**Mailgirls on the Run**

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**Chapter Nine**  
  
Another early Monday morning, another on-going downside to getting sucked back into the world of mailgirls.  
  
One, Seventeen, and Twenty-four were due for punishment this morning. The more frightening prospect was Ms Barnes possibly deciding that the crowd scene Sunday morning would require reminding mailgirls of their station in life. Megan still remembered the lineup of gagged and hooded mailgirls, bound hands stretched up behind them forcing them to bend forward - strappado position, according to then Mailgirl Eight - while standing on newly laid gravel. Some fifth floor executives had complained of insufficient respect being paid by mailgirls. The several mailgirls that the fifth floor had called out by number were strung up first on a Monday morning and the rest of the mailgirls were paraded past them. Then for the rest of the week a half-dozen mailgirls were on display each day from 11-2 for the lunch crowd. That stretch of gravel was still in the courtyard as a reminder.  
  
Megan walked through the breakfast crowd in the lobby and down the stairs to the Mailgirls' Locker Room. Eighteen looked up at her and complained, "Six miles next weekend is going to kill me. Tell Ms Barnes I'll accept my six strokes as a given and take another half-dozen in lieu of pounding my feet on the asphalt." Several other women said that went for them as well.  
  
"I can make the suggestion, but I suspect that Human Capital would come up with something more painful than a dozen strokes of the paddle or crop to discourage mailgirl initiative. Anything else you would like me to raise with Ms Barnes?"  
  
One spoke up, "The bra I was testing out didn't do the job."  
  
Samantha, aka Twenty-two, added, "Nor mine."  
  
Seventeen said, "Dawlish's leather cage isn't a sports bra, but it did help. A bit of chafing, but my boobs are less sore than they were after the first run."  
  
Megan asked, "Eleven?"  
  
"Some chafing, not enough support."  
  
"I'll pass all of this on to Ms Barnes. I suspect you'll each be called up to report to Mr Dawlish personally."  
  
It was amazing how much disdain a mailgirl could express without saying anything or even nodding her head. Then they all froze and Megan knew Mistress V had arrived and the mailgirls' workday had officially begun.  
  
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Checking her calendar Megan saw she had a meeting with Ms Barnes at two p.m. - not a lunch date then. The Mailgirls App showed the punishment session for One, Seventeen, and Twenty-four at 10:30.  
  
She took time out from the finance business for the 10:30 ritual and then worked through the noon hour at her desk, not feeling inclined to make another trip to the dining hall. Then it was nearly two and Megan made her way up to Human Capital, mug in hand. Four was in "Knees" position on the mat next to the receptionist's desk when Megan walked into the outer office. The mailgirl kept her eyes firmly on the ground in front of her mat, steadfastly ignoring Megan's approach. The door to Ms Barnes' office opened and Two emerged, eyes downcast and obviously in pain. She stepped aside to allow Megan to go in. Megan noted the six parallel red lines across Two's ass cheeks, souvenirs of the caning she had obviously just received.  
  
Ms Barnes was seated behind her desk, Mistress V was standing up straight against the wall a riding crop dangling from her left hip. There was a thin black rod on Ms Barnes' desk, the instrument of Two's punishment, Megan surmised.  
  
"They get paddled for running slow and caned for running fast?"  
  
"No, the caning was for that disgraceful scene in the parking lot Sunday morning. These are mailgirls, not porn stars. There was entirely too much hubris shown with all of those men crowding around at the end of the run. SF&G personnel know how to treat mailgirls; those voyeurs need protocol lessons. We may have to cordon off the finish area to keep them away if they can't behave properly. It's not fair to the mailgirls to tempt them so."  
  
Mr Starnes spoke from behind Megan, "We're going to have to walk a fine line if we want this project to succeed. While I understand that the mailgirls have to know their place, we still need to provide something of a carrot if we want them to run well. The old trope 'Beatings will continue until morale improves' is not an inspiration to strive for excellence on the day."  
  
"Yes, we'll figure out something to remind all of them that they are mailgirls. Well, what do you have to report about the running?"  
  
"Three and Four ran very well indeed. Then we have a cluster of Twenty-two, Fifteen, Fourteen, Two, and Twelve. It probably makes sense to seed the heats in this weekend's runs to provide head to head competition of those mailgirls. We're looking for a squad of six mailgirls to race along with Megan and any of the other female staff that wish to enter the Corporate Challenge. Five runners score and it's always best to have more than just a bare five so that one bad race doesn't sink the whole team Fourteen's and Fifteen's mailgirl contracts expire in September so we're not sure of their availability."  
  
"Ms Brooks, what do you have to say?"  
  
"Both Three and Four could have run quicker and with training will do so. The other women Mr Starnes mentioned won't disgrace themselves or SG&T. From a competitive standpoint I'm feeling more optimistic about this whole project. But the pride in doing something well is antithetical the whole Mailgirl concept. I don't know how that can be reconciled."  
  
