueprints and packages and say, ‘Yes Sir’ and ‘Yes Ma’am’!”

“Any job can be done badly or well or excellently,” Tami said. “My uncle, for example, worked on the sanitation crew. He was the only one whose back didn’t go out after five years. He knew how to pick up a bag and swing it into the maw with a minimum of effort. He told me it was like swinging a baseball bat. And if something fell to the ground he always picked it up. He knew how to bend down without getting all strained. I saw him in action once. It was almost like he was dancing. He was \*excellent\* at what he did!”

The girls did not seem impressed. Tami got more to the point. “To be an excellent Mailgirl, run in an efficient way. Don’t thud on your heels. You should be springing on the balls of your feet. Keep your toes spread and use them to thrust forward. Also there’s an elegant way, and a clumsy way, to snake around people in a crowded hallway. Memorize the elevator locations, the corners. That’s why I put the floor plans on your laptops. They’re all the same, except for floors 2, 3, 18, 25 and 26. Plan ahead. And practice ‘presenting’. Bend down, brace your hands on the floor in front, not behind you, then bring your butt down to the floor with one motion. It looks better and it’s also less effort.”

“But some of those people are so rude!!” Ngo-kwang said. “Or they’re creeps. Especially on the upper floors!” Though some execs were nicer than others, there was no denying the Hsa Corporation’s underlying callousness.

“It’s them, it’s not you. If they’re rude it’s their problem. Don’t let it bother you. Remember, we’re stronger than they are!”

“What?”

“It takes a lot of courage to walk around like this” — Tami pointed with both index fingers down to her bare breasts — “when everyone around you is fully clothed. I don’t think any of \*them\* could do it. But \*we\* can!”

This brought her to another frequent theme, getting them to like their bodies. “Be proud of your nudity. Every time you think you’re debasing yourself, tell yourself that you’re actually showing off that you’re beautiful. They might be proud of their 5,000 – Yuan suits but you are wearing the most expensive, prettiest suit of all – your beautiful bare skin. And you’re beautiful inside as well as out. Look!” In front of them she spread her legs and lifted up her butt. She brought her hands around and spread her lower lips. “Look close!” The four naked teenagers gingerly brought their heads closer, Ngo-kwang a little more eagerly than the others. “Push and the lips can separate. I can feel the air in there now . . . Xifeng, get your phone and hit the flashlight.” They took turns inspecting the bright pink cave and the cervix at the far end. To the girls it seemed almost like the illumination was coming from within Tami rather than from the smartphone.

“You all have the same . . . woman-land . . . as me. Though every girl’s is different.” With various degrees of eagerness she got the other four to open up their vaginas so that the others could look inside. Xifeng’s wouldn’t open but that was o.k. Tami made them comment on each girl’s woman-land, how they differed. Unavoidably the odor of female musk soon enveloped them. “Ooh baby,” Ngo-kwang said to Huiqing. “Can I?”

Xifeng knew what was about to happen. “I don’t want to see this! . . . Can’t you do this up on 14 like you usually do!” If she had to hear the sounds of orgasm she would much rather they be far-off echoes. She scooted over to the other side of the mattress, sat up cross-legged, and cruised the internet on her phone. Of course this was China and her browsing was limited.

The lapping of tongues, the moans of passion, the sucking on nipples and clitorises . . . this was part of the Mailgirls’ shared secrets, away from the world’s prying eyes, just having each other, their own private world, clothed by nothing except the air of the atrium, in the darkness, and then the cries of orgasm, uninhibited and loud because they knew no one was around to hear, echoing off the corridor walls, and off the skylight way up above.

It was finally on the thirteenth night that Xifeng blushingly confessed to them that she had never had an orgasm. A couple of times she had tried diddling herself under the covers, in the privacy of her bedroom back in Nanning, when she knew her parents were out. She sensed there was a peak in the distance but she couldn’t quite get there. Ngo-kwang was about to rise to the challenge by attacking her with a ferocious tongue. But Tami advised them to go slow: “If it won’t happen tonight, it will happen tomorrow night, or maybe the night after.” In the darkness Xifeng couldn’t see a thing, which helped put her at ease. She only felt the lips and gentle teeth on her nipples, fingers spreading her lower lips, the subtle and then more aggressive poking of tongues, the sweeping over the clitoris, the jolts and thrills, and then despite her initial protest the noodling of Ngo-kwang’s pointed tongue into her recently enema-ed, cleaned-up anus. She got close a few times; then she finally went over the edge. It was a spectacle they kept ribbing her about afterwards. Her scream nearly broke the glass up on the skylight, causing it to vibrate and send her shriek up to the very stars. She then went right to sleep, unmovable, like a corpse, though a smiling one.

4.

“Yeah, get that again. ‘Epsilon’,” Ngo-kwang (“4”) said. “I bumped it on the stairs up to 14, round that corner.” Accordingly, Huiqing (“2”) once again massaged and hyperextended the tendon on Ngo-kwang’s pinky toe.

“That’s a tough corner,” Yingtai (“5”) said. “I almost banged it yesterday.”

“It’s not as bad as coming down from 7,” Xifeng (“3”) said. The others nodded. “I don’t know why they don’t do something about that metal flange. . . oooh, get ‘gamma’ again. Thanks.” Their toes had become Greek letters. Yingtai gave another workout to Xifeng’s middle toe.

It was 8:30 p.m. The five mailgirls were sitting upright facing each other, like a five-pointed star made of female legs, massaging each others’ feet. Ten minutes for one foot, then switching over for ten minutes to get the other foot. A necessary workout for naked Mailgirls who spent their working days running up and down the stairs in their bare feet, delivering messages to the 800 or so officers and staff of the Hsa Corporation, in this huge 26-story tower, with the cavernous atrium that extended all the way up to the glass roof. Each morning they did another, shorter footstretch at 7:30 before their work day began.

If one looked way, way up, one could see darkness and stars on this March night — still frigid, this being Harbin. At this time of year even during the day it didn’t usually get above freezing. But the girls spent their days inside. The place was so huge, they didn’t feel cooped up.

They had the run of the place at night, after the security guards waved goodbye to them at 7 o’clock. Even after working and living here for four months, they still had not explored all of it. Though they were careful not to leave any (bare) footprints. For example, no opening doors, no snooping through papers, and definitely no tapping at anyone’s computer.

They had had a few close calls. There was the Coffee Cup Incident, when Ngo-kwang, up in Mr. Chen (Jr.)’s office on 11, had accidently knocked over a half-filled cup he had left on an end-table. Fortunately it was a carpeted floor, so the cup did not break. Also fortunately, it turned out to hold only water. At 5:30 a.m. she went up to confirm that it had left no stain; she took the cup to the rest room and carefully filled it to what she guessed was the previous level and put it back exactly where it had been.

Then there was the time Huiqing, normally so careful, accidentally touched Ms. Yang’s keyboard with her left calf, while bending over to look down into her waste basket. This woke up the computer and the screen lit up to the logon page. Mailgirl #2, on pins and needles, wrapped her arms around her stiffened nipples, her big toes twisting uneasily on the floor. Fortunately after five minutes the screen went dark again.

“How about that stair door on 2!” Yingtai said. “It’s always stuck, hard to pull open. My dad could fix that in a minute!” Yingtai’s father was a mechanic.

“I complained about that to Mr. Tang,” Tami (“1”) said, shifting her bare butt so that she could get to Yingtai’s right foot.

“You did??” Yingtai said. “He let you?” It was the rule that a Mailgirl could not speak to anyone without being asked.

“According to the Manual,” Tami said, “we can speak to warn about . . . ” Tami was getting quite fluent in Chinese but still had to occasionally search for the right word. “‘Dangerous or incipient conditions’. So I told him about it yesterday afternoon, during break,”

“I was wondering where you were!” said Huiqing. “So . . . did he say he’d fix it?”

“You know how he is,” Tami said. They couldn’t stand Mr. Tang, who was supposed to be in charge of the physical plant. He was always rude to them, though being very observant, they noticed that he was actually rude to everyone, everyone that is except Mr. Chen and Ms. Ling, the ones who outranked him. “He acted like he wasn’t paying attention. But if he wants us to do our jobs, he has to take care of that door.” The door to 2 was an important door, being the only way out of the stairwell except for the ground floor entrance. To get to 3 and up one had to switch to the other stairwell that began on the east side of 2. This was to make room for the extra large conference room on 3. By now the girls knew more about the building layout than anyone except Mr. Tayler, the architect.

Ngo-kwang said, “Yesterday, while kneeling at attention for Ms. Mao, I noticed the floor was warm.” Mailgirls, being naked at all times, could notice things that clothed people could not, for example Ngo-kwang, sensitive to sensations on her bare knees and bare feet.

“You should tell Tang, then. It might be a heating problem on 5.” Ms. Mao’s office was on 6.

“Oh gosh, I don’t want to do that. I \*hate\* that man!”

“I’ll go with you,” Tami said.

The five-pointed star of foot massagers was sitting on the open platform they shared on the ground floor, that served as their bed, their dining room, and their hangout. The quiet burble of their voices echoed through the huge space, interrupted only by grunts from the HVAC system, or the aquarium on 4 outside Ms. Hua’s office. Their breasts jiggled as they vigorously worked on plantar muscles and metatarsal tendons, and intertwined fingers with toes.

Huiqing’s cell phone gave its little “ding!”, signaling the end of footstretch. The naked Mailgirls got up, worked the kinks out of their legs, then rummaged around their bags, checking out the “booty” they had gotten on their second trip to the local mall. Once a month they were allowed to leave the building and were taken by limo downtown. They were allowed to buy anything they wanted (that is, except clothes or shoes) up to a total of 60,000 Yuan between them (about 1000 American dollars), on the Hsa business card.

Huiqing picked up a big bottle of red sauce. “What is this?”

“That’s Cantonese hot sauce,” Xifeng said. “Careful it’s hot. Like I’m hot right now!” She pulled Ngo-kwang up by the arm and led her to the stairs. They all knew what that meant. Xifeng, the hung-up child of a religious shrine keeper and farmer from down near Vietnam, had broken through to her first-ever orgasm here during the second week, and ever since then had become an orgasm hog, wanting five or six at a time, every night and every morning. Ngo-kwang, by now an “out” lesbian, was the most skillful at pleasing her, and had become her favorite. She gave the others a tolerant, exasperated smile as she was led along. They heard two pairs of leathery soles scampering up the stairs, five and six and seven flights (easy for a Mailgirl), until they got to the hog’s favorite spot, that alcove on 8 with the two chairs she could really spread her legs on, leaving Ngo-kwang with a clear tongue-path to her open vagina and anus. Soon they heard Xifeng’s loud cries echoing through the atrium.

“She’s right, it’s incredibly hot,” Yingtai said, referring to the Cantonese sauce.

“Let me try,” Tami said, having to raise her voice. “I like hot stuff.” By now they were used to conversing with Xifeng’s orgasms as a backdrop.

“Ohhh!! Jesus!!” That wasn’t Xifeng, but Tami, trying the sauce — just two drops on a tortilla shell. She hopped around, mouth open, tongue out. Only an emergency glass of milk from the fridge put out the fire. Afterwards she lay prone, her nipples scraping the rough carpet, sweat on her forehead. “How the hell can anyone — what possible purpose does that stuff serve?? Who created it? Why does it exist??” The others looked on in amusement.

Of course more practical things had been purchased — new electronic gadgets, cushions to sit back on, candles. And things that make girls feel pretty, despite being deprived of clothes and shoes — bows for their hair, makeup, fingernail and toenail polish, highlights for their hair, sparkles to sprinkle over the tops of their breasts, even a little wide-toothed comb that turned out to be perfect for preparing their pubic hair for the world’s gaze.

“Do you think it’s okay to put on rainbow nails?” Yingtai had said once, during a foot stretch. “I think so,” Tami said. She was the big sister they went to for advice. “But,” she said, “if your nails said ‘f\*\*k me’, like Xifeng might do, they would not take kindly to that.” That got a laugh.

That was their second outing. Their first had not gone so smoothly. It was a bitingly cold day and they had not been outside since being stripped. Cringing in the foyer, they wondered if they would survive the 100 yards of icy sidewalk that led to the limo, where the driver was waiting in his gloves, Russian hat and overcoat. Tami set an example. “A few seconds out there won’t hurt you! Watch.” She strode slowly and comfortably, taking a full three minutes, as if not feeling the frigid Siberian wind attacking every inch of her nakedness. Walking slowly is necessary, she explained, because ice is slippery under a girl’s bare feet. Inside the limo, they hugged each other in the big back seat during the 50-kilometer drive.

Once in the mall they were protected by security guards who watched from a distance. They tried to ignore the shocked stares from housewives and doctors and teachers and kids. “In the building they expect us to be naked,” Huiqing explained later, “but at that mall, walking in front of all those surprised people, it was different.” Indeed they had at first covered their nipples and pussies with their hands as they walked along, despite Tami discouraging it. Eventually they realized they couldn’t cover up and carry bags at the same time. “I was afraid my parents would be there!” Ngo-kwang said, even though their families lived hundreds of miles away. Finally, they could not decide what to buy. Only a last-minute splurge on expensive skin cream got them up to 60,000.

Huiqing lingered at the window of a clothing store, then found that Tami was standing next to her. Tami had a dry mouth, but cleared her throat and said, “You shouldn’t torture yourself. Let’s go.”

That was six weeks ago. Huiqing would not act like that today. Like the other new Mailgirls, she now embraced and celebrated nudity, believed that it was the best way to live.

“We’re so lucky!” Xifeng said one morning as they sipped their coffees at 7:15 a.m., when it was just the five of them in the building. “Not having to wear clothes! Only we get to have this freedom!” There was a murmur of assent.

“It’s like we’re breathing with our whole bodies!” Yingtai said.

“I would hate to have to put on clothes when we get to B.T.U.!” Huiqing said. Their service as Mailgirls was their ticket to Beijing Technical University, the country’s most prestigious S.T.E.M. institution. They hadn’t gotten grades quite high enough for instant admission, but having won a lottery, they could get in through this newly instituted Mailgirl service. How it had been arranged, they didn’t know. They could not be curious it. The Chinese government did things a certain way and no one asked why.

“I wish there was an all-nude dorm there,” Ngo-kwang said.

“Or an all-orgasm dorm!” Xifeng said, causing a general rolling of eyes.

“You almost got us in trouble yesterday,” Huiqing said.

“I’m sorry — but I had to have just one more.” After breakfast Ngo-kwang had just finished tonguing Xifeng to her third orgasm when the front door opened and Mr. Tang arrived. Did he hear that last shriek of hers as it echoed off the octagonal walls?

“It was your fault, too,” Huiqing said to Ngo-kwang.

“Being left hanging just short of orgasm, is not good for a Mailgirl,” Ngo-kwang pointed out. “All tensed up, she won’t run as fast.”

“I would have loved to come right in that guy’s face!” Xifeng said.

“Come on, now . . .” Tami said tolerantly. She appreciated the sentiment, though, based on what they had found out about Mr. Tang. While on her knees in his office, the ever-observant Huiqing, waiting to be excused, had noticed a book on Taoist sexual practices tucked at the end of a shelf. A strange book to have in an office. That night she did some research on her laptop. Their internet accessibility was severely restricted, but they could read anything on Chinese Wikipedia, which surprisingly had an entry on “Tao and Sex”.

When she reported her findings to the others they were amazed.

“What! You mean he can’t ever come??”

“That’s right. He has to hold it in, staying on the brink, while his wife has as many orgasms as she can.”

“That would be torture!” Yingtai said. “His balls must be constantly aching . . . Why would he do that??”

“If he ejaculates, he loses his ‘yang’ energy,” Huiqing explained. Then she lowered her voice, only for dramatic effect, because there was no one else around to hear. “It’s the essence of male domination!”

“Oh come on!!” Ngo-kwang could not believe it.

“It’s a tradition that goes back centuries,” Huiqing said. “That is how we Chinese women have been kept down for so long.”

“Wow.” Yingtai was trying to absorb this information. “That’s what caused foot binding.”

“Akkk!!” The others recoiled. They loved having free feet, feeling the floors and ground underneath them, hating the idea of having to put shoes on once they got to B.T.U. To have their feet not only shod but tied up tight! These horrifying thoughts caused them to caress their toes and spread them with their fingers.

“Well!” Xifeng put on a show, standing up and strutting around. “How are you Mr. Tang? See my boobs, that you can’t touch? See my vagina? See my clit? Do you know I have thirteen orgasms every day? Or maybe it’s fourteen, or eighteen, or twenty-five! I lose count! And each is a ‘real’ orgasm! These are not minor experiences! They feel sooooo good! And you can’t have a single one! How long has it been for you? Years?” She did a cartwheel, flaunting her nudity for the invisible clothed, repressed Director of Maintenance. The other girls were enjoying this performance immensely. “I bet your dick is so hard right now, rubbing against your underpants, trapped under your pants, straining to get out . . . But you can’t come! No no no! . . . Do you know that every night I have five, six, ten orgasms on those chairs over there, right outside your office?? How can you stand it!”

The girls were reduced to helpless giggles. “Still,” Xifeng said, as she sat down, “maybe I wouldn’t mind being Mrs. Tang.”

“Yeah, she gets to come, over and over, while he can’t, not even once,” said Yingtai.

“I don’t think I’d want to get in bed with that guy, no matter what,” Ngo-kwang said. Of course, she had no desire for any man.

“Too bad I can’t do that dance right in front of him,” Xifeng said. “Tami, do you think I can just give him a sexy wink when I’m kneeling for him, and maybe wiggle my hips?”

