**Mailgirls: Harbin**

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**Part 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 Corporation were mutually aware of that. But the snow and ice of downtown Harbin were so bright this January morning that it was impossible for the thirteen officers and the CEO and the Comptroller to see each other across the big oak table up here in the big penthouse boardroom.

This was Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang Province, booming like all 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 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 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 corporate 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. Lin 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 Corporation 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 highly intelligent and accomplished young women. 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.”

“Motiaved 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” Mrs. 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. The authorities have already mapped out places within the city where a naked girl 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.”

**Part 2**

The big oak doors opened and the officers and directors turned their heads. Those near the doors moved their chairs so that nobody had an unobstructed view. 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 the 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 opened the blinds around the room, which took about a minute. Bright 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 brightly 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 in normal conditions 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 new 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 — this girl 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.”

“Oddly, and this is surprising,” Ms. Ling said, “After the first few 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.”

“There must be a — sexual dimension to this,” Ms. Sun said.

“Don’t worry, no Mailgirl is sexually turned on by her experiences. At least that is what we have been assured. However any female of that age has sexual drives and they must be addressed. . . You might have noticed that the center of the food court also has been under construction.”

Another collective gasp greeted the next computer-generated depiction. Mr. Wang said, “That’s not — what I think it is, is it?”

“Yes, it is a Sybian, with vaginal and anal attachments. 1 will sit on it during the Corporation’s lunch time. Notice that it faces the main queue. Anyone is invited to come over and look into her eyes as she reaches orgasm, which I understand will always be several times. Her pupils dilate in an unforgettable fashion. . . I think you’ll agree it’s an improvement over that ugly sculpture we had there.”

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

Mr. Zhou said, “I can’t help but be impressed by this girl.” They all looked up at 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 applying to be 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.”

[end]