"That's in my domain, not yours, Ms Brooks. You let me worry about the Mailgirl concept. You and Mr Starnes will let Mistress V know who will run in the fast heat on Sunday. We'll see if that selects our team for us. Mr Fforde has persuaded the fifth floor into offering Fourteen a part-time mailgirl contract through the end of the year, offering the carrot that she could attend college on-campus three days a week. Legal is working on it now, contingent on her making the team. And we're very close to acquiring a mailgirl from Donovan Runnels who was an All-American in college."  
  
"Also Ms Barnes, several mailgirls have said they are willing to accept their half-dozen in lieu of running the 10k this weekend."  
  
"Mailgirls do not make suggestions, they merely obey. Everyone will run and the slowest eighteen will receive the cane. Mistress V will spread their punishments out over the next week."  
  
Megan sighed. "Where are we on bras for the runners?"  
  
"Mr Dawlish will be interviewing the five test subjects today and I expect his decision this evening. Is there anything else we need to discuss?"  
  
Megan headed back to her office, having agreed to send Mr Starnes her picks for a fast heat on Sunday. She wasn't looking forward to a summons from Mr Dawlish. As a senior executive she had to treat him with due deference, but she needed to make it clear to him that she was no longer a mailgirl and her choice of clothing was her business. Floating her resume was getting more attractive day by day.  
  
It didn't make sense to run three eight girl heats to select six, or five, mailgirls for the team. What she proposed to Mr Starnes was that the eight least likely girls to make the team run on Saturday and the other sixteen run in a single heat on Sunday. Plus, this way she would only run one race on Sunday rather then attempt back-to-back 10ks. Her suggestion would be that One, Five, Seven, Eight, Eighteen, Twenty, Twenty-one, and Twenty-four run on Saturday.  
  
She then put thoughts of running Mailgirls aside and immersed herself in the details of a proposed project before the the Investment Committee. Mr Bratz had been giving her increasingly more important proposals to review which Megan took as a measure of his confidence in her work. It was past six p.m. when her computer pinged and displayed a new calendar appointment. Mr Dawlish expected her in his office at 6:30. Megan closed out the files she was working on, logged out of her workstation, and left for the day. Working after hours on financial proposals was one thing, catering to Dawlish's fetishes wasn't something she need put up with any longer.  
  
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Fourteen looked for Ten as soon as she finished showering and retired to the Mailgirls' Lounge at the end of her workday. The former HR staffer was laying in her sleeping niche looking at the ceiling.  
  
"Ten, Mr Fforde told me that Human Capital will offer me a part-time contract if I make the running team. I would work at SG&T Friday through Monday and be outside on my own Tuesday through Thursday so that I could attend class on campus beginning in mid-August and extended through the end of the year. That scenario would work better with my class schedule since my current end date would be part way through the semester, but I'm not going to be Fforde's live-in mailgirl. Do you have any suggestions?"  
  
Ten rolled over onto her stomach and said, "Let me think. Is Twenty-two around?"  
  
Twenty-two was looking over Thirteen's shoulder while the ginger-haired mailgirl was typing away on one of the computers in the corner. She turned around and sauntered over to Ten's niche asking, "Anything I can help you with?"  
  
"Would your sister help Fourteen get settled when she leaves us?"  
  
Twenty-two paused to consider. "I think so. I mean, she's hanging around to keep an eye on me. And it would help get her focus off me."  
  
Fourteen explained about the part-time offer.  
  
"I'll ask her."  
  
Ten said, "I'll get you to see her. Meanwhile, I'll have HR to forward Fourteen's college transcripts to Megan."  
  
Fourteen asked, "Why is it that the folks in HR still do you favors? Are they expecting that you'll be their boss when you finish up this contract?"  
  
"Mostly it's because they really dislike Human Capital. Ms Barnes is nominally part of the Human Resources Department, but she reports directly to the fifth floor. HR is left to clean up after Human Capital's messes. While Human Capital makes sure that the workforce doesn't go over the line with their treatment of mailgirls, that line is far past the boundaries of sexual harrassment and HR has to ride herd on the workforce's behavior with the rest of the women at SG&T. Human Capital can pitch becoming a mailgirl to an employee, but for anyone else telling a woman that she should be a mailgirl can be seen as threatening. Human Capital lays down the law that we are to be treated as sub-human, and HR has to follow behind with seminars, memos, and counseling about how to deal with the clothed population. Throw in the fact that mailgirls recruited from the professional ranks are pulling down outsize salaries to perform menial tasks and/or have been promised major promotions down the line and we have resentful women who see us as whoring for money and advancement. Human Capital just keeps pushing their agenda which keeps the tension high."  
  