“Um . . . no!” Tami said, laughing.

“Well . . . how about highlighting my pubic hair? \*That\* will make him look twice!”

“I suppose that would be all right. Make sure Yingtai does it. She’s really good at highlighting.” The girls took turns doing each other’s hair, painting each other’s nails, combing each other’s pubes. They even scrubbed each other in the shower. They did everything as a team, which of course included licking each other. Sometimes they would all plunge in together, a heaving, sweating tangle of ten arms and legs, sometimes all reaching orgasm at the same time. Being naked in this formally dressed corporate environment had ignited their libidos.

“Whoa, look at this candle!” Huiqing said, taking it out of Xifeng’s bag.

The girls relied much on candles. There was no other light in the building after hours, except for the little red emergency blinkers up on 12 and 24, and their cell phone lights which drained the battery. Using candles, on holders that prevented wax dripping on the floor, the nude young explorers found something interesting almost every night. Huiqing found an exhibit of calculating equipment in a glass window on 14 — slide rules, abacuses, “Napier’s bones” . . . Similarly, Tami pointed them to the “20th Century Technology” exhibit in the portico on 21, with those big old grey boxes, 286’s and 8080’s and XT’s, Lisa’s and Mac-2’s, the DOS and Multimate era. Of course these old computers were not patched in to the network, and could not be, with their old serial port peer-to-peer system. So the girls could turn them on and play with them without anyone finding out. Though because they could not show pictures or graphics, their allure was limited. Only Tami and Ngo-kwang, computer nerds that they were, remained fascinated.

The candle hauled out by Huiqing was huge. “You weren’t thinking of . . . um . . . putting this in your — ”

“Hell no,” Xifeng said. They often wondered what her conservative parents would make of the way she talked and acted now. She had really come out of her shell. “I just wanted a flame that would last a long time. . . I couldn’t put that in me. It would kill me.”

“I bet Tami could do it!” They had figured out, without knowing the specifics of Tami’s past, that her sexual experience was considerable. As was her stamina. One weekend all four of them licked and stroked and rubbed “1” but could not tire her out. They counted thirty-two orgasms before they all gave up and went to sleep.

“No, I don’t think I could,” Tami said, being handed the candle and examining it with a strange faraway look in her eyes.

“Maybe in your butt?”

“Well . . .” After much encouragement, Tami went over to the toilet at the edge of the platform, gave herself a coconut-scented enema, and uneasily got onto all fours.

“You do it, Huiqing. Use lots of lube.”

The candle was too large for Huiqing’s two hands. Yingtai had to help out. One problem was that the candle was not tapered at the end. Only by angling it could they get one corner in. Watching Tami’s breathing and reactions carefully, they were almost about to get the first half inch in when Tami had to call a stop. “I — just can’t. Hurts too much. I’m — out of practice.”

“What? You used to do this a lot?”

“Y – yes . . . long story . . . ”

They consoled themselves with a smaller candle which Tami took into her rectum quite easily. “I wish I could be like you,” Huiqing said. “You’re a real Superwoman.”

After the second candle was taken out they watched the aperture of Tami’s anus slowly close. “1” was out of breath. She sat down and watched as it was Ngo-kwan’s turn to prepare the warm bedtime cup of milk.

It was a sleepy conversation they had afterward, on their backs, holding hands, looking up at the glass skylight and the stars. As usual they talked about the latest in interoffice politics. The Mailgirls were as observant of the Hsa operation as dogs are of their owners. “I think Sung is mad at Avery.” Mr. Avery was one of five Americans on staff; Ms. Sung was his boss and was bitchy to most people. “Did you see the photo of Mr. Chin Junior’s new babies on his desk? Twins, and so cute!” “Mao’s son is on probation, finally. He’s visiting her next week.” “How do you know?” “She was on the phone to him as I passed her door.” “Tung is trying to hit on his secretary, and she’s not having any of it.” “I don’t blame her. He’s creepy.” “But why does she wear those really short skirts?” “Maybe she wants to torture him.” “I think those skirts must violate the dress code.” The naked Mailgirls were ignored, except when doing pickups and deliveries. It was amazing how Hsa personnel didn’t care what they overheard; it was as if they didn’t exist. The general conclusion was that they had been ordered to treat Mailgirls thus.

Suddenly as they fell silent Huiqing noticed something. “Tami — why are you crying?”

The others sat up.

Tami sniffed, “It’s just that — I’ve always been the only one naked in my life and now it’s — we’re all together. You’re my sisters, my dear sisters, naked as I am.” She tried to stifle her emotions. “I am so close to all of you now.”

They hugged. The tangle of bare females grew silent and then was motionless with sleep.

5.

The April morning was a little chilly by a normal person’s standards, requiring a sweater, but on this third outing the naked Mailgirls were enjoying the sensations. They had been dropped off at the park entrance and were hiking the trail up to the lake where there was supposedly a hot spring. The trail was muddy and without the benefit of hiking boots, they slipped often. Occasionally there was a waft of cold from the melting snow in the hollows. But they loved their lungs being filled with the wonderful clean mountain air. And of course being chatterboxes they kept the air moving around.

“I can’t believe that — a whip and handcuffs??” Ngo-kwang said.

“Yes, I saw it, in Chang’s closet. He left it half open last night. There’s more stuff in there too, but I couldn’t bend my neck around enough to see it.”

“I’ve got to investigate!” Ngo-kwang had finally gotten herself to admit that she liked BDSM, though there was no way she could search for it on the internet. She had purchased some hair strings at the mall (kerchiefs, being an article of clothing, were off limits to them) and had tried to get Xifeng to tie her up, with only partial success. “Did you take a picture?”

“Of course not!”

“Oh — right.” Sometimes the girls had to be reminded that their iphones could be searched at any moment, without them knowing, maybe in the midde of the night. They were prohibited from turning off their Wifi, limited as the Wifi was.

They had been going up the narrow path in single file, in order of the numbers stamped on them, occasionally slipping, experiencing the unusual feeling of mud squishing between their toes. Yingtai, who was bringing up the rear, said, “This is weird, but it feels good”.

Xifeng did not agree. “Yuck!” she said, lifting up a foot to inspect the muck.

“Don’t worry,” said Tami, who was leading them. “You can wash your feet off in the lake.”

They reached the crest and indeed there was a lake below them, sunlight sprinkling its ripples so brightly that it almost blinded them. They had been in the shade but now the early afternoon sun hit them, warming the fronts of their bodies. “Mmmmm . . .”

“This is the best!!” exclaimed Ngo-kwang as they gingerly picked their way down the rocky path that wound down to the shore. Then she added — “What the — ?”

It was another group of naked girls, hiking toward them from the other direction!

There were seven of them, looking younger than the Mailgirls, and they were marching as if in a military formation.

When they encountered each other, Tami took the initiative. “Hi, my name is Tami.” As the Mailgirls got a close look they noticed that these girls had deep all-over tans and were even more oblivious to their nudity than the Mailgirls had come to be. Like the Mailgirls, their bodies showed the results of vigorous physical conditioning. Unlike the Mailgirls, their fingernails and toenails were unpainted. They also wore no makeup, and had unshaved legs. Their natural black hair was hacked short and unstyled, though oddly each sported a bow of orange yarn.

“I am Fenfang,” said the first tanned girl. “These are Chyou, Jing, Liena, Mei-yin, Qinyang and ZhenZhen.” They bowed politely, in unison.

“I see you are . . . on an outing like we are?” Huiqing said, still shocked to see other naked girls, let alone meeting them on a hike.

“This is our weekend exercise,” Liena said.

Xifeng said, “I see you are naked too. We’re Mailgirls. See our numbers?” She pointed to her left breast. “We’re required to be naked, while in service.”

“We are Maik-lings,” Qinyang said. “Maik-lings do not wear clothes.”

“Ever?”

Qinyang looked at her companions. They all had blank expressions which were a little disturbing. “We never have.”

Tami broke this awkward moment by saying, “I’m sure you want to go down to the lake. There’s a warm spring down there, I’m told.”

This seemed o.k. with the “Maik-lings” so they followed the Mailgirls down to the water. The lake was so pristine and clear that they could see down to the bottom. Tami and Huiqing took the lead, jumping off a rock. When they emerged Huiqing squealed, “This is COLD!”

Tami, not as affected, swam a bit further out. “It gets warmer out here!”

It turned out the hot spring was under the lake. Too far out and the water was bubbling and close to scalding. But about fifty feet from the shore, it was warm and sensuous.

It was the first time the Chinese Mailgirls had swum naked. “This is heaven!” Xifeng said, reveling in the riot of new sensations. For quite some time now they had enjoyed the many advantages of nudity but this was a whole new world. “Oooooo!” Ngo-kwang joined in, as for the first time the girls felt the swish of warm water across their nipples, over their buttocks, into their vulvas and into their butt cracks. For a few minutes they treaded languidly, aimlessly. Like any product of the PRC education system, they were good swimmers, and soon they were slicing through the water in circles and figure eights, venturing into the colder depths and then returning, breaststrokes, front crawls, sidestrokes, backstrokes . . .

There was a wide, smooth rock so close to the surface that a girl could sit on it and the water only came up to her navel. The Mailgirls hopped on and off, splashing each other, squealing like five-year-olds. The Maik-lings dutifully jumped in and gravitated toward where the Mailgirls were. They were expressionless until Yingtang splashed ZhenZhen in the face. The Maik-ling was nonplussed until she splashed back and betrayed a smile. Soon there was a splash fight with the two teams squaring off, the Mailgirls not only outnumbered but soon outsplashed.

“It’s good to see those girls look like they’re enjoying themselves,” Huiqing said to Tami. They had gotten back up on the shore, their wet bodies shivering a bit in the cool air, but knowing they could again plunge into the big warm bath that Nature had provided them.

Xifeng had found another nearly-submerged rock and dragged Ngo-kwang up with her. She stood up, legs spread, while Ngo-kwang inserted her tongue. Xifeng did not take long to reach the crest and go over. Her uninhibited shouts echoed off the mountain, turning seven shouts into fourteen. She was having the best time of her life.

Mei-yin, the shortest of the Maik-lings, swam up to the shore and sat next to Tami and Huiqing. Huiqing expressed their embarrassment at Xifeng’s antics. “Sorry about our friend,” she said. “It’s probably not correct for her to have an . . . orgasm in front of you girls like that.”

“We have orgasms,” Mei-yin said in her tiny voice.

Huiqing, taken aback, said, “Um . . . but she likes to have a lot of them.”

“It is something one has to do,” Mei-yin said. “We are to have forty every day.”

“You have forty orgasms a day??”

“Yes, it is our duty.”

“A strange duty,” Huiqing said. “At least you get a lot of pleasure.”

“Pleasure is not something we think about,” Mei-yin said blankly. “It is our part in the People’s Struggle.” Huiqing didn’t ask what she meant; in China such a comment must be taken as the last word.

After a few seconds of strange silence, Tami said, “You can enjoy the water at least.”

“Yes we can. I’m glad we met you.” Mei-yin stood up and dove off the rock, then enjoyed the splash fest. With a shrug, Huiqing followed her.

Xifeng launched into her second orgasm. After she came back to earth, she bent down and kissed Ngo-kwang on the head, dove back into where the water was almost hot, and floated, treading with her feet, arms extended to the sides, her smiling face turned up to the sun, eyes closed, in a state of bliss.

Ngo-kwang came to the shore and sat next to Tami. They watched as the ten naked Chinese girls dove in and out of the water, splashing each other, playfully grabbing each other by the legs, by the boobs, by the butt.

Tami laughed when Ngo-kwang said, “If a white guy in the United States could see a film of this, he’d never stop jerking off.”

6.

“Oh — ”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to startle you.”

Tami closed her laptop as Huiqing approached. They were in the hallway of 25, just around the corner from the office of the CEO, Mr. Chen (Sr., not his son, who was on 11).

It was late, around 10:15, close to the time when the Mailgirls should be going to sleep. With the closing of Tami’s laptop they were in almost complete darkness. There was only the light from the stars, coming in through the glass roof just above them, and below them the little blinking red emergency light on 24, and across the space of the vast atrium, tiny dots from office windows, emanating from digital clocks, monitor indicators, power strips. A ghostly constellation, like trillions of years from now when the universe is entering “heat death” and only a few fading dwarf stars remain. Far below, Yingtai and Ngo-kwang were chatting, their voices echoing faintly up to where Tami and Huiqing now stood, leaning onto the railing, their toes rubbing against the lush carpet, the most exquisite in the building.

“You come up here a lot lately,” Huiqing said.

“Some intense schoolwork,” Tami said. “I have to concentrate.”

They contemplated the scene far below, with Yingtai and Ngo-kwang, and Xifeng reading something on her cell phone.

“Tami . . . you’re a very reserved person, you know that?”

“What?”

“There’s something . . . hidden about you. We don’t really know you.”

Tami’s amused smile revealed her teeth, which Huiqing could see. The rest of her face was only faintly visible. She guessed it more than saw it.

When she said nothing, Huiqing said, “Well that’s your business I suppose.”

“It’s probably because I’m from a different culture, different country, different everything.”

“Even though we’re your naked sisters.”

“Yes.”

Huiqing cleared her throat. She began speaking in English, which most Chinese girls had been trained to be fluent in. “Tami . . . don’t you think there’s something weird about what we do? I mean the whole Mailgirls setup?”

“What, having five naked girls running around an office building, with everyone else in suits? I think that’s plenty weird, for sure.”

“Not that . . . or not JUST that . . . ” A Chinese girl is not supposed to question official things, so the words did not come easily. “Why do they need us Mailgirls? Why do they need deliveries anyway? Why can’t they just email each other?”

Tami continued the thought. The deliveries were in the form of cardboard tubes. “They can’t \*all\* be blueprints. Or bulky items.”

“Right. And isn’t it odd they always wait until we’re out of the office before they open them up? . . . Tami . . . ” She cleared her throat. “I think we’re delivering secret messages, in hard copy only, that they don’t want entered into email.”

Tami’s voice — Huiqing couldn’t really see her expression — did not betray surprise. “I think . . . that’s a good guess.”

“That means there’s an entire operation here that is outside official channels.”

“But if the folks in Beijing approved having Mailgirls, they must realize that.”

“Maybe . . . and why do they let us have the run of the place after hours?”

“They can’t just keep us in a cage overnight.”

“Yes, but . . . most of them leave their offices open.”

Tami didn’t respond. Leaning on the railing, breasts crushed against it, they looked down at their toes clasping the ledge. Far below, Ngo-kwang said something that made Yingtai laugh, a laugh that echoed up to them.

“I don’t know the answer to that question,” Tami said.

“Another thing . . . They must have a special place to dispose of those messages. I’ve looked into a lot of wastebaskets.” She had been doing that when her calf brushed up against Ms. Yang’s keyboard on 10 that one time, waking up the screen. “There are no discarded messages there.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, pretty sure. It’s all office refuse, like ripped up folders or printer cartridges. And also — most offices, wastebaskets get emptied after hours. Here they come through at 1:30 p.m., finishing at 2:00. Exactly!”

“Yes, I’ve noticed that.”

“So how do they dispose of them?”

Tami shrugged her bare shoulders. “Maybe they shred them?”

“I haven’t seen anything that looks like a shredder. Have you?”

“No.”

Huiqing exhaled. “I think there might be . . . counterrevolutionary things going on here.”

Tami paused and then said, “That’s a very PRC [People’s Republic of China] way to put it.”

“If there’s something bad going on, I don’t want us to get in trouble.”

She knew this fear didn’t extend to Tami, who had the protections of being an American citizen. “How can you get in trouble?” Tami said. “You aren’t doing anything except what you’re told. . . and you have to do it with no clothes on.”

“Tami . . . if these messages are . . . anti-Party, and we’re carrying them, we become accomplices. We will get caught up in the net. That’s how it works in this country. You’ve heard about Xinjiang?”

“Yes, that’s in the western part of the country. Urumqui is the capital.” Tami had educated herself very thoroughly as to Chinese geography.

“When we say Xinjiang these days, we’re talking about people getting . . . sent away.”

“Oh. . . I read about that before I came over here.”

“My uncle’s friend got ‘sent away’ . . . they haven’t heard from him since. There might be a prison camp there, like under the Cultural Revolution . . . or maybe worse,” In the dimness her sniffles signified her distress. “I don’t want that to happen to us.”

Tami turned to hug her, bare skin against bare skin, and reassuringly rubbed her toes over Huiqing’s foot. For Mailgirls, holding feet was like holding hands. Huiqing placed her head on her big sister’s shoulder.

Huiqing separated and sniffed back her tears. “Another thing. I — don’t think they want us Mailgirls here any more.”

“What?”

“I haven’t told any of you this . . . but twice this week I overheard people saying that the Mailgirls program was not a good idea. ‘Why can’t they just put on clothes?’ they said.”

“Why did they think that? Who was it?”

“It was Mr. Paddington, on 3 . . . and Ms. Shin, on 11 . . . they said something about wanting to discontinue it. I was running past and I couldn’t make out why they said that.”

Tami waited a few seconds before responding. “Huiqing . . . I’ve heard some . . . grumblings too. But there are over 800 people working here, and Mailgirls is a weird idea. Not everyone is going to approve. And if something was really wrong, Ms. Ling would talk to us about it.” Ms. Ling was nominally in charge of the Mailgirls program, though it was such a smooth running operation that she rarely called them in.

The two naked girls looked down in silence at the tiny figure of Yingtai getting the warm milk ready. She yelled up into the darkness: “TAMI! . . . HUIQING! . . . BEDTIME!!”

After the echo died down, Huiqing yelled, “WE’LL BE RIGHT DOWN!”, switching back to Yingtai’s Chinese. She leaned over the railing. Yingtai could barely see the dim waving hand, three hundred feet above her. She waved back.

“Tami . . . one more thing.”

“What?”

Huiqing exhaled and let ten seconds go by. “I think we are being watched.”

“What?”

“I think someone is watching us, after hours.”

“Huiqing, there’s no one here but us.”

“I know that.” In the early weeks the girls, Xifeng and Huiqing especially, kept hearing little noises and were convinced some evil man was lurking around on the stairs, ready to attack them, possibly with an ax. The fear came from watching American horror movies. It soon subsided. They were so attuned to every sound this building made, that any lurkers would be discovered. But there was no one.

“How do we know they haven’t put in cameras, watching everywhere we go? And recording everything we say?”

“Why would they do that?”

“I don’t know . . . This place is mystery upon mystery. We overhear a lot of things, we know probably more about the interoffice politics than the officers themselves . . . but I get the idea something’s being hidden from us.”

Tami looked at Huiqing, barely seen faces looking at each other. “Huiqing . . . I have a secret portal. I’m going to give you the link and the user name and password. No one will know it’s you, ok? Even if it’s on your device they’ll think it’s me, an American citizen, using it.”

Huiqing’s mouth fell open. “But — why are you — ”

“It’s so you know that you and the rest are not in any trouble. It will give you all the access I have, crummy as it is, to the outside world. And my emails from the American Embassy.”

“The Embassy?”

“Yes, all my emails from anywhere, or to anywhere, like my class assignments, have to go through them. It was part of the deal of being a foreign exchange — I mean being the American Mailgirl. It’s the Chinese government, control of information, you know how they are . . . Don’t tell the others.”

The information could not be entered into Huiqing’s cell phone or even written on paper. Tami recited it to Huiqing, then recited it again, then a third time. Huiqing recited it back to show that she had memorized it.

Huiqing was flattered to become privy to this secret. But then she said, “Tami, if you say we’re in no trouble, then I believe you.” With her other foot she rubbed Tami’s, like Tami had done. It was an affectionate, tactile mutual footshake. “I don’t think I’ll have to use that link.”

“Then don’t. But just so you know.”

Tami then surprised Huiqing by bending down and sucking Huiqing’s nipple. “Oh Tam — ” After initial resistance she gave in. Tami laid her down on the soft carpet and worked her way to her vulva, then circled around her clit. By now the Mailgirls were experts on each other’s quickest path to orgasm. At 10:41 p.m. just outside the CEO’s office, 2.3 meters from the door, a naked girl lying on the carpet experienced a slow, rolling orgasm of nine contractions, lasting 14 seconds from first to last. Her pupils dilated as her eyes looked up through the glass roof. Stars were disappearing as clouds rolled in.

7.

“AY – AY – AY – AY – AY!” Clutching her butt, Yingtai ran circles around the atrium, to the broad smiles of Tami, Huiqing, Xifeng and Ngo-kwang, standing on their platform at the south end. “AY – AY – AY – AY – AY!” Her shouts, and the slapping of her feet on the terrazzo floor, echoed in the huge space, getting fainter as she receded to perigee (or maybe “peri-platform”), louder as she approached apo-platform.

It was all in fun. Yingtai had gotten an enema from Xifeng, to prepare for anal penetration with that large-ish blue candle. It had become Yingtai’s favorite sport recently, and she had carefully carved “ribs” in the candle so as to maximize its “utility”. But Xifeng had sneaked ginger in the enema, which burned like hell. Yingtai hurriedly squirted into the toilet and then took off as if she had been stuck in the butt with a needle.

“I’ll get you!!” Upon completing her fifth circumnavigation — a total of almost a kilometer, which even at a sprint a Mailgirl could do without breaking a sweat — Yingtai, breasts bouncing wildly, hopped onto the platform, Xifeng in her sights. Xifeng jumped off and tried to make her escape but Yingtai with her gingerfied rectum could run faster. Xifeng was caught and wrestled to the ground. Her mouth was pinned down by Yingtai’s vagina and her ribs tickled mercilessly. Her nipples were pulled and twisted and she was violated below with two fingers. She retaliated with quick tongue flicks which, after a minute of heavy breathing, gave the result Yingtai would have gotten with the candle. She lifted her head up to the glass ceiling with a loud shriek that was boastful, like a lion(ess) who has caught her prey.

It was 7:15 a.m., after their upper-body workout with the dumbbells, and the usual breakfast of whole wheat toast, grapefruit juice and non-fat yogurt. Yingtai and Xifeng, sweating and their hair a mess, returned and another enema, this one tinged with milk, soothed Yingtai’s rectum of fire. Now the five Mailgirls settled down for the morning footstretch. After all that commotion the atrium was now suddenly quiet.

From 7:15 to 7:45 (when the maintenance crew showed up) was special. There was no sound except the creaking of the building’s metal and glass shell as it expanded in the rays of the sun, the only time of day this phenomenon could be heard. The Mailgirls, normally gregarious, were quiet during this time. One of the rare comments made was by Ngo-kwang. She was not the religious type, but said that the vast, quiet interior space, with the complex and beautiful architecture, reminded her of a cathedral.

At 7:45 Mr. Ganbaatar, an old Mongolian man who was the chief custodian, unlocked the front door and came in with his young assistant Jin. Jin, as usual, got as many glances at the naked girls as he could before following into the custodians’ office, which was pretty big. During the height of the business day there were 21 custodians tending to the 26 floors, which contained 814 Hsa officers and staff, 536 offices and 14 conference rooms.

To the girls’ surprise the next person to enter through the big glass front doors was Mr. Slice Reality, the artist they had been posing for, probably in the service of creating Mailgirl publicity materials. It was a surprise because he hadn’t been seen in a couple of months. Also he never used to show up this early.

“How are you, ladies?” he said in his north-of-England scouse. Normally they weren’t allowed to converse with this man, but having been addressed, Tami decided it was ok to answer. “Fine, Mr. — Reality. We haven’t seen you in a while.”

He shrugged good-naturedly. “That’s a long story. . . I’ve permission to sketch each of you today, stretching and athletic poses. Who will be first?”

“Tami, you’ve got the best body!” Huiqing said.

“Yes, you’re the obvious first choice!” Yingtai said.

Tami shook her head. They knew that she did not like to pose. Why, was a mystery. She was very good at it, when it was forced to be her turn. She could stay motionless for a long time.

Instead Xifeng stepped forward to the front of the platform, as Mr. Reality got out his easel. He had her stretch her arms up and out, separate her legs so that she was a big ‘X’, and look skyward. As the first staff came in and made their way to their offices, one could see her little smile. She knew how beautiful and perfectly toned her body was, breasts riding high on her chest, narrow waist, concave tummy, tight butt, lightly muscled legs, and she loved to show it off, especially to the women who had to pass in front of her and could only dream of possessing such perfection.

8.

“This . . . is not good,” Ngo-kwang said. Her jaws slowed down as she reluctantly masticated the broccoli quiche.

“My first try,” Huiqing said. “I had to do two shifts, you know!” All they had to cook with was a little toaster oven, and a microwave. It was really all they needed, with their sparse diet.

“Too bland,” Xifeng agreed. “Some soy would help.” As it turned out a couple of drops improved it immensely.

They took turns on dinner. Huiqing had Tuesdays and she was not the best cook, not like Yingtai who was a master. They had to make do with what was delivered every week. It was all vegan, low-calorie. Fortunately it was also high quality, and varied enough so that their palettes never got bored. “I never thought I could get filled up on this stuff,” Ngo-kwang, a former hamburger addict, said. But Mailgirl life causes stomachs to shrink. “By now, if I had a burger it would probably weigh me down all day,” which is not acceptable for a Mailgirl. They never wanted to go back to the outside world, bad and fatty food, unnatural ingredients. Just like they never wanted to go back to wearing clothes.

Their after-dinner footstretch, after nightfall, was different today because of an unaccustomed overhead glow. Ms. Lin, up on 4, had put in a new floor lamp, right near her office door. She had forgotten to turn it off and it shone right down into their faces. It cast shadows across the entire atrium.

“That’s way too bright a lamp for where it is, let alone to leave on at night,” Huiqing said, while spreading the toes of Xifeng’s right foot.

“I think they’ll make her take it out,” Ngo-kwang observed. Ms. Lin was relatively junior. In the Hsa hierarchy they had deduced that she reported to Mr. Wang, a fat and rather gross man on 9, who in turn reported to Mr. Zhou, the wrinkly old guy up on 19, who in turn reported to Mr. Chen (Sr.), the CEO.

The issue of Ms. Lin’s lamp assumed greater importance at bedtime. They had no blankets or pillows to hide behind. A girl doing the normal turning around during sleep would quickly find the glare in her eyes.

“Let’s go up there and turn it off,” Yingtai said.

“No — she’ll know we did it,” Huiqing pointed out. They were all aware of the dangers of lurking into Corporation offices, Huiqing most especially.

“Maybe she’ll think she was the one who turned it off?” Xifeng suggested.

The murmuring consensus was that the risk of being found out was too great. They should leave the lamp alone.

Half an hour later Ngo-kwang sat up. “I just can’t sleep. We’ve got to go somewhere out of — someplace in a shadow.” Xifeng, noticing her distress, sat behind her and gently massaged her neck.

Finding a suitable place in the shadows was not easy. There were plenty of dark places but they were all just bare floors, cold and impossible to sleep on, though the girls tried. Hardy as they had become, bare skin on hard cold floor just did not work. Finally Tami found the solution, though it took some walking. On the far end of the atrium, about 40 meters away, was a semi-circle of couches, with cushions that could be removed.

They carried the cushions back to their end of the atrium where they felt more at home. They decided to sleep against the nearby wall, in shadow. There were enough cushions to fit under all of them. As they turned and twisted into their preferred sleeping positions the cushions separated, causing bare butts to sink to bare floor. Huiqing solved this problem by pushing some chairs against their big temporary bed to keep it all together.

“Ahhh — ” Xifeng said, closing her eyes, supine on a cushion, eyes on the blessedly dark soffit above them, hard bare heels resting up against the wall. “Much better.”

Ngo-kwang said, “Do you think we will have to do this every night? What if Lin keeps forgetting to turn that thing off and no one tells her to remove it?”

Yingtai suggested, “Maybe if they find us like this in the morning, and they ask, we can tell them why we had to do this.”

Huiqing observed, “That would be pretty bold.”

“Look, we have to be able to sleep. Otherwise we wouldn’t be worth during the day.”

With these thoughts conversation wound down and the girls drifted off to sleep.

That is, until 2:31 a.m., when Huiqing awoke with a start. She slapped the butt cheeks of the girls around her. “I smell smoke! Smoke!” Indeed they were surrounded by it. Then she looked up to 4, flames coming out the door, caused by the lamp which had fallen over and ignited the carpet, and an endtable which had a paper sculpture on it. “FIRE!!”

9.

“And we stayed there under the rug until the fire squad arrived,” Yingtai said.

“Finally: did you at any time that night, or the day or evening previous, enter Ms. Lin’s office?” The same question he had asked Huiqing (“2”), Xifeng (“3) and Ngo-kwang (“4”).

“No.”

Mr. Zhou said, “5, you may sit down.”

Yingtai (“5”) took her place next to the other four Mailgirls, not on their knees and heels for once but seated in folding chairs, their bare butts on the cold metal, naked teenage girls amidst the grownups in their formal business attire. Mr. Zhou, in the center of the dais, spoke briefly to Ms. Mao to his left and then Ms. Hua to his right. To the side sat Mr. Chen (Sr.), Mr. Tang and Ms. Ling, and the stenographer, whose job was only to make sure the voice-to-text software was accurately taking everything down.

They were in a corner partition of one of the big semi-permanent tents the Corporation had set up on the spacious lawn in front of the main entrance. For the past week, since the fire, the five Mailgirls had been idle, confined to another partition, leaving only to wait on line for meals along with the other Corporation staff or use the showers. It felt odd to them, showering in stalls instead of in full public view, but the stalls were big enough so that they could go in in twos and threes, which made them feel more “at home”. The tents were operating on solar power which apparently was malfunctioning. It was too hot for the business attire Corporation officials were compelled to wear; sweating as they fussed around their makeshift desks, they must have envied the Mailgirls’ nudity.

“This concludes our fact finding hearing,” Mr. Zhou said, wiping sweat from his forehead. The Corporation personnel started to get up out of their chairs.

“Wait a moment, sir!” Huiqing said, standing up quickly, her breasts bouncing.

They all looked up in surprise. Mailgirls were not permitted to speak without being spoken to.

“2, you are out of — ”

“Why don’t you ask Tami — ask ‘1’? She saved our lives! When we couldn’t get out of that stairwell, she broke that big window with the chair, badly cutting herself, and carried us out! And then went back in and found that rug so that we wouldn’t freeze to death!” Huiqing’s nipples, stiff with her passion, were like accusing fingers.

“2!”

Mr. Zhou was about to admonish Huiqing further but Ms. Mao put a gentle hand up to him. She explained to Huiqing, “1 is an American citizen. We cannot compel her to testify.”

“I think she should. She might — complete the picture.” She gestured toward Tami, sitting next to her.

Ms. Mao and Mr. Zhou spoke to each other. Then Mr. Zhou said, “1, would you like to say something?”

“Yes, I would,” said Tami. She stood up, careful not to dislodge the bandage on her knee. Another bandage enclosed fingers on her right hand. There was a scab over her left eye. Abrasions, quickly healing, reached across her right breast and nipple.

“We were stuck in that stairwell because of that door leading up to 2 — up to the second floor. I had reported the stuck door to Mr. Tang, two weeks previous.”

Mr. Tang visibly bristled. Not only had Tami cited the complaint she had made, but she had mentioned him by name. Mr. Chen glanced over to him.

“Thank you, 1.” There was an uneasy silence. “This hearing is over.”

10.

Their services as Mailgirls were not called upon, evidently not needed, now that it was a skeletion Hsa staff working in reduced and close quarters. After a few more days in that corner partition Ms. Ling starting bringing the girls out three times a day to run around the building, five circumnavigations each, to keep them in shape. They started on the grass and as their soles got re-toughened they moved to the concrete. It amounted to about three miles, which was a little less than their daily total when they were delivering those mysterious tubes all around the 26 floors. Their route brought them near the highway. The Chinese are very careful drivers but there was much rubbernecking, people not believing what they were seeing, though they had heard rumors.

It was odd standing in line with Hsa personnel to get their meals. At first they gagged at the meat dishes, the fatty and salty and sweet food. Not even the salads were that good. In a way they thought of themselves as “royalty” being forced to eat with the common people. They hated getting used to it but they did. It was but one aspect of their pervasive sense of loss. The hard-won concavities of their tummies softened, to their sorrow. Also fading away were the numbers painted under the left breast, on their hips, and on their lower backs. Every week the numbers had been carefully refreshed by a Mr. Shu who used an oversized Chinese calligraphic brush. Now with each shower they got fainter and fainter until they were barely visible.

Back in their room there was nothing but boredom and also unsated sexuality. They were the only ones there after hours, just like in the building, but the tent’s polyester walls were very thin. They could hear cars on the highway all night, even people passing by. Orgasms on the decibel level of Xifeng’s would be heard easily. After some experimental lapping of tongues they learned how to have orgasms face-down so that they could scream into the mattress.

One night Xifeng, overcome with lust and wanting some fresh air, dragged Ngo-kwang out onto the grass, out of sight of the highway. Being Harbin in May it was a chilly night, but that was no big deal for a Mailgirl in heat. Huiqing kept lookout, peering around the side of the tent, rubbing her goose-pimpled arms, hugging her cold-stiffened nipples. Not much traffic this time of night. She waited until she heard Xifeng’s muffled, strangled grunts; it was very hard for Xifeng to suppress her natural shrieks. When they got back inside the shivering Ngo-kwang insisted on remuneration which was paid in full.

As for sex during the day, now that they were idle, that was out of the question. The partitions had no individual ceilings, just the high pointed “big top” of the tent itself. Any moans of passion would bounce back into Hsa offices. By the same token, they could overhear conversations and quickly learned more about their overlords than they ever did by scooting around the 26-floor tower. There were broad smiles when they learned that Mr. Tang had been sacked. Also Ms. Lin, whose lamp had caused the fire, though they were sad about that because she had been nice to them. They also learned that the fire had taken out most of the offices on 4 and 5 but fortunately the vast impressive structure was not affected. The first floor survived with nothing but smoke damage. Smoke had infiltrated most of the building. Abatement was underway. It was projected that some departments could be moved back in within three weeks.

The mumbling Babel bouncing back to them from above was at times so multifarious with dozens of voices that it was hard to separate them. But their ears pricked up when the heard muted references to Guoanbo (the secret police). And to “repositioning” — what did that mean? They heard the word over and over again, usually uttered with a sense of dread.

Ms. Ling was, of course, a product of the Hsa cold hand, but she took her role as Mailgirls supervisor seriously. From snatches of various conversations they already knew her father was a Tienanmen Square protestor who had been imprisoned; she was aware of the ill effects of enforced boredom. That was their explanation for her appearance one day with a large bin of books. The books had been lying around in various offices and perhaps were no longer needed, or so smoky smelling that they were no longer acceptable. Indeed the odor permeated their partition, but it was not so bad. Yingtai said it reminded her of her uncle’s mountain cottage. Strange to say, in this sterile white tent, they actually got to imagine they were in that cottage, snow falling outside, while they snuggled their nude bodies against each other in front of the fireplace, reading by firelight.