"Well, if Megan helps to keep me out of Mr Fforde's grasp I'll be forever grateful."  
  
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Tuesday morning, Megan was unsurprised to find a premptory message from Ms Barnes directing her to set up a meeting with Mr Dawlish at his convenience. The post-it note telling her to talk to her sister was more puzzling. Dawlish wasn't in yet, but as with most of the 5th floor his secretary handled his calendar and Megan arranged a ten minute appointment with him at 10:15 promising Mrs Johnson that she wouldn't bleed into his 10:30 meeting.  
  
She was trying to decide whether to just summon her sister via the Mailgirl App when she heard a soft knock at her partially open door immediately followed by Samantha, that is Twenty-two, entering carrying a closed mailing envelope.  
  
"Delivery, Ms Brooks" chirped Samantha, coming to a stop beside Megan's desk in Feet position, presenting her MMU to be tapped in acknowledgment of the delivery. Megan complied, noting that Sam had twenty-three seconds to spare.  
  
"Knees" and Samantha sank gracefully down into position while Megan looked at the envelope from Human Resources. "What am I supposed to talk to you about?"  
  
"This Mailgirl is passing on a request from a colleague. Mailgirl Fourteen would like your help. She may be offered a part-time mailgirl position for the duration of the next semester. Mr Fforde has arranged this offer, but she would prefer that Mr Fforde not arrange her life outside of SG&T. She wanted to know if you could help."  
  
"And the envelope from HR?"  
  
"Mailgirls do not queston what we are given to deliver."  
  
"So why didn't Ten just arrange for Fourteen to come talk to me?"  
  
"This Mailgirl does not know. Mailgirl Fourteen believes that she can finish her accounting degree over the next two semesters and then move on with her life."  
  
"Does Mailgirl Twenty-two have any such plans?"  
  
"This Mailgirl is just doing her inadequate best to be the best mailgirl that she can be."  
  
"Oh, get out of here Sam and tell Fourteen that I'll see what I can do. Go out to the mat and titilate the rest of the Investment Group."  
  
Twenty-two gracefully rose to her feet - Megan ascribed it to her early dance training, not that Sam continued once she discovered boys - and left, closing the door behind her.  
  
Megan opened the envelope from HR and found college transcripts from Mount Holyoke College, Montgomery College, and the University of Maryland, University College. Marie Hyland was a straight A student her first year at Mount Holyoke, then her grades tailed off a bit in her sophomore year, especially the final semester. Her courses didn't indicate any particular field of concentration. Marie Briggs' grades the last year and a half at the two local colleges were back to straight A's in business and accounting courses. She hadn't been wasting her time in the law library.  
  
Mount Holyoke..., who did Megan know that went to Mount Holyoke? Her smart phone chimed to warn her of her upcoming appointment and Megan put that question off until she returned from the fifth floor. She headed out of the Investment Group, idly noting that the mailgirl in position by the receptionist's desk was Fifteen; Twenty-two must be off on her next delivery.  
  
Megan took the stairs. It wasn't a lot of exercise, but walking stairs was part of a healthy lifestyle and Megan realized that she needed to take back her life. She unconsciously squared her shoulders preparing for the meeting with Dawlish.  
  
Up on the fifth floor she entered Dawlish's office and announced herself to his secretary. Megan wondered why Dawlish didn't have the stereotypical gorgeous young woman as a secretary - jealous wife? Or maybe besides being a creep he did real work and Mrs Johnson was part of that.  
  
"You may go in now. Remind him that he has the Naimo people coming in just a few minutes."  
  
Mr Dawlish looked up as Megan entered. "Our Miss Brooks. You can keep the bra, that's not the model I chose. We're going with the 'Bondage Bra', but in satin instead of leather to avoid the chafing issue. So, when you and Starnes choose a team we'll order a couple of bras for each of the girls and they can add hand washing them to their list of after hour activities. It's not a style that suits your figure however, so you can go with what you have."  
  
Megan was stunned, this wasn't Dawlish the lech. He'd actually put some constructive thought into this project, though she suspected he got off on it as well.  
  
"Mr Dawlish, the gentlemen from Naimo are here," came through the speakers on his executive desk.  
  
"Send them in."  
  
The door opened again and Mrs Johnson - definitely not Ms - ushered through three Japanese men.  
  
"Welcome gentlemen, I trust you enjoyed your escort."  
  
"How could we not appreciate a mailgirl leading us to your door."  
  
"This is our Ms Brooks, one of the top analysts in our Investment Group. She'll likely be on the team that reviews whatever plan we develop.  
  
"Well, I mustn't keep you, Megan. Back to your corner of the coal mine."  
  
Megan responded, "Yes, sir." and left Mr Dawlish's office, not at all surprised to see her sister kneeling on the mat next to Mrs Johnson's desk, in full view through the open door behind her.  
  