The books were surprisingly diverse. Not all were in Chinese; a good many were in Russian, some were in English, some in Korean. Books were exotic artifacts to the Chinese girls, except for Xifeng, whose mother was a temple keeper. They were somewhat less strange to Tami. Not all were technical manuals or official PRC histories. Their favorites were short novels, like those of Kurt Vonnegut (in Chinese) or Tie Nin. They would read one together, clustering around, turning a page only after everyone had gotten to the last line. “Oh — my — God!!” they would say when there was a plot twist, or something shocking. These Chinese teenagers were easily shocked. They were the product of the rigorous but constricted Communist education system. Their innocent eyes widened as they were exposed to new worlds.

The big dusty bin had perhaps two hundred books. “I can’t believe it!” Huiqing cried, rummaging around the bottom — Mr. Tang’s book on Taoist sex!! Evidently he wasn’t even given the chance to clear out his office. They devoured it, fighting over how quickly to turn the pages. But it was a huge letdown. The philosophical stuff they had mostly heard before; they were looking for tips on how to induce stronger and more numerous orgasms. Taoist men who weren’t allowed to have any orgasms themselves, and had to concentrate solely on their wives’ pleasure, might know a few things . . . but the techniques shown were, to them, lame. The Mailgirls knew a lot more than the book. “There’s nothing about anal, nothing about circling the clit, nothing about four-finger,” Ngo-kwang pointed out, this last referring to her specialty of playing two fingers in the vagina off against two in the anus. “\*We\* should write a book,” Xifeng said.

One morning Ms. Ling and Mr. Zhou stepped into their partition as they were finishing up their (yuck) scrambled eggs and white toast. They stood up at attention on the mattress, carefully so that their plates didn’t flip over.

“Come with me,” the old man said. “We are going back to the building.”

They glanced at each other in anticipation as they followed, single file in Mailgirls order, Tami first and Yingtai last. They came to the 26-story structure, through the big glass doors that, strangely, were now painted red. Once inside they could see the “cathedral” had been altered. Much of the glass had been painted over, primarily red, though with some oranges and browns. Perhaps this was to hide smoke marks. Worst of all, the skylight was now an opaque yellow. The effect was to make the big atrium look smaller. The whole place looked more functional, more ordinary, more . . . “Communist”. That this was now a “Party” operation was confirmed by the PRC flag hanging from a rafter, with the stars and the hammer and sickle. There was still a faint whiff of smoke.

Their platform — their former “dorm” — was still there, with the refrigerator, cabinet, shower and toilet on the periphery. It at least was unchanged. But in front of it was a desk with a computer terminal with two monitors and a headset.

There was a long table with a large hamper, next to which stood an orderly. He laid out five sets of tennis whites, white socks and white sneakers. The four Chinese girls’ eyes opened wide in horror, realizing who they were meant for. They did not notice that Tami’s mouth went dry and she licked her lips.

“The Mailgirls program is being significantly altered,” the old man said, haltingly, like a hostage reading for a video. “You will no longer deliver materials. Instead other tasks await you.”

He turned to Tami. “Will you put on clothes and shoes?” The orderly held them out to her, the folded whites and socks in one hand, the sneakers in the other.

Tami, with shaking hands, was starting to reach out for them when her head was turned by what was the most unprecedented outburst by any group of Mailgirls.

“No! Don’t!” Led by Huiqing, the four Chinese teenagers, in their proud nudity, did not want their “big sister” to so degrade and torture herself.

“1” looked at “2”, “3”, “4” and “5”, their vigorously shaking heads. It was like children pleading with their mother to not put that cigarette to her lips. Then she looked down at their beautiful nude bodies.

Tami cleared her throat and put her hands down. “I will stay naked with my naked sisters.” She looked at them with wet eyes. With equally moist eyes Huiqing, Xifeng, Ngo-kwang and Yingtai smiled back. Xifeng sniffled and wiped away a tear.

At Ms. Ling’s gesture the orderly handed another bundle to Huiqing. “No,” she said, shaking her head.

“I’m afraid you do not have the liberty to refuse,” Mr. Zhou said.

“What?”

“You are Chinese subjects and must obey all orders. You are part of the People’s Struggle.” As “2” opened her mouth in surprise and shook her head, he said in a lower voice, “There are other places we can send you.”

“Miserably” is too mild a word to express the distaste with which the four girls accepted the bundles. Lining up behind the table, they grimaced as they put on the hated coverings, which included bras and panties, slowly and painfully, as if each were lined with barbed wire. Tami looked on in a state of crisis as they put on the T-shirts, then the longish shorts, then finally the socks and sneakers. The sneakers were, of course, Hsa “Zhe-lings”. Somehow each girl’s measurements were known; everything fit perfectly. Finally they stood at attention, fully clothed and at the point of tears, this time, sad tears.

Tami cleared her throat and spoke loudly. “I insist on putting on clothes. I’ve changed my mind.”

“No — don’t Tami! Xifeng cried out. “Just because we’re suffering doesn’t mean you have to suffer too!”

“I — can’t enjoy this — advantage that you don’t have,” Tami Smithers said. “I would feel — awful.”

The orderly was bringing the bundle to Tami, and she was a few inches from touching the fabric that was about to turn her into a clothed person, when Mr. Chen (Jr.) ran into the foyer and pulled the bundle back from Tami’s reach. As the confused orderly stood there, he whispered something into Mr. Zhou’s ear.

Mr. Zhou bowed to Tami with a measure of respect he had not thus far displayed. “Most sorry, Miss Smithers,” he said. “I have been informed that you are a religious nudist and under American law must not be offered clothes. I apologize for the misunderstanding.”

“But — I WANT clothes!!” Tami cried.

“No, Tami, don’t!!” Huiqing exclaimed. “Don’t! Don’t! Don’t!” added Xifeng, Ngo-kwang and Yingtai, in Mailgirls order.

“No, I WANT them . . . I REALLY do!” Tami said, eyeing the bundle fiercely as if it were her Holy Grail. To her now-clothed companions, she was putting on a show that was no longer necessary.

“No, we are under orders not to give you clothes,” Mr. Zhou said. “We were not told of an exception for consent.” His mind-set was that of Chinese Communism: everything not prohibited, is compulsory.

The orderly put the bundle back into the hamper. “Good for you, Tami!” the Chinese Mailgirls called out. Tami crossed her arms over her breasts, covered one bare foot with the other, put her head in her hands and sobbed. She nodded to acknowledge their cheers. “You are so lucky!!” they whispered as they resisted the urge to itch the scratchy, suffocating things that now smothered their bodies and imprisoned their feet.

11.

They were kept apart. Evidently someone had decided that Tami was a bad influence on the Chinese girls. They had to continue to sleep in that tent partition, while Tami slept naked on the platform like before, and ate and pooped and showered there, in full view. They envied her her nudity but were sorrowful at being apart. Not to mention hating their clothes. True, they were free to strip once back in the tent, but it was not the same without their big sister. Their libidos deflated to nothing as the naked teenagers stared into the darkness listlessly until sleep came. One time Ngo-kwang tried to cheer up Xifeng by licking her, but the Orgasm Hog shook her head and pushed her away. It was not a happy time.

Their jobs were separate too. No longer did they run around urgently delivering those “secret” messages. “Repositioning” was an enormous task and they were relegated to moving files around, bringing documents to shredders, and sometimes rearranging desks and furniture. It was unpleasant, sweaty work in their confining clothes and sneakers. They thought of happier times, when they winked at other’s naked forms while scaling and descending the corrugated “Mailgirls stairways” on tough bare feet.

Tami was just as sad, despite enjoying the benefit of continued nudity. On the first regular day in their new role, they entered to see her posing for the artist, Mr. Reality. Her leg was hitched up on a chair, as she spread her butt cheeks so that he could get a view of her opened vagina and spread anus which he was busily sketching. He had brought an upturned spotlight so that Tami’s nether orifices all but leapt out at the people passing by. As Tami saw her clothed and covered up friends enter, her face betrayed the same desolation that they felt.

Tami’s new job was to take orders for Hsa products. Her cute American accent made her a good choice. As they passed by they heard her voice as she sat front and center in her backless chair, wearing nothing but a headset. Hsa’s specialty was clothes and shoes. “Yes, that’s a medium red shirt, long pants with a 13 waist, size 8 Zhe-lings, blue cotton socks . . . ” The Hsa catalog was quite extensive. They heard Tami mention just about every article of clothing they could think of, as she helped clothe China (and countries beyond) with Hsa products. Her voice, coming from (now) the only unclothed person in the building and audible throughout the atrium, served as a running reminder of Hsa’s diverse line.

Then one day, quite an ordinary day, Ngo-kwang and Yingtai were hefting a stack of folders up the old Mailgirls stairway, the short one that went from 1 to 2. The door to 2 was still stuck. In fact, stuck so badly that the two of them together couldn’t open it. In desperation they pounded on the door, hoping someone would open it from the other side.

The pounding reverberated through the atrium. Nobody responded. That is, until Tami ripped off her headset and jumped down to the floor. The slapping of bare soles running across the terrazzo had not been heard in some time. It turned heads. The nude American girl disappeared into the stairwell. Four seconds later the door burst open, nearly ripped from its hinges, followed by Tami’s bare foot in mid-air.

Mr. Chen (Sr.) happened to be walking by with a delegation of Vietnamese visitors. Stomping right up to his face on her hard soles, her breasts bouncing with anger, fists swinging to the sides, the naked girl launched a stream of shouted invective, in English and Chinese, such as the elegantly suited CEO had never been subjected to. Everybody froze, open-mouthed. Up and down the atrium people came out of their offices to see what was going on. Stamping her feet, Tami cursed in English and attempted cursing in Chinese, being barely coherent as she excoriated the Hsa Corporation and Mr. Chen in particular for STILL not fixing that door, putting the Mailgirls in peril, not caring about people’s lives, and worst of all being robots and not thinking for themselves. The echoes around the atrium from this tirade by the solitary nude were so loud that they seemed to run into each other. By the time she finished she had an audience of close to a hundred, obedient Chinese who had never heard such an outburst in their lives.

Tami, out of breath, stood before him with blazing eyes, breasts heaving, finally out of words.

“Security!!” Mr. Chen barked. But the guards were already behind him.

12.

The uniformed Chinese guards bowed as she passed. They had been told she was a naked capitalist harlot, beautiful but wanton, degenerate and dangerously seductive. She arrived naked and they were under orders that she was to stay that way. However during her two week incarceration she had won their respect through her courtesy, quiet study habits, and what could only be called modesty. So too the other prisoners. As well as her volunteering to help with laundry, putting bedsheets out on the clotheslines and taking them down and folding the linens. It was a less depressing place with her around. They were sad to see her go.

She had sent her things ahead, for some reason preferring to walk to her freedom without bookbag or laptop, just her bare naked self. She seemed oblivious to the chill Gobi wind blasting through the barred passageway, past her cold-stiffened nipples, fluffing her lush pubic hair. Her hard bare feet proceeded in a stately manner along the smooth concrete floor. Bare as she was, she clothed everywhere she went with grace, dignity, humanity. The guards thought: If only all capitalists could be like her . . . !

She got into the back seat of the PRC jeep with a slight nod from the poker-faced driver. Eighty kilometers later she was transferred to a limo with diplomatic plates. She got into the back seat with Dr. Judith Margolin, a psychologist attached to the American Embassy. They were headed to the consulate in Harbin. They spoke easily; they had been communicating through Tami’s secret link. Dr. Margolin, being the casual type, wore a blazer over a turtleneck sweater, jeans, and moccasins with socks. The fully clothed 35-year-old and the clothesless 20-year-old talked about American things, though Tami smiled when Dr. Margolin remarked that Tami had picked up a slight Chinese accent.

They got to the consulate and the limo went around to the rear entrance. Dr. Margolin could get in with her magnetic card but Tami had to confirm her identity by answering computerized questions, as if anybody but Tami Smithers would be entering this place naked.

“Full name?”

“Tami Blanche Smithers.”

“Date of birth?”

“27 July 2000.”

“Mother’s maiden name?”

“Campanella.”

“Paternal grandmother’s maiden name?”

“McNamara.”

“Maternal grandmother’s maiden name?”

She had to think for a second. She shared with Dr. Margolin a rolling of eyes. “Tufano.”

Entry granted.

The American Consulate sat on a quarter acre enclosed by a tall opaque fence. It consisted of a quaintly small “palace” style building, dating from 1924, behind which was a large lawn with a teahouse at the other end. At this time of year, when the grass was green and the weather more or less pleasant, tables and chairs were set out.

Tami and Dr. Margolin passed over the elegant Ming dynasty-style rug which had never before been touched by bare feet. They turned the tight little corner and entered the conference room.

“Good morning,” said the Assistant Consul, a short gray-haired man of about 60, clasping Tami’s hand and bowing, trying not to notice one of the world’s most beautiful bodies on full display in front of him. She was introduced to his assistants, Ms. Zhi, Mr. Jorgensen and Ms. McGillicuddy. Tami smiled a tight smile and bowed, but did not say a word.

They took their places in the conference room. “We are in American territory here, Miss Smithers,” the Assistant Consul said. “We welcome you to the Consulate. Let me say we all admire your exemplary behavior as an American citizen.” Tami was expressionless. Then he said, “Let us review some documents.” He put his finger to his lips as if to say, “Shhh!” Ms. McGillicuddy got up and pointed to a portrait of President Richard Nixon which hung on the wall, actually pointing a little behind it; then she pointed to her ear.

A laptop was placed in front of Tami. She read the long email that had been pulled up.

“Good evening sirs. My name is Huiqing. Ms. Tami Smithers gave me access to this email account in case of emergency.

“This is the story of what we ‘Mailgirls’ saw yesterday.

“1. Mr. Chen himself led us from the tent to the atrium. He explained that Tami had to be punished to show us that no Mailgirl can act the way she did. He then told us that a large thick candle had been placed in Tami’s rectum such that only half an inch remained inside but it was secured so that she was prevented from expelling it. He said she was not being physically injured but the psychological stress was ‘excruciating’, feeling like when one is about to expel a hard piece of feces but not quite able to do it. He also said she had been in this state of extreme frustration for forty minutes and she might not any longer be lucid.

“2. We were led to the far end of the atrium. Tami was on all fours on a raised platform, like the one we used to sleep on but only big enough to fit her body. She had a gag in her mouth like a golf ball but with holes in it. A big candle that we used to have was stuck in her anus, held in place by a metal brace. Her knees were tied apart onto the platform and her elbows were tied up above and attached to a overhead metal loop. She could not move. We were put into chairs in front of her. Her hair was tied to the loop so that she had to look up at us. Her eyes were open halfway but she did not seem to recognize us.

“3. Using a kind of crank Mr. Sen-tai pushed the candle further into Tami until about another 15 cm was inside her. Then he placed clips to her nipples and attached them to a kind of device similar to the ‘S&M’ items we have seen in Mr. Chang’s closet. It looked like a ‘scales of justice’ with the base pressed between Tami’s breasts and a wing-nut in the center on top of a long threaded bolt, which was designed to gradually pull the clips away from Tami’s chest. The nut was turned numerous times until her nipples were grotesquely stretched out. The chains were stiff and had a lock mechanism. Tami’s nipples were twisted one full turn and fixed like that. Tears came from her eyes and when they were twisted on full turn the other way she finally screamed. This was done four times.

“4. We tried to look at the floor but they made us look up at what was being done to her. If you were Chinese you would understand that we have to do what we’re told.

“5. The candle was finally taken out and from a little cooler Mr. Sen-tai took out a smooth shaft of ice that was almost as big and long. He attached it to the crank and eased it into Tami. Her lips turned blue and her body started shivering.

“6. Tami’s nipples were then released and the clips taken off. Her nipples were red and inflamed. To our surprise they brought out a big jar that we had bought of Cantonese hot sauce. With a brush they painted Tami’s irritated nipples with the hot sauce. She started screaming again.

“7. The last thing they did was to remove the ice shaft and run a long brush into her, like a bottle washer except longer and the bristles were soft like feathers. First they plunged it into the jar where it curled up so that the whole length was submerged. It dripped a lot when they took it out. Then they plunged it full length into Tami, took it out, and plunged it in again, three or four times, then pushed it all the way in and tied a rope around her waist so that she couldn’t push it out. I suppose the ice was to make her numb so that she wouldn’t feel the hot sauce until the brush had been tied into her. Her eyes opened wide and she screamed loudest then. We had to keep looking but we were crying.

“8. Mr. Chen wanted us to stay but finally Ms. Ling led us out of of the building. Tami was still screaming.

“9. Aside from Mr. Chen and Ms. Ling, the people there (as far as we can remember) were Ms. Mao, Mr. Chen Jr., Mr. Zhou, Ms. La, Mr. Chang, Mr. Sen-tai, Mr. Chen-wa, Ms. Tung, and Ms. Zhou. I am sorry we can’t remember their first names, except for Mr. Chang (Piao) and Mr. Zhou (Tse). There were also people watching from the doors of their offices.

“Signed, Huiqing, Xifeng, Ngo-kwang and Yingtai.

“P.S. If you see Tami tell her we hope she’s ok now. We were told she would recover from what they did to her without any marks. Also tell her we love her very much. When the building caught fire she saved our lives.”

Tami looked up to show that she had read it all. She was a little out of breath.

The Assistant Consul said, “Is there anything you wish to add?” Tami saw Ms. McGillicuddy holding up a sheet on which she had scrawled, “Say ‘NO'”. “No”.

“Thank you. This concludes our meeting.” Again the Assistant Consul put his finger to his lips.

They silently filed out of the conference room and then, led by the Assistant Consul, went outside to one of the tables on the lawn. It was a sunny day but with a chilly breeze, such as happens in Harbin even in June. Tami was asked to sit at one end of the table, with the Assistant Consul at the other end.

“We can speak freely here,” he said, a bit loud so that he could be heard over the breeze. “Is everything in that email true?”

“Yes,” the naked girl said icily.

“It is, of course, a gross violation of international law.”

“Tell me about it.” She crossed her arms over her breasts, defiantly. Underneath, her dexterous toes grabbed at the grass and pulled up a few blades.

“Made public, it would create quite a . . . sensation.”

“Like the whole stupid Mailgirls business!?” Tami said, barely controlling the desire to raise her voice. “I was supposed to be an exchange student!”

The Assistant Consul looked at Dr. Margolin. “Doctor, I hope you haven’t turned her against us.”

Dr. Margolin said, “She was already angry and has every right to be.”

The Assistant Consul exhaled. “First things first. We want to make sure that there were no physical — sequelae.”

Tami intimidated them by being graphic and clinical. “My nipples were red for a few days but they are back to normal now. See?” She stood up and held her breasts out at them, as if they were a twin-barreled howitzer about to shoot at them in alternate rhythm.

“Yes, ok,” the Assistant Consul said, shielding his eyes. “And of course your — your — ”

“My ANUS??” Tami practically shouted, making them jump. “That’s okay too. A few milk enemas and the burn went away. Some dripped into my vagina, so I did a milk douche. Both look fine. Want to see?”

“No!” he said quickly. “A medical exam — ”

“Why do you need that? Just LOOK!!” To their horror Tami hopped onto the table and, with her gymanst’s flexibility, pulled her legs up, crossed her feet behind her head, and got into what is called the “sleeping yogi” position. They were as astounded as they were mortified. The position allowed her to propel herself on her hands while thrusting her anus and vagina into their faces.

She scooted across to the Assistant Consul first. “Miss, this is not necessary –” She cut him off. “See? My vagina is in good shape.” She spread her lower lips. With a devilish smile she made her clitoris jump twice. He turned away. “Look! I’m not moving away until you look!” After a few seconds he did, squinting as if glancing directly at the sun. Another clit jump. “Also my anus. Don’t worry, there’s no odor, I just took a cherry shampoo enema.” He grimaced as Tami used her experienced internal muscles to relax her sphincter. He was forced to peer into an aperture that expanded to a full inch. Miss Tami Smithers now had the honor of having the interior of her rectum viewed by the Assistant Consul of the American Mission to the People’s Republic of China.

Tami went down the table, giving the same show with agonizing slowness to Ms. McGillicuddy, Ms. Zhi and Mr. Jorgensen. (She spared Dr. Margolin.) She was expressing her shame in the most forceful way possible. And as a result the naked girl on display on the table was not half as embarrassed or discomfited as the seated, fully clothed diplomats.

Tami resumed her seat. No one spoke as people caught their breaths, except for Tami and Dr. Margolin, who exchanged triumphant little smiles. Finally the Assistant Consul cleared his throat and said, “Very well then . . . Miss — Miss Smithers, needless to say we do not want this — abuse of an American citizen to be made public.”

“Why not?” The sun had disappeared, it had quickly gotten colder, and the wind kicked up. It looked like it might rain. Tami, normally quite temperature resistant, rubbed her upper arms which were now goose pimpled.

“I am not at liberty to say.”

“I think the whole Mailgirls program is a total disgrace. Even if what — what they did to me, was not told, the way they treat those girls — Huiqing, Xifeng, Ngo-kwang, Yingtai” — her eyes got wet as the remembered her little sisters — “is not — fair. That Hsa Corporation is made up of BAD people!”

“That is a Chinese matter. We cannot interfere. . . But if you agree to go back home once your, uh, exchange student year is up, in August, without saying anything, we are in a position to show our gratitude.” He buttoned up his jacket against the cold. The others at the table buttoned up theirs. Ms. McGillicuddy, who had a sweater tied around her neck, untied it and put it on.

Tami shivered. Then she said something that she obviously had planned to say. “Give me clothes. I want clothes to put on. I don’t want to be naked any more.”

The Assistant Consul glanced at the others. “Miss Smithers, according to our information, you are religious nudist.”

“I’ve changed my mind. I want to — wear clothes, like you folks do.” She hugged herself, trying to shield her nakedness against the increasingly chilly wind. She pulled her legs up so that she was sitting cross-legged on the chair, her freezing toes tucked into the hollows of her knees.

“But according to our file, if you were not so, you would have been expelled, because the only other explanation for your being caught naked on campus was that you were, as they say, ‘streaking’, which is an expellable offense at that college.”

“I don’t think the college would expel me now. Not after they sent me as their first-ever . . . ‘exchange student’ . . . to China.”

Again there were glances around the table. Evidently the naked girl had done some thinking. “Perhaps that is true. But . . . I am afraid there is a standing order that you must never be clothed.”

“What!”

The Assistant Consul turned to Ms. McGillicuddy. “Eileen?” She chimed in. “Miss Smithers, it is not official, but it is a clear policy understood internationally. We don’t know how it started, but it would be a breach of protocol for anyone to offer you clothes or shoes. We in the ‘corps’ are careful not to breach protocol, no matter where it originated, even if it seems strange.”

“What!” The naked girl further hugged herself, shivering, looking around at the warm clothes worn by everyone else.

“It’s called ANST. It stands for ‘Absolute Nudity: Smithers, Tami’.”

Tami looked down at the table with widened eyes. After a few seconds she said, in shivering tones, “D – do you know Mr. Ross? Henry Ross?”

The others looked around the table. Finally Ms. McGillicuddy said, “No, the name does not ring a bell.”

Tami straightened up. “I s – still want clothes. I don’t care about ANTS.”

“ANST,” Ms. McGillicuddy corrected her.

“W – whatever! You said you could do me a favor. Or do you want me to call the — the P – Providence Journal and tell them what they did to me? My c – cousin works there!” This was true, technically; Jim McNamara was on their maintenance staff.

The Assistant Consul looked around the table. Then he said, “Miss Smithers, I will see to it that your request goes through. We will make sure ANST is nullified and you will be able to wear clothes . . . You certainly deserve it.”

Tami almost smiled. “Thank you.”

“Just so you know, we can’t do it right away. Give me a few days, maybe a week. Meanwhile you can stay upstairs where the interns live. There’s one room that’s vacant.”

“Which has no clothes or blankets, I suppose.”

“Well . . . correct. But before we break the ANST protocol we have to clear certain channels. Meanwhile the best thing is for you to treat this place as your residence until your year is up. The interns are close to your age, and very friendly; after all, they are budding diplomats. The internet is relatively unrestricted so you will easily be able to continue your classes. And I’ll have you know our chef is world class. You will be comfortable here. More so than at that Chinese prison.”

“They were good folks. They were nice and never lied to me.”

13.

“Miss Smithers, I should introduce myself to you by name,” the Assistant Consul said. “I’m Tom Verplanck.”

“Mr. Verplanck,” Tami said, bowing, looking down in the night darkness at her bare feet on the grass next to his shined shoes. They were on the lawn behind the consulate, along with staff and interns. It was a late drink-and-snack affair which Mr. Verplanck had arranged, in honor of Tami as a visiting American citizen.

He said, “You wear your nudity as if it was the most expensive gown here. You’d make a good diplomat.”

Tami smiled. The consulate people had grown on her in the four days she had been resident here. “I’ve, um, had lots of practice.”

He motioned for her to follow him to the bar, attended by one of the interns in a blazer and open collar. “I hear that Mr. Simon, here, has a degree in mixology. Helpful, actually, for a diplomat.”

The young man smiled. “Can I get you a drink Tami?”

Tami looked at Mr. Verplanck. “The drinking age in China is eighteen, but you said we are on American territory. I’m not twenty-one yet.”

“In the consulate building, it might be an issue. Out here on the grounds, probably not. Don’t worry about it.”

“I’ll have a martini, please.” Mr. Verplanck and the intern laughed with recognition. The naked guest of honor said, “You know I like martinis?”

“Yes, it’s in your dossier,” Verplanck said. “Not too dry, Beefeaters gin, ‘up’ with a twist.”

Young Mr. Simon made it to order. Tami sipped. “This is good, George . . . It’s been a while since I had a drink.”

They watched the other people on the lawn, talking in twos and threes. Tami said, “It’s nice out tonight.”

“Our first warm night. Up here we only get about five of these a year.”

Another sip, and she looked up at something passing in front of the crescent moon. “Those are strange looking clouds up there.”

“Noctilucent clouds. The highest clouds in the atmosphere, about sixty miles up. This is one of the few places on Earth where they can be clearly seen. That is, on nights when the pollution isn’t too bad.”

“You know a lot about Harbin, I suppose.”

“I’ve been here thirteen years. Rather a long time to be in my position, but I made the mistake of trying to be good in my job. I learned Chinese fluently, and worse than that, the local dialect, and educated myself on the region. Now I’m the ‘Harbin specialist’ and I’m stuck here.”

“That makes no sense . . . Maybe you’ll get promoted to Consul.”

“I’m afraid that’s a political appointment. . . It’s not so bad,” Verplanck said, as the two wandered deeper out into the lawn. “I like it here. My wife does too.”

Tami swallowed and cleared her throat. “So — I get clothes tomorrow?”

“Yes, as of 5 p.m. local time. By that time all the, uh, channels will have been gone through and the ANST protocol can be abrogated.”

“It’s so odd that people know about me, and think that I can’t ever be given something to put on. Do you know how that — ANST thing — started?”

“No.”

“Why would you be afraid of giving me something to wear?”

Verplanck shrugged. “It might offend someone, somewhere. That’s all I can guess at.”

“Offend?”

“The first rule of diplomacy is not to give offense. You’d be surprised at some of the silly-ass things people get offended over, especially in this corner of the world.”

“Wouldn’t me being naked offend someone?”

“That situation . . . has not come up. We work case by case. You were a Mailgirl, and Mailgirls are supposed to be naked.”

“So how did I end up being a Mailgirl?”

“The Chinese were right — it was an American screwup.”

“They knew that?”

“That was our information.”

Tami took another sip, a big one. “So what happened to the girl who was supposed to be a Mailgirl? Did she get that exchange student job at the university?”

“No, she never showed up. Never even left the states. Just as well; she had not been properly vetted. Got arrested for a drug sale back in January and it turned out it was not her first time.”

Tami took another sip. “This whole Mailgirls business seems very weird to me.”

“You should talk — a religious nudist??” He cocked one eyebrow.

“Mr. Verplanck, you have to believe me.”

“Whether I believe you is not important. I don’t mind telling you, though, that our dossier on you is more extensive than the one that’s passed around to our allies. We think you have made several attempts to get into clothes. That exchange student ‘trousseau’ was one example.”

Tami, her face half in darkness, did not respond.

“Also we think it was you who engineered Hsa’s dissatisfaction with the nudity policy, by phishing emails originating from your external link. That’s why they made the decision to put the Mailgirls into clothes. All the Mailgirls except you, of course. Your plan backfired, wouldn’t you say?”

Tami was silent for a moment. Then she said, “How would you know something like that?”

“We have a . . . plant at Hsa.”

“Who — is it Ms. Ling?”

“Sorry, I’m not going to tell you.”

Tami took another sip. “That fire was an accident, caused by that lamp falling down.”

“Yes, we know that. Though it was a very convenient accident for certain people.”

Tami shook her head. “I’m just glad I’m out of there. All I want is to wear clothes again.”

“More proof that you are not really Mailgirls material.”

“What kind of girl would apply to be a Mailgirl? American girls, that is. I know why the Chinese girls do.”

“Mostly they seem to be ex-cheerleaders from places like Texas or South Carolina. Girls who like flaunting their bodies and jumping around, one assumes. Some of them, if not for the Mailgirls opportunity, would probably go into sex work.”

“Isn’t that what Mailgirls do? Being a Mailgirl is like . . . being in porn.”

“No, it a different world. In fact we monitor the situation carefully to make sure it stays that way. The Mailgirls idea is an American ‘export’ and we absolutely can’t have it intermingling with Guanxi.”

“Guanxi?”

“Business relations here are often cemented by providing sex favors, or putting on sex shows. It’s a huge underground industry, part of the Chinese mentality.”

“What about Chinese business — women?”

“They’re getting into it too now. It’s interwoven in Chinese culture, but in the American view it’s prostitution. The Mailgirls folks supply naked female messengers. That’s as far as it goes. No Guanxi . . . Hi, Judith.”

Dr. Margolin approached, holding a glass of white wine. “Hello . . . Tami, I hope you’re enjoying your life upstairs.”

“Yes, the interns are nice.”

“How about the food?”

“Very, very good!” They all laughed. “And I thought the vegan food at Hsa was good . . . Though my buddies up there, the interns, they keep asking questions about why I’m naked. I tell them I want to be like that, but it sounds weird. . . And what do I tell them tomorrow when they see me in clothes?”

“You don’t have to say anything. Or just, ‘long story’. They know that in ‘the service’ one often has to go on incomplete information. It’s training for them, I suppose.”

“Well, it certainly is a long story.” Tami was about half done with her martini. “Mr. Verplanck, about going back to Campbell-Frank . . .”

“Yes, have you written your statement yet?”

“I emailed it to you an hour ago.”

“Oh?” . . . He brought out his cell phone and read the screen. “Very good, short and simple. You say you’ve decided to change your convictions as to clothes and you thank everyone for being so supportive. . . ”

“Tami,” Dr. Margolin said, “you would make a good diplomat.”

Verplanck laughed. “You’re not the only one to tell her that!”

Tami said, “Why can’t I send it to the college right now?”

“It’s complicated. It has to have the Embassy imprimatur, and we can’t do that until the week before you return. Also we want to attach a photo to show anyone who might have heard, uh, rumors, that you are happy and in good shape. Maybe up on our roof, with the interns, and the Harbin skyline in the background . . . Judith, want to show Tami what awaits her?”

Dr. Margolin led Tami back into the consulate building. They passed over that Ming style rug, around another corner, then another, then to a hallway with a display case. Tami’s eyes opened wide as she saw an exact replica of the set of clothes and shoes that had been sent ahead on the way to China, the set that had been ceremoniously burned in front of her at the airport as she watched miserably, naked and barefoot in the snow.

At the sight of the clothes in the display case Tami lost control. She dropped her martini glass, then grabbed the glass door. Finding it locked, she picked up a chair, breasts jumping wildly on her chest, and was about to use it to smash the glass when Dr. Margolin grabbed the chair from behind.

“TAMI!! What are you doing!! You’ll be wearing those things in a day!!”

Tami’s eyes were still wild. Then, still holding the chair, she broke down and sobbed. “You don’t understand . . . so many times I’ve been SO CLOSE to putting clothes on . . . almost touching them . . . then they’re snatched away from me!! I don’t care what it looks like! I want to put those on NOW!”

“Tami . . . Tami . . . ” Dr. Margolin hugged the naked girl’s head in her arm. “Think! You are an American citizen who was tortured in a graphic, sexual way, in front of identified witnesses. The Embassy absolutely does not want this to get out. They know you have the proof up and down. They will pay ANY PRICE to buy your silence! Granting your request for clothes is the least they are able to do. They could probably pay for the rest of your college education, if you demand it.”

Tami sniffled and lowered the chair. “I’m there on a scholarship.”

“Well, anything else then . . .”

“Dr. Margolin . . . Judith . . . I still don’t believe I will get to put clothes on. This kind of thing happens over and over.”

“Let me ask you: What happens tomorrow at 5 p.m. and somehow these clothes have disappeared? You will contact your hometown newspaper and tell your story. They can’t stop you. It will be a worldwide ’cause celebre’, maybe for weeks.” Dr. Margolin picked up Tami’s martini glass, which had fallen on the rug and had not broken. “You are holding all the cards, Tami. You’ve got them in the palm of your hand!”

Tami gulped and put the chair back where it was. She crossed one arm over her breasts, and with her other hand covered her pussy. Then she let her arms fall to her sides. “I think . . . I want another martini.”

By the time she was sipping her second martini, out on the lawn with Verplanck, she had calmed down.

“You should eat something with that Tami,” one of the interns said, coming up to her with a piece of quiche.

“Thanks Sherry,” Tami said, gulping it down as Sherry went back to talking with Dominique, Harald and Zoraida.

Verplanck looked at her take another sip and said, “The dossier also mentioned your capacity for alcohol.”

Tami smiled. Then she said, “There’s one thing about being a Mailgirl I’ll miss. Huiqing . . . Xifeng . . . Ngo-kwang . . . and Yingtai. They’re so sweet, innocent. When we all get back to school I’ll talk to them online . . . They certainly have earned their way to — what was it, B.T.U.? Beijing Technical University?”

Verplanck took a sip of his wine and looked away.

Tami got a strange feeling in her nipples. Her eyes widened. “They — ARE — going to B.T.U., right?”

Verplanck took another sip, and said nothing.

“What happened to them??” Tami said, coughing on her drink. “Tell me!!”

“I — can’t, Miss Smithers.”

“Of course you can!! Or . . . do you want me to . . . call the Providence Journal??”

“Miss Smithers, please don’t — ”

“Of course I will! What happened to them?” Her face fell. “Xinjiang??”

“That — is our information. Not certain, though.”

“How can you let this happen??”

“It’s not something we have a voice in, Tami. They are Chinese nationals.”

“You — KNEW all this??? Without telling me!”

“Miss Smithers — ”

“You’ve got to get them out of there!”

“We have no means to — ”

“I — DON’T — CARE!” Tami flung down her martini. Her fists were at her side, her legs apart, her spread toes gripping the grass. Conversation stopped with her strangled sobs. “GET THEM OUT OF THERE! I DON’T CARE WHAT — DEAL YOU HAVE TO MAKE! OR YOU KNOW WHAT I WILL DO!!”

14.

It was an exhibition hall which somehow sprouted up out here in the Gobi desert, perhaps as the centerpiece of a planned city which never got built. Some limousines parked around, and a helicopter pad. It was not that large inside, about the size of a high school gym, with five rows of stands around the periphery and a wraparound balcony. It was well-lit, big windows above bringing in the bright though bleak surroundings, a chilly and windy landscape even in summer.

Sir Gregory Bateson, age 74, tweedy three-piece suit, red tie, Union Jack pin, pocket square, well-shined wingtips. A throwback to the Foreign Service of the 1970’s, he had come with a bowler and umbrella, which he had surrended at the door, along with his cell phone.

Horace Donaldson, age 59, attached to the American Consulate. The Consul decided, wisely, not to tell the Ambassador or the other political higher-ups about the “arrangement”. All tasks were passed off to the British, whom the Chinese trusted more anyway. Still they decided that they should include an American. Consulate staff had grown so fond of Tami during her short stay there that the task was delegated to Mr. Donaldson, who had been on vacation during that time and could be more objective. He wore a pinstriped Armani suit.

Sir David Sutcliffe, age 62, assisting Sir Gregory. His choice in suits was a little brighter than his superior’s, light gray, blue tie, wingtips that were new and pinched a little. Flashes of green socks could be seen as he walked.

Peggy Park, age 29, a native of Korea but a graduate of Stanford University. Sir David’s intern, nervous on her first “sensitive” assignment. Ms. Park wore a business jacket with a ruffled collar, A-line skirt cut below the knee, nylons and heels.

Roger McConway, age 44, Ms. Park’s supervisor in the PRC unit, in a business suit of course.

Lady Louise Fanshaw, age 66, a senior Sinologist, in a floor-length skirt and business jacket over a silk blouse and flats.

Vladimir Zinowsky, age 55, another Sinologist, in a rather old-fashioned rounded collar shirt under a double-breasted suit with rather oversized pants. His good shoes were being repaired, so he was wearing black sneakers.

Under the above described clothing, they all of course had on a full set of undergarments.

Around the hall there were the echoes of shoes shuffling and low voices. But the place was not empty. The seventy or so visitors, obviously men of wealth and power, sat on the sides, or milled around the stations at the far end. Areas for weight-lifting, yoga, gymnastics, what looked like a low desk with a laptop, all up on three-foot risers for better display . . . but mostly the guests clustered at the near end, after the entry where there was a long coatrack meant to accommodate perhaps fifty guests. There was a partition which blocked any direct view from the entrance. Going around it . . .

The seven-member delegation looked up at the suspended, nude form of Tami Smithers, wrists and ankles cuffed with ropes that stretched her out into a very wide “X”. She was surrounded by inquisitive businessmen — and a few women — who were drinking in her complete and utter nudity with a quiet but hungry lust, it was not just a rumor, it was true, their reward for bringing in millions in foreign money, and an inducement to bring in more. Allowed an hour in here, they circled around in the best (or worst) Guanxi tradition, carrying the drinks they had gotten from the bar, or maybe the little plates from the buffet, admiring the American girl’s tight little butt, the lightly muscled shoulders, the exquisitely long legs, the toned tummy, the well-displayed pubic bush, the pretty bare feet, the perfectly firm breasts, and not the least the beautiful face with bright green eyes and the dark red hair just touching her bare shoulders.

There were a handful of women in red overalls here and there, acting as staff.

To accommodate the heavily suited guests, the air conditioning was turned up, and the cold air stiffened the nipples on Tami’s firm, jutting breasts. Around the nipples, there were goose pimples on the tanned, weather-toughened areolae. The nipples poked out searchingly as if on an eternal quest for covering and warmth.

“Miss Smithers,” Sir Gregory said, looking up at her face, with as steady a voice as he could manage. They had been told to expect something like this but they still were unsettled, and truth be told awestruck at this luxurious and complete elucidation of one of the world’s most beautiful bodies.

“Good afternoon,” Tami said, listlessly. She closed her eyes and in a smaller voice, she said, “Please don’t look.” Then she cleared her throat and looked down at them. “I have been waiting for you all month.”

“Yes, sorry, but what you ask was . . . well we have had difficulties.”

“They made a promise to me.”

“Yes, but — ”

Tami perked up, as if suddenly given a shot of adrenaline. “And those clothes and shoes! They could have at least let me put them on, and wear them, even if only for a few minutes.”

“Sorry, Miss Smithers . . . but that would have violated the terms of the arrangement. Also I know you were told that ANST would be officially abrogated, but it was not yet, as you Americans might put it, a ‘done deal.”

They looked up at her face and it appeared for a moment that she was on the verge of tears. Sir David said, “I know it must be frustrating. You have three more weeks here. You must be counting the days.”

“I don’t count days any more,” Tami Smithers said, cryptically.

“They will miss you when you’re gone, I’m sure,” Mr. Donaldson said.

“They have a girl lined up to replace me. Her name is Zhen-Zhen.”

The elegantly dressed delegation and the stretched out nude girl regarded each other for a moment. Tami wiggled her fingers and toes, as if part of a wild hope to rip the cuffs off, jump down to the floor, grab something from the coatrack to put on, and run out of here.

“Can you please at least get that fan turned off?”

They looked down to the side. A large fan was quietly but efficiently blowing upwards at Tami’s crotch. “It’s bad enough they keep this place like a refrigerator, but . . . ”

“What is the purpose of that fan? It seems unnecessary,” Lady Fanshaw said.

Tami shook her head in digust. “They like the effect it has on my . . . lower hair.” To Tami’s chagrin this prompted them to examine at her crotch, which due to her suspended state was a little above their eye level. The pubic hair of Tami Smithers, as was well known, was lush and abundant, having grown free and unencumbered in the open air for so long. The fan ruffled it in a way that was oddly and admittedly enchanting.

“I’m sorry, Miss Smithers,” Sir Gregory said. “They made us promise not to do anything to help you.”

Tami exhaled, exasperated at the impotence of her clothed visitors. Meanwhile the delegation took stock of her predicament. They could hardly imagine a posture that could leave every inch of her more completely exposed and more helplessly on display. The ropes on the ankle cuffs went down to pulleys far to the right and left, then up to the balcony, where on each side they were coiled into a windlass which also operated the ropes coming up from her wrists. Her legs were pulled apart more widely than her arms, allowing her pink pubic lips to emerge into view, slightly separated. They looked at her bare, outstretched feet, and saw red white and blue painted on the widely spaced toenails, obviously not her idea. Her fingernails too. Noticing their gaze, she said, “They also wanted to dye my hair red white and blue, but I said no way to that.”

Sir David said, “Remember, Miss Smithers, shortly before you leave this place, your college will get the directive that you be allowed footwear, and clothing.”

“Can’t they be given the directive now? Zhhh!!” She shuddered as with a turn of the fan a whiff of chilly air curled up into her vagina. Goose pimples rose on her butt, much to the enjoyment of a Colombian gentlemen who was transfixed by her glutes.

“No, only at the proper time. Those are the terms. Though the paperwork is all ready.”

“Yes I know, I wrote it myself!” She sighed in exasperation. “I wish I could access it. I can’t get to anything here. Just the official news, and the email relay to my classes.”

“I understand,” Sir Gregory said. “Of course the Chinese are very good at restricting internet access.”

“As if I didn’t know that.” The naked girl looked down sternly from her stretched out perch. She shivered; they could see the goose pimples on her breasts and her thighs and they all felt miserable, fully clothed and free to walk about on their well-shod feet.

Now she stared down at Sir Gregory with the iron determination they knew this girl was capable of. “Well — ?”

“A few preliminaries,” Mr. Donaldson said. “You’re an American citizen and our first task is to ascertain that you are safe. We have been given a very general list as to what, uh, what they are doing to you on a daily basis. Are you here all the time?”

Tami reluctantly gave her report. “Yes, 24/7, except for mornings when I do cleanup and go outside to dump the trash.”

“Cleanup? Dump the trash??”

“Yes . . . These folks are getting their money’s worth out of me.”

“You’re not always on . . . display like this.”

“Well, this is like, part of my typical working day. After I take out the trash, I eat breakfast. I have to admit, the food here is really excellent. . . Then I go down to the far end, where I . . . poop in front of everybody, then I get an enema, shower, and the festivities begin.”

Sir Gregory looked around. “Is it always this — well attended?”

“Yes, usually, More so in the mornings. It’s amazing how many old guys are fascinated with watching a girl poop. It still freaks me out.”

“No one can touch you though?”

“Certainly not! I made that clear from the get-go.”

“How about keeping up with your classes?”

“I’m free after six, so there’s plenty of time. It’s the summer semester anyway. It’s hard to study with people staring at me, but I got used to it. Also, some of the workers here, I tutor in English. They’re really nice.” Implication: as opposed to the rich creeps who come in to gawk.

Mr. Donaldson looked around at the balcony, the folding chairs, and peeked back around Tami’s bare butt to see the various stages, the shower, the toilet, and a canopy about eight feet up with rows of folding chairs around it. “Do these people get allowed in . . . after dinner too?”

“Yes, and even overnight. They dribble in even at three o’clock in the morning. It was hard to sleep on that clear plastic thing at first, with people looking up at me, and down at me, but I suppose I can get used to anything. At least the whole place is a ‘quiet zone’ then and they turn the lights down.”

Sir Gregory cleared his throat and said the well-rehearsed words. “It was understood that your presence here for the benefit of unnamed guests would carry a component of intimate exposure.”

“You mean the sex things they do to me?” The hurt in her pretty green eyes was as sharp as her words. She glanced up at her wrist, and the rope extending from it way up to the balcony. She tugged on it as if testing if escape was possible. Her breasts jiggled slightly. The two Russian guys to the side smiled at this.

“Um . . . yes. I hope you are not being . . . physically . . . discomfited.”

“Well . . . ” Tami looked up briefly, as if making a mental list. “They’re not very subtle or gentle around here.” As if that needed to be said. “The dildos they use are too big, very uncomfortable. The never heat the enemas enough. And the nipple clamps are too tight.”

The stretched-out nude looked down at Lady Fanshaw and noticed her aghast reaction to the mention of nipple clamps. “They do a — ” Tami, unfamiliar with the vocabulary, searched for the word. “Sadomasochistic — thing — every Thursday.”

“They are not injuring you, I hope!” said Sir Gregory, opening his jacket to tug down at his vest.

“No . . . it’s just uncomfortable. I’ll live.” Then she looked down and said sharply, “It’s not like Mr. Sen-tai and his — twisty — ” She didn’t have to finish the thought. They studied Tami’s nipples, cringing at the thought of what they once endured, grateful that they were so resilient, as resilient as Tami herself. “And,” she added, her words dripping with insinuation, “I am happy to report that my — rectum — has not had any hot sauce in it recently.”

Donaldson refused to accept the implication that her sufferings had been her government’s fault. In his gruff voice, said to the rest of the delegation, “Miss Smithers is in a way used to — what you see here. It had been a fact of her life at her college as a research subject, to the point where she had become used to that fact. That’s what made the arrangement . . . conscionable.” They knew that of course. This naked girl had been through more extreme things than this. They had read the accounts of the experiments at Chalfont, the wintry semesters walking barefoot through Vermont snow. And then this remarkable girl had made her way across her entire home country in the nude, while thinking the police were hunting for her, with no clothes, no shelter, no money, walking barefooted over mountains and deserts and swimming across rivers, equipped with nothing except her bare body and her wits.

Still, this scene was hard to look at.

Tami stared down at her fellow American. “I’ve never been in front of an international audience, though. . . Are you sure none of this is being videoed?”

Sir Gregory said, “The Chinese are far too astute to allow something like that to happen. This entire . . . facility, like all Guanxi, is sub rosa.”

The officials had to move to the side so that a small clutch of dark-skinned gentlemen, having viewed the nude from the rear, could see Tami from the front. Their heads bobbed in front of the ruffling pubic hair as they took turns to inspect. Their low voices had a French accent. Possibly from Ivory Coast. Tami looked over dully at the line of coats hung up right in front of her as if to torture her, and then gazed up through the big window at the bright windy plain. Now the Africans withdrew and took their seats to the side, evidently waiting for an upcoming “demonstration”.

The appearance of one of the red-clad matrons up on the balcony drew their attention. She walked over to the windlass, and nodded to her partner on the other side. In coordination they cranked the windlasses. It took increasing effort as the ratchets clicked once, twice, and then finally a third time. The ropes creaked in their pulleys as they tautened and then vibrated, as if the whole apparatus, including the girl’s body, were a huge musical instrument being tuned up.

Tami Smithers was now further stretched. She gasped as her arms and legs were straightened to the limits of their elasticity. Her breasts jutted out further, the cold-stiffened nipples seeming to poke out like guns with which to destroy her enemies. Her labored breathing only emphasized the deepened concavity of her tummy, heaving in and out under her clearly defined ribs. Below, at their eye level, her pubic lips further separated as the doors to her dark feminine cave peeled apart.

The stretching, reminiscent of the legendary Rack of medieval times, concerned even Donaldson. “Miss Smithers — that must hurt — ”

“Not — really,” she said between exhales.

“I don’t see the purpose of this,” Sir Gregory said, as if he was about to lodge a protest. Though it was doubtful he had permission to do so.

“It’s — to make my — ” Tami hesitated at saying the word and closed her eyes. “My — orgasms — stronger. If my muscles are all stretched out — ”

Those who had read the Chalfont papers vaguely remembered a mention to this effect.

“A few are — so strong — they — knock me out,” she said resignedly. Despite her distress she noticed their consternation. “Don’t — worry. I set limits.”

Peggy Park spoke even though it was not really her place. “Limits?”

“Yes . . . At — first they — went too far. They almost killed me. F – finally I said — no more than thirty — ” Tami closed her eyes again — “orgasms in one day. And no more than ten in one — session — uhhh — ”

Miss Park looked down. Her Asian eyes widened. Thirty orgasms in one day!! She had never had even one. The product of a strict family of bureaucrats in Seoul, she had broken out of her upbringing only a few years ago and tried masturbating in bed, under the covers, pulling down her pajama bottoms and then her panties, manipulating the soft lower lips with fumbling fingers. She had come close a few times but never could “go over the top”. She knew that whatever an orgasm was, it had to feel really, really good.

And this naked girl, the forever naked Tami Smithers, had thirty of them! Every day! Some of them so powerful that she fainted! Peggy felt consumed with envy and then chastised herself. Did she really want to be like Tami, forbidden to ever wear clothes, stretched out with every little bit of her exposed for the leering eyes of creepy rich men?

The delegation stood there silently, at a loss for words, unable to stop looking at the ruffling pubic hair, the concave tummy, the pointed breasts, then over at the widely-spread bare feet with the red white and blue painted toenails.

They knew the stretched-out nude was going to scold them, and now the moment came. “Well, gentlemen and — ladies!” Tami’s voice, stentorian so that it almost did not sound like Tami, broke the silence. The stretching of her body made it a little hard to breathe but she got the words out. “Do — you — have — something to sh – show me?” It amazed Peggy that young Tami, naked and up on display and now under stress, could hold her own with the clothed diplomats.

“Miss Smithers — ” Sir Gregory began. He was interrupted by one of the matrons, who approached them and said in uncertain English, “We will begin now show. Yourselves sit please.”

There were empty seats right behind them. As they sat down uneasily there was a movement of observers to this end of the hall. Another matron went around behind Tami and pulled apart the naked girl’s butt cheeks to the close inspection of the men back there, as it happened some venture capitalists from Australia. Like all the other guests at this facility they were meticulously and expensively dressed, in full-cut suits with florid ties and pocket squares, their shined shoes squeaking against the cold tile floor. The guests here were coming from, or about to go to, important business meetings and were dressed accordingly.

The delegation couldn’t see it from where they sat, but it was obvious from Tami’s pained expression what unwelcome things were being done to her rear parts. “Ughh — why do these matrons — all have to be — smokers — ” An odd comment; they could detect no cigarette smell, just a hint of coconut, evidence of the afternoon enema. Her sour accusatory grimace was aimed at Sir Gregory directly as her body jerked as a skilled tongue darted deep into her rectum and then slid rapidly in and out of her anus. The twist of her face brought out the faded little scar over her eye. He looked away, down past the twitching toes of her right foot.

They preferred to look elsewhere when the first matron approached Tami from the front, ostentatiously spread the girl’s vaginal lips, and showed off the naked girl’s emerging clitoris to the crowd. It was engorged with the unwanted arousal that had been achieved behind. Tami looked up at the ceiling in desolation. Her clitoris, shining in the overhead metal halide dome lights, was directly at the height of the matron’s mouth. Now the 48-year-old lesbian of much experience plunged her face into Tami’s crotch and devoured the young woman’s vulva with such ferocity that it elicited a short shriek which echoed through the hall. Tami’s legs, pulled apart almost to the horizontal now, quivered to the extent they could. The jolt was transferred through the wrist and ankle cuffs to the taut ropes, which got them vibrating. The vibrations reciprocated, and like a marionette the nude body jerked in crazy directions. The two matrons locked arms around the girl’s hips to steady her as they played the girl’s body for the crowd’s amusement. Tami was no longer cold; her skin flushed with her increased metabolism.

Orgasm was induced quickly, as they knew it always was with Miss Smithers. The veins in her throat bulged as she tried to keep her jaws shut but her strangled screams resounded in the huge atrium. Her eyes bugged out at the delegation with powerful accusation. They all looked down at themselves, the layers of fine clothes which Tami was always prevented from wearing, the shoes that would seem so odd being put on her broad, tanned, toughened bare feet.

It seemed like forever but the orgasm finally spent itself, the first of the session (though it was her seventeenth of the day). The matrons’ tongues and lips, front and rear, did not stop sucking and chewing and licking and jabbing even for a second. Tami cried out in agony during the moment of supersensitivity; then her head dropped to her neck as she surrendered to the second cycle of plateau and orgasm.

Peggy could see Sir Gregory look around uneasily. They would hate to admit it but all five men in the delegation were getting erections to varying degrees and were shifting in their chairs. It seemed odd to think this but the experience was actually more unbearable for the observers than for the beseiged nude girl. Unfortunately to get up and leave would create “a scene”. Their instructions were to be as discreet as possible. As Tami was recovering from her third orgasm they were rescued by the appearance of an equal number of Americans, well fed, overdressed and leery-eyed. Sir Gregory offered their seats and soon the delegation had escaped to the outer row of stands. After an awkward silence they began discussing their options, trying not to watch what was being done to Tami forty feet away.

They could think of nothing at the moment. But they had to return, and quickly. They were at the naked girl’s mercy. And she knew it.

15.

Peggy Park sat with the other six members of the delegation in the stands, watching Tami Smithers’s chalked hands twirl around the parallel bars as she executed a double-flip dismount. Her strong, broad bare feet landed with a solid thump on the platform, her breasts jiggling to rest as she stood up with arms raised and the traditional fake smile. Her hair had been done up in cute pigtails which made her look about fourteen years old, obviously not her idea. The worshipful men sitting around her, knowing themselves lucky to see expert gymnastics done in the nude, clapped spontaneously, though they were too polite to shout. Their emotions were as inhibited as their erections, hidden but squeezing the confines of their business suits. As much of a vaunted treat this was for the moneyed guests, now that they were here it made them uncomfortable, hot under the collar, sweating. While the totally nude young woman exposing every bit of herself in various inventive ways seemed perfectly at ease, if anything flaunting her bodily freedom, unconfined by clothes or shoes. Maybe she enjoyed their discomfiture and tried to aggravate it by playing her part so brazenly?

Peggy and the rest of the delegation had been waiting here for half an hour. Having surrended their cell phones and unable to think of things to say, there was nothing to do but watch. It was three o’clock in the afternoon, right after the afternoon enema (they were glad they had missed that). Soon would be the weight lifting, and then the yoga demonstration at which they were guaranteed front seats and could talk to Miss Smithers about what was being arranged. They would have preferred to arrive right then, but the schedule they had (finally!) been given was too vague and they wanted to be sure.

This was their second visit. Ever since their first visit a week ago Peggy, a 29-year-old virgin who had never had an orgasm, who went to bed modestly dressed in underthings and pajamas, had become obsessed with this young woman who had been deprived of clothing for so long that it could be no more than a fond but faint memory. Who had dozens of orgasms a day in this place, and been put on display and subject to dildos, vibrators, ropes, and the mouths and tongues of the red-clad matrons. Tami had agreed to being a public sex toy for the summer in this strange and secret place. But had she agreed to all the other things she had done for the past two years?

This young nude lady was a Sphinx, impossible to get to know, or it seemed so to the diplomats who had access to the file. She was casually referred to as “the International Nude”. It was the impetus, somehow, for the ANST policy. Peggy had read the file — the reports from Tami’s college, from American authorities, and from clandestine observation. Everyone in the office had read it. It was always being added to. But the more information that was gathered, the deeper the mystery seemed. Tami’s bare body had been probed and displayed and discussed and documented more than anyone else’s in history, probably, but her mind could not be penetrated. No one had seen her laughing or acting “natural” or at ease. She always seemed on her guard. Or maybe her mind was somewhere else?

Was Tami Smithers really a nudist? There were several schools of thought. Practically nobody believed Miss Smithers’s claim that she had decided, one week into her freshman semester, that nudism was her religion. That was obviously an excuse concocted on the fly to avoid expulsion after being caught on a streaking dare; it was, as Sir Gregory put it, “plain as a pikestaff.” The dossier on her was very thorough, and it showed no hint in her previous life of any strong religious feeling, or any eccentricities. She was a normal girl from a working-class family in the State of Rhode Island, U.S.A., who had good grades and got into college on a gymnastics scholarship, the first person in her family to go past high school. She had a normal circle of friends and was not a troublemaker. Only a threat of expulsion, which would be devastating to her family, could prompt such an uncharacteristic profession of faith. And it was that threat that intimidated her into agreeing into more and more intimate exposures.

The school of “traumatic adjustment” had more adherents, including Sir Gregory and Peggy’s boss Sir David. Having declared herself a nudist, Miss Smithers was at first traumatized but gradually realized that being naked was not so bad. Constant exposure eventually blunted her feelings of embarrassment, and she actually got to enjoy her nudist life. As Sir David put it, “Once the sense of shame has been conquered, a naked girl, particularly one as fit and attractive as Miss Smithers, has a great deal of power.” Or as Fiona, another intern in the office, put it: “a naked girl with a body like that can conquer a room and reduce all the men to babbling idiots”.

Another school of thought — “change of mind” — agreed that Tami had adjusted to nudity but also believed she had grown weary of it and at a certain point decided she wanted to get back into clothes. This would explain her apparent attempts to put herself in situations where clothes would be required — for example, her application last year to be an exchange student here in the PRC. Why China? This working-class girl did not know much about overseas travel. She only knew one person, her dorm roommate Jennifer McIntyre, who had been to China, and that was only to Hong Kong. But Tami must have read that China was a conservative culture and would be unlikely to tolerate a nudist in their midst. That was why the set of clothes and shoes was waiting for her on arrival — obviously ordered by her. Ostensibly this was ascribed to some kind of bureaucratic foulup, but the clothes had been selected with much care, all Tami’s size, and similar to the clothes she had worn previously.

It must have been torture for poor Tami, standing barefoot and naked in the snow at the airport, with everyone else in overcoats and boots, to see the clothes, moments from her grasp, declared to be an “insult” to her freedom of religion and burned right in front of her. That was the thinking of the last school of thought, the “desperation” school, which held that Miss Smithers never wanted to be naked, never got over her feelings of modesty, and had been trying, in various inventive and increasingly desperate ways, to be allowed to put on clothing and shoes. It was the most unsettling viewpoint, but to Peggy, perhaps because she was a modest young woman herself, it was the most obvious.

The record revealed a long series of attempts by the unfortunate girl to snatch the clothing that was forbidden her — beginning her first semester with her volunteering for that art exhibit performance, thinking she would get to wear a body stocking; then her applying for a summer job in a different town where the college would not know she was clothed; then her remarkable journey across the country, frightened by that bogus fax from the college warning the police to not give her any clothes, yet certainly she spent that journey trying to find something to put on; then being trapped on that bizarre “pony girl” farm, begging for clothes yet being kept naked and barefoot with the other girls all in leathers and boots — it went on and on, an endless series of frustrations. On top of that, Tami was continually put in situations where the desire for covering would be overwhelming — exposed to cold and wind and rain, hard and rough surfaces under her bare feet, being put right next to clothes which she must have an intense urge to grab and cover herself with, an urge that had to be suppressed and so completely that people couldn’t even detect it. A phrase from a report stuck in their minds: “Extreme tantalization over an extended period of time.” They all agreed that Miss Smithers had exceptional inner strength. But there must be a limit. It was a wonder she hadn’t gone crazy with frustration.

A small number of insiders postulated that she actually \*had\* gone crazy, that her reserved demeanor masked a personality that at some point had gone over the edge, escaped into a fantasy world where she was warm and clothed and wore an exquisite collection of fancy shoes, like someone being starved to death who in extremis thinks he is eating a five-course dinner. Indeed retreating into herself must have been the only defense during those horrible Chalfont Institute experiments where the terrified teenager was forced to make eye contact with creepy male researchers during her mechanically induced multiple orgasms. The problem with that theory was that there was no evidence of a psychotic break. It might have happened during that cross-country naked journey but that was pure speculation. The most detailed account from that time was Professor Marge Richardson’s, when Tami passed through her friendly commune of Jewish lesbians in the State of Tennessee. The Professor related that Tami, though naked, acted in all other respects like a normal teenage girl and they even enjoyed a laugh or two together.

All the theories were upended by Miss Smithers’s surprising announcement at the Consulate that she wanted to get back into clothes. This declaration seemed to vindicate the “change of mind” thinkers, but she picked a strange time and manner. Why hadn’t she done it earlier? Perhaps she realized, as she said, that the college couldn’t very well expel her now that it had sent her as an exchange student, and to China of all places, diplomatically sensitive. But she could have changed her mind on that basis six months ago, indeed, even when she first arrived. . .

Tami completed her gymnastics, finishing with a floor routine. A matron gave her a water bottle and then she walked over to the weight machines. The delegation moved up to the second row. The clanking of metal weights began as Tami did the chest press, over 20 kilos. She was strong in every sense of the word. The men in front watched intently as her breasts jiggled with every “rep”. Now the leg press, the naked girl spreading her legs wide as her toes spread and flexed against the footplates. The men took turns at the vantage point from which one could see her separated vaginal lips as her thighs pushed and drew back above them. Now they saw the flushed skin and the beads of sweat as they collected in little rivers to run into her pubic hair. A few more exercises, and finally the hip adductor/abductor, requiring the naked girl to spread her thighs wide, wide, wider for the men.

These activities had no sexual component so they were easier to watch than the forced-orgasm exhibition the first time they were here. On that date the delegation had already endured watching Tami, suspended and stretched out with ropes, subjected to the matrons’ tongues, front and rear. They were glad to yield their seats to some arriving Americans and sit back here in the stands, where they discussed their options. They were about to leave when the matrons withdrew from Tami’s well-worked vagina and well-worked anus. She was still cruelly stretched out by the ropes, sweating and exhausted, by then having endured perhaps six or seven orgasms, her head hanging down, catching her breath, her concave tummy heaving. They thought the matrons would untie her and let her rest but the show was not over.

The huge painted head of a traditional Chinese dragon was brought in from the rear, carried by two of the security guards. From the front another matron approached with a pail of warm water, out of which she fished a long floppy rubber-like thing that looked like a giant tongue, maybe a foot long, pointed at the end but thick as a cucumber at the base. They attached it in some manner to the inside of the dragon’s mouth. Peggy’s eyes widened when she realized what was about to happen.

Like everything the Chinese did, it was well thought out and effective. And diabolical. The prehensile rubber tongue was lubricated and slid up into Tami’s rectum. Her head jolted upright and her eyes looked up in alarm. As it slid in further she emitted what sounded like choking sounds. Finally the works was set in motion in retro fashion by a large hand crank on the side of the dragon’s head. The long tongue slithered in and out, bending and twisting but always managing to snake all the way in, evidently connected to a cam which changed the angle of attack with each thrust. Tami shivered and shook and the ropes vibrated once again as the tongue must have gone past her rectum and up into her colon. The matron, who like everyone else in the world (it seemed) knew the nuances of Tami’s levels of arousal, cranked more vigorously as orgasm approached. The naked girl’s knees quaked to the extent they could as a strangled cry was ripped from her throat. From reading the Chalfont reports Peggy could deduce that Miss Smithers was now experiencing not only stimulation through her anus and rectum, but through the entrance into her sigmoid colon (what someone referred to as “Tami’s inner butthole”) and up further.

Suddenly Peggy, and the rest of the delegation, noticed that the men watching around the perimeter all looked Asian . . . and were wearing PRC pins! An American woman was being anally invaded by a Chinese dragon and driven to orgasms she did not want. One could hardly imagine a grosser insult. It was well known that the Chinese harbored lingering resentments at being so degraded and humiliated by Western imperialist powers in previous centuries. This was a form of revenge, a conclusion reinforced by the malevolent smiles and laughter of the Chinese men.

“What a — !” Mr. Donaldson was outraged. He got up as if to leave until he felt Sir Gregory’s hand on his shoulder. Leaving now would look like a form of protest. They had to be as faceless and discreet as possible. They all knew that any American objection would be politicized and fumbled at any rate. That was part of the reason this matter had been handed to the British. The delegation had to just sit and watch, silently cursing their impotence. Was their humiliation greater than Tami’s at the moment? The naked young woman was driven to two more orgasms, so powerful that her shrieks resounded up to the glass windows. Finally the tongue was withdrawn. Sudden and surprising applause, with a hint of viciousness and glee, erupted. The matrons, smiling for a change, took a bow. Up on the balcony the windlasses were unwound, ropes loosened, and Tami’s limp body was untied so that she could collapse onto the bare floor where she quickly fell asleep.

That was bad. Today, much to their collective relief, it was just Tami exercising for the crowd.

Now Miss Smithers, having done the circuit on the machines, padded back to the shower and washed off the sweat, sweat caused this time not by orgasms but by simple exertion. A towel was provided by a matron which of course, as soon as Tami finished drying herself, was quickly snatched away.

Miss Smithers went to the yoga mat on the little square stage and now the delegation got their chance to sit right up next to her. The flexible gymnast easily and comfortably got into the initial postures. Peggy had taken yoga and recognized the lotus positions, then the peacock, the scorpion, the bird of paradise . . . Now Tami faced the man at the end of the stage and slowly and sensuously thrust up her crotch at him, spread her legs wide, extended her arms back, and intertwined her fingers with her toes. This was an advanced position; Peggy remembered it was called “bear” . . . although with Tami it would be “bare”.

A matron handed the man a small flashlight. Tami gave a little grunt and displayed one of her many talents: her womanly cave opened up in his face. This was another Chinese man in a business suit with a PRC pin. He gulped and peered into the pinkness inside, his hand shaking as he aimed the flashlight. It was too intense, especially with Tami looking directly at him, from his perspective her eyes emerging right over her pubic bush. After only a couple of seconds he gave the flashlight back with a trembling hand, almost dropping it. An American girl so discomfiting him — was this her own revenge for that dragon stunt? Tami’s body, inside and out, was a formidable weapon and she knew how to use it. The matron gave the flashlight back to the man again and pointed. Evidently each was to hand the flashlight to the next. The second man shined the light up Miss Smithers’s vagina but likewise could only stand it for an instant.

Peggy noticed the faces of the men in her delegation going pale. They were a few seats away it was clearly expected that they, too, would be expected to shine the flashlight into Miss Smithers. The effect created by her cute pigtails, which they now saw had pink ribbons in them, made it worse, more transgressive, more embarrassing, not to the young naked girl but to the clothed men. Poor Mr. Zinowsky was first. Never at ease, he bit his lip as he dutifully looked into the interior of Miss Smithers. One could hardly do this without looking Tami in the eye, so close was the line of sight. He tried to avoid that but a quick eye-flick showed that he had succumbed. Lady Fanshaw was next. The unflappable aristocrat peered inside as if she were examining a rare stamp, without any apparent consciousness that it was something she and Tami had in common. She fastidiously flipped the flashlight to Peggy.

Tami’s interior was pink and bright, almost as if the illumination originated from her insides instead of the other way around. Her cervix was a lighter-colored knob with a little hole in the middle, the entrance to her very womb. So odd to think that Peggy had one too. She tried to imagine where her own cervix was inside her, whether she had ever felt anything there. Tami, of course, felt air against it as part of her daily life. She probably felt Peggy’s own breath against it now. Weird!

Now she heard Sir Gregory’s voice — “Miss Smithers, we want to show you our documentation” — and Tami answered — “I’m glad to hear that, finally!” — and the cervix wiggled with each word Tami spoke! Peggy’s eyes widened.

Sir Gregory handed up a piece of paper for the International Nude to look at. To do this he had to reach over Tami’s thigh. She untangled her left foot and hand. To their surprise she clasped the paper not with her fingers but with her flexible toes. It made sense because her foot was closer. Now Tami slid her hips over to Sir Gregory. It was his turn with the flashlight.

The proper British gentleman was outwardly stoic as he took in the interior of Miss Smithers’s vagina, waiting for her to read the paper, but dryness of mouth was betrayed by a clearing of throat. With her gymnast’s flexibility Tami brought her foot over so as to draw the paper to her face. After a quick read she said, “I’m sorry, Mister . . . Gregory, but this will not do.”

Sir Gregory must have seen Tami’s cervix wiggle with her words, as just above it Tami’s face was talking to him and looking at him. “Miss — Smithers — we — cannot do more.” It was a conversation between man and cervix.

“You will have to!” Tami said with a loud whisper. She twisted her toes so that the paper hanging from them was now facing Sir Gregory. The red white and blue toenail polish glistened in the overhead light. “This is just a statement from you. It doesn’t even have a direct quote!” Her cervix must have been bobbing up and down vigorously in the man’s face, or rather, side to side like a little head shaking “no”. The rest could see Tami’s pigtails swing with her (big) head shaking, like a little girl complaining that someone took her doll.

With a deep exhale Sir Gregory passed the flashlight, much to Mr. Donaldson’s dread. “You must trust us, Miss Smithers.”

As Tami swiveled her legs over to her fellow American, she turned her head to Sir Gregory and said, “I’ve been deceived by men in suits, over and over.” Then she mellowed a bit; even in this situation Tami remembered to be respectful to her elders. “I don’t want to insult you, Sir. But you understand this is not for me that I’m — going through — this.”

“Yes, I know that, ch — Miss Smithers.” Fortunately he had stopped himself from saying “child”.

Twenty minutes later they emerged from the hall into the waiting limousine, bound for the British consulate. During the two-hour drive they knew they should be brainstorming as to aggressive strategies, but all that occupied their minds were the pink, brightly-lit folds of Tami Smithers’s innermost feminine sanctum, and being scolded by her cervix.

16.

They emerged from the limousine after another tense two-hour drive, still a bit bleary-eyed despite the coffees they had forced down when they met at the British Consulate at 4 a.m. There were only five of them this time, Lady Fanshaw and Mr. Zinowsky being unable to make it.

Coats and gloves were necessary. Early mornings in the Gobi are cold even in August. Peggy was glad she wore fur-lined boots over heavy socks. They poked around the perimeter of the exhibition hall until they found the loading dock, where a crew of four was taking out the trash.

Three of them were Chinese men in ski caps, heavy gloves, insulated jumpsuits and big black work boots. Two were bringing bags out to the dock. A third was backing up a very big truck to a very large dumpster. Peggy imagined that hundreds went through the hall every day, with drinks and food provided, so that must generate a lot of trash.

The naked girl had one foot on the deck, the other extended out onto the edge of the dumpster, her rough, widely-spread toes curling over the lip to maintain her balance, as she barehandedly swung the bags from the dock into the far end of the dumpster. Her skin was flushed, partly from the cold and partly from her exertions. The bags were heavy but she had no problem hurling them the fifteen feet or so, swinging her hips with a rough kind of grace that brought out the ripples of her abdominal muscles. Her breasts swung tightly in time with each throw. It was as if flinging bags of garbage was in the family line. There were occasional grunts for the heavier bags but for the most part she made it look effortless.

Now she hopped onto the dock, walked forward, turned around, and planted her other foot on the dumpster as she started grabbing the fifteen or so bags that her co-workers were depositing in front. She was facing away from them now and they saw the motions of her exquisitely formed glutes, and the strong but somehow still delicate muscles of her bare shoulders, brought out by her over-all tan.

The man in the truck shouted out something. Miss Smithers turned to answer him. The conversation was in Chinese.

Sir Gregory, Sir David, Mr. Donaldson, Peggy and her supervisor Mr. McConway could only stand at a respectful distance and wait until the job was finished. Standing in one place on a cold morning, one gets cold. Peggy was on the verge of shivering, despite being so heavily clothed.

Finally Tami waved to the men on the dock, who disappeared inside. Evidently she was the crew foreman. Now she jumped off the dumpster, her tough soles landing silently on the rough concrete, and walked over to the truck as the hoist lowered. She climbed up the back of the truck to attach the dumpster. She was facing away from them and she had to spread her legs wide as she grasped the top strut with her toes to anchor herself. She was pitched forward and her puckered anus winked at them in the early morning chill, her internal muscles reflecting the vigorous motions of her arms and hands.

She hopped down, and with a loud whirr the dumpster was lifted and emptied its contents into the truck. Tami watched, hands on her hips, to make sure no bags spilled over. Then the dumpster was lowered to the ground and hit the concrete with a resounding bang that echoed through the cold still air. Tami hopped up and spread her legs again as she disconnected the dumpster. Finally, standing on the ground, she waved to the man in the truck and it drove off.

She had seen the delegation, of course, and now faced them, arms at her sides, expecting them to approach her rather than the other way around. They came up to her, glad to get their blood moving again. As Peggy drew close she noticed Tami’s hard bare feet on the cold concrete, filthy, freezing and reddish, and wiggled her own toes, thankfully snug and warm in her fur-lined boots. The naked girl’s stiff nipples pointed at them as if accusingly, angry little brown pebbles. She gave off an odor of drying sweat and rotten garbage. From handling all those trash bags, Tami’s thighs had streaks of dirt across them. Her pubic hair was caked with gray dust. Her fingers and toes had grease smudges from working on the truck. Most disgustingly, at some point a slurry of something rancid and red had sprayed across her right breast and nipple, leaving a dried speckled streak.

“Good morning, Miss Smithers,” Sir Gregory said.

“Good morning, sir,” Tami said, politeness hiding her exasperation with them. She was still a bit winded after the strenuous job. It was so cold her breath came out in little clouds. She was standing bolt upright, shoulders back, breasts thrust forward above her hollowed-out tummy.

“I think we have finally succeeded, to your satisfaction,” Sir Gregory said. He came up to the naked, filthy girl, taller than she was, more than 50 years older, and fully and elegantly groomed and clothed. His cologne contrasted with her stink. He handed her four affidavits.

Tami looked them over carefully, while absently scratching her bare butt, and then a nipple, the one that had escaped the vile spurt. Her hair was a sweaty mess and she brushed back a few strands. In the midst of such dishevelment her pretty face and bright green eyes stood out all the more. She read one affidavit, then another, careful to handle them with the fingers that were still unsmudged.

Tami handed them back. “These can be faked.”

“Miss Smithers, really — ”

Tami exploded. “R – really! They can be faked!” The cold was finally starting to get to her now and she began shivering. “Y – you don’t know, sir, how much I’ve been lied to! Over and over! I once saw a — thing — signed by a doctor, saying I was a c – crazy girl and shouldn’t be given any clothes. I had to g – go across my whole country hiding from the p – police! And it turned out the s – signature was faked!”

Sir Gregory was trying to hide his indignation. “But these are notarized — ”

“I don’t care about notaries!” In fact Tami had only a vague idea of what the word meant. “I want — physical proof!” Her arms flung about, she stamped her bare foot onto the concrete, her breasts jiggled this way and that. This was their first exposure to Tami’s legendary wrath. She handed the papers back to Sir Gregory.

“Well — I don’t know — what we can do further,” Sir Gregory said, handing the affidavits to Sir David, who slipped them back into his attache case.

Tami’s eyes got wet. She clenched her fists and beat them against her hips. “It is — COLD — out here! I mean — C – COLD!! Do you know how badly I want to put on clothes??” The clouds of her breath shot out with each word. She prayed up to the sky. “Please, God, give me clothes!” she said in a little voice, as if for the thousandth time. She hugged herself, trying to stop the shivering. She covered one grimy bare foot with the other. Peggy so longed to give her coat to the poor naked girl, and even her fur-lined boots, but she knew it was strictly forbidden.

“Well — yes of course we are — ”

“And this — ” The girl uncovered herself and motioned to the building — “place full of — creepy old guys watching me. This is more than I agreed to, WAY more!” The poor naked girl shivered again, all over. She closed her eyes.

Then she held each of the five in her steady eye, one after the other. “Next week — Thursday — at one o’clock they tie my elbows together behind my back and put me on this huge — fake penis — it’s gigantic — and tie my feet to the floor, and then they twist it up so far into me I have to stand on my tip toes. That’s the — icky — stuff they do to me.” No longer was she a Sphinx. She was expressing her real hurt, revulsion, anger, shame.

There was a brief silence. Then she said, as slowly and evenly as a cold naked girl could say it, “After that they will t – tie me up and stretch me out, like you saw me that one time. My head’s way up there. If I say anything, they can all hear it. The ac – coustics are really good. They can all hear me — shout when I — c – c – come.” These last words were especially hard to say.

“Next Thursday, when I’m up there, I will shout out: I AM AN AMERICAN CITIZEN! I AM B – B – BEING HELD HERE AGAINST MY WILL! I WILL T – TESTIFY AGAINST ALL OF YOU! I DEMAND TO SEE MY AMBASSADOR! . . . Then I will shout it out again, in Ch – chinese!”

Sir Gregory’s eyes widened in shock.

Without another word the shivering naked girl turned and sprinted back to the building, arms pumping, breasts bouncing, bare feet now numb with the cold thudding against the gravelly concrete. She was headed for a welcome hot shower, though it would be up on a platform with no curtains and men in suits all around watching as her breasts jiggled with her vigorous scrubbing.

17.

Eileen McGillicuddy, special assistant to the Harbin, China American Consulate, sat patiently in the third row. She was dressed in her full formal diplomatic “uniform”, pinstriped blazer and skirt, ruffled white blouse, nylons, low heels, hair done up in a bun. Her cell phone had been checked at the entrance so she had nothing to do but watch and wait. That she was the only female spectator did not faze her in the least. Nor the fact that the “show” she was watching was utterly outside her previous experience, part of a world alien to her. But she was a professional, and she had been briefed, so she knew what to expect.

The other 47 visitors were also dressed in formal business attire, though they were all men, there for far different reasons. Also fully clothed were the seven red-clad matrons buzzing about. The youngest person in the hall, however, had the benefit of no clothes whatsoever.

Ms. McGillicuddy watched as the nude girl was gradually lowered from above. Her elbows had been brought behind her back until they met, her arms linked from elbows down to wrists with a multicoiled knot — painful if not impossible for most people, but not for this flexible young gymnast. The knot was hooked to the overhead rope, which went up to a pulley in the ceiling and then over to a winch on the balcony operated by a matron.

This was the summer’s last “S&M Thursday”, the day of the week when Miss Tami Smithers was tied up in various inventive ways, sometimes evocative of causing pain but not really causing pain, and certainly not injury to the priceless naked body.

Spotlights created shadows on her nipples, illuminated every pubic hair. Protruding from the stage was a monstrous three-foot dildo, seemingly too thick to find purchase in the thin body. But Tami’s lower orifices had developed a remarkable capacity and, toned through vigorous exertions, closed up like every other woman’s when not used. Yesterday as part of her “show” Tami had emptied a small bottle of skin lotion into her vagina, then lifted her pelvis to launch the contents a distance of thirty feet. The men cheered, imagining what wonders such a girl could perform on a penis. Three or four squirts even overshot the stage, hitting a couple of Argentinian businessmen seated at the far end who could only laugh and clap despite the damage to their suits. It prompted a rare smile from the nude young woman herself.

Ms. McGillicuddy was one of those who did not think Miss Tami Smithers had that hard a life. The naked girl, whether voluntarily or not, was long used to such public demonstrations. And her nudity, again whether voluntary or not, was an advantage, in fact even envied. Miss Smithers had proven, over and over, that she simply did not need clothes. It might have been been uncomfortable to walk naked through the snow, but it was only for a few minutes at a time and was not harmful. If anything, she was proving the health benefits of exposure to the elements. Since she took off her clothes, that first week at college, she had never gotten sick, not once. She was strong and healthy. She had an ever-growing network of supportive friends. And by now she surely had lost any sense of shame as to being naked in a world of clothed people.

Some of the photos in the dossier stuck in Ms. McGillicuddy’s mind. Miss Smithers walking along a campus path, talking to her friend Jen McIntyre, on a hot day, everyone else sweating in the clothes society required them to wear. The naked Miss Smithers was more comofortable than anyone. Another photo showed Miss Smithers jumping around in the surf with her bikinied friends. Ms. McGillicuddy had never swum nude and imagined it must feel wonderful. Then there was Miss Smithers in a Vermont winter standing next to her friends on the campus quad, drinking coffee, they in their winter coats and boots, she quite casually chatting with them, in no hurry to get back inside, her body flushed with the cold, her bare feet quite at home on the packed snow.

And then the photo taken of Tami two months ago with the interns on the roof of the consulate, happy young people, in front of the distinctive Harbin skyline, with the Dragon Tower, the tallest tower in China, recognizable to any Chinese. Carefully cropped so that it looked like Tami was wearing a strapless dress. They had immediately decided it was the proper attachment, along with the Embassy seal, to the message finally emailed this morning under Miss Smithers’s name to Campbell-Frank College in the State of Vermont.

Ms. McGillicuddy watched as a matron spread Tami’s pink, spotlit lower lips as they prepared to make contact with the well-lubricated shaft. Miss Smithers was fitted with a ball gag, like a golf ball with holes in it so that her breathing would not be impeded. She couldn’t see what was happening below, so just stared ahead, wincing as the rounded tip entered her, spreading her lips further, and she was lowered further onto it. Few penises were that thick but through careful breathing the girl expertly took it inside. Three inches, four inches, five inches . . .

Before full capacity was reached her widely separated feet came in contact with the two waiting blocks of ice. Soon her bare soles were flat against them. She could have hopped off the shaft at that point, but further penetration was in store. The matron went around to the back and turned a big, old-fashioned-looking crank which pushed the shaft further into the naked girl. Marked gradations allowed the spectators to imagine calculating the extent of “involvement”. That the girl’s capacity had been reached, that the shaft had passed her cervix and settled into the fornix, was evidenced by her heels leaving the ice. Soon she was on her tip toes, toes that probably were getting numb. The rope had gone slack and was now unhooked. The hook followed the rope as it receded upward.

The hall was silent except for the shuffling of expensive shoes as men circled around the nude, taking in every aspect of the beautiful pierced form, her labored breathing (perhaps put on for show), the eyes that dully faced out to nowhere, or perhaps to a place far away.

They had guaranteed Ms. McGillicuddy thirty seconds of “alone time”. The matron led the men away. The little stage was high enough so that her eyes were about the same level as the girl’s.

The nude Tami Smithers, her arms tied behind her back, her spread feet teetering precariously on blocks of ice, a thick shaft pushing deep up into her interior, made eye contact with the immaculately dressed representative of her country’s Department of State.

“Ms. Smithers, I am here to inform you that your statement, with the Embassy seal, was emailed this morning to Campbell-Frank College in South Lowell, Vermont.” She was not authorized to say more, but did venture: “We as always respect your convictions and your right to change them.”

The bit about changing convictions was old news to Tami Smithers which she greeted with a rolling of the eyes. Gagged as she was she was unable to say thank you, or anything else. Eileen McGillicuddy said, “Good day,” turned and left, her high heels clicking on the floor. Once more men gathered around.

18.

As minutes go by internal muscles relax and the vagina is able to slowly, slowly accept more within it. As the ice under Tami’s toes melted her body steadily lowered and more of the shaft eased up inside her. As usual the Chinese were ingenious, and diabolical.

Peggy Park, of the British delegation, appeared with a laptop and ear buds. She was not allowed to say anything. She tried to give as understanding a look as possible to the nude captive who returned a glance of recognition.

It was a precorded video, meant for Tami’s ears alone. Fortunately the ear buds fit easily over the straps that held in the ball gag.

The first image was the seal of the United States Embassy. Then an eldery man in a business suit speaking English with a thick Chinese accent. “Miss Smithers, I am Chang Mat-su, Provost of Beijing Technical University. This is a secure message delivered through your Department of State. Let me introduce four of our new freshmen, Sun Huiqing, Tho Xifeng, Hon Ngo-kwang and Chin Yingtai.”

It was her four former Mailgirl comrades, in B.T.U. uniforms complete with stylish berets, smiling and waving. They were on some kind of campus quad, students and professors walking past in the background. “Hi Tami! We love you!”

In turn, they each hogged the camera. “We saw that photo of you in front of the city! You look great!” “Hope you’re well!” “Have a good trip back to the USA!” “We’ll be talking on Zoom!” “Eat vegan!!” Ngo-kwang added, a bit more quietly, “We had a rough time in that camp in the desert! We didn’t know what was happening! But here we are!” Now the four of them went back a little so they could be seen as a group and they did the college cheer, claps and jumps, as silly and uninhibited as is done on any American campus. “Go B.T.U. go!”

Mr. Chang, with a good-natured shrug, came back onto the screen to say, “These four were guaranteed admission. They will be contacting you once you’re back in the States. We’ll send you a link.”

It turns out it is possible to smile while wearing a ball gag. Yes, Mr. Verplanck and his crew, and Sir Gregory and the rest, finally did come through with the Chinese authorities — the girls had made it to B.T.U. and not to some horrible Xinjiang fate. In return for which the Chinese got what they must have thought was a bargain, a “uniquely qualified” American girl as a live-in sex exhibit this whole horrible summer. And the delay in abrogating “ANST” was almost over. Campbell-Frank College had already received her statement and within a week she would be back in the U.S.A., with her friends — and clothed! A happy ending!

Alas, Tami had no time to enjoy these thoughts. Her eyes bulged as a matron inserted a tongue into her upraised anus, well-displayed to the gentlement watching from the rear. Then the shaft, attached to a hidden mechanism below, began vibrating, in a manner calculated to reach the pleasure centers of the least responsive female.

Huiqing appeared to give a last message. “Tami,” she said, in a confidential manner, “That photo had a draft message to your college saying you want to wear clothes again. I couldn’t believe it! Naked is best! Someone was playing a joke! So I changed it — it says you want to be naked forever! And it’s got the official American seal on it! Just think — wherever you go, in the whole world, you will never ever ever ever wear clothes! Ever again! No one will be even allowed to try to give you any! We saved you! You’re naked for life! You are so lucky!!!” She receded and now the four girls did the cheer again, modified to proclaim, “Go Tami Go!”

Tami Smithers lost her mind then. We all do, at the onset of orgasm. She resisted it, the 3,147th unwanted orgasm of this long summer here, but succumbed. As she came back to earth and thudding waves jerked her body on the shaft, her toes slipping and sliding on the ice, all to the delectation of the crowd, she realized her tears were tears of joy, for her four little sisters, whose lives she had now saved, twice over.

-end-