Entering the stairwell musing on what was going on with Dawlish, her sub-conscious lifted Seven up. Seven had been a petit Oriental woman: gorgeous face and fabulous hair, not that much up top - she and Megan had been lined up side-by-side more than once by some wit who decided to hold an itty bitty titty contest. When she signed her mailgirl contract, Seven was ABD (all but dissertation) in some branch of higher mathematics and her thesis advisor was a Mount Holyoke alumna. The former mailgirl left SG&T for a teaching job subbing in mid-semester for someone out on maternity leave. The last Megan heard Seven was still there.  
  
Megan passed Three sprinting up the steps and called out, "Tell Fourteen I'm working on it."  
  
She had real work to do, but she googled 'Hood college faculty' and began scanning the list. There was no entry for "Seven" which is the only name that Megan knew for her former colleague. Mailgirls did not have names only mailgirl designators and that had been thoroughly beaten into Megan by the time the second cohort - Mailgirls Seven through Twelve - came on board. Megan still bounced between Twenty-two and Samantha in her head every time she saw her sister despite her sister being Samantha much longer than she was Twenty-two. Mistress V had been brutal in correcting both women in the few months that Two and Twenty-two had spent together as mailgirls.  
  
This search would be a lot easier if the Hood website posted headshots of their faculty, but there weren't any women with Oriental names in the Math Department. So Megan checked the Business Department list where she found Lin Chang. No photo, but she did have an email address and Megan dropped a quick note. Then Megan got back to work looking at financials.  
  
It was well into the afternoon when her telephone rang and the caller id indicated an unknown, outside line. "Two, what are you still doing at SG&T?"  
  
"Well, it's Ms Brooks now and I enjoy Ms Brooks' work. Plus, if you remember, my sister was hired last summer as Mailgirl Twenty-two and I had to stay around to keep an eye on her. Passing on Samantha sightings is the only reason that my folks still talk to me. Call me Megan. I'm sorry to say that I didn't even remember your real name."  
  
"So, what can I do for you?"  
  
"I don't know if you ever knew, but I ran track in college. Last fall just a few months after returning to the finance desk I ran on the SG&T team in the annual corporate challenge. That's a 10k race between teams from companies and government agencies across Central Maryland. I was SG&T's top woman by a wide margin. This year SG&T hosts the race. Jeremy in Corporate Relations told me they brought in a couple of male runners from other SG&T locations, but had a problem in finding women who would accept a transfer. So, some bright soul on the fifth floor decided that we could field a team of mailgirls.  
  
"I've been formally tasked to help select and train the team. One of the wrinkles in the whole scheme is that Mailgirls Thirteen through Eighteen come to the end of their contracts before the race. I don't know if you remember Fourteen, she's the older woman that used to be married to a lawyer. She spends weekends in the law library taking on-line courses through a special dispensation arranged by a friend of her ex-husband and she's a serious contender to make the team. They've tenatively offered her a part-time mailgirl contract to start in mid-August and go through the end of the year if she makes the team. She'd work Friday through Monday allowing her Tuesday through Thursday to attend class. She's afraid the friend of her husband sees her as a live-in mailgirl and she doesn't want to go there. So Ten sent her to me."

"And your thought is?"  
  
"Ten had HR send me her college transcripts and she's doing well. She had two years at Mount Holyoke before marriage and she has straight A's in her on-line classes at Montgomery College and Maryland the last two years, aiming for a degree in Accounting."  
  
"Well, my former thesis advisor is now the Dean of Faculty here and she has a mad on at SG&T for doing the mailgirl number on me. She might be inclined to pull some strings to admit this woman; we're big into non-traditional students. Send me her transcripts and I'll talk to Dr Smithers."  
  
"Thank you. Then we'll just have to figure out housing and transport. She's an hourly employee, so no big salary. No expenses either, so she's got nearly two years wages banked, but she deserves to hang on to some of that stash to start her new life."  
  
"I'll see what we can do. And and and I will have to sit down and have a cose about our other friends - I know you were tight with Five, and Ten's still a mailgirl, and then there's Ms Barnes and Mistress V. I could tell stories in the Faculty Lounge, but I don't."  
  
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Megan picked up dinner at Panera Bread on the way home after having no more Mailgirl involvement the rest of her work day. She decided that Fourteen's saga was worth a call to Sarah.  
  
"So, how are 'The Young and the Naked' going?"  
  
"One more run for all the mailgirls, this time a full 10k. The slowest eight to date will run Saturday and then the other sixteen will all run at once on Sunday. Brendan says that he'll show up to cheer."  
  
"I don't know whether that's a good thing or a bad thing, but it will give him some insight into where we're coming from."  
  
"Ms Barnes says we're very close to acquiring a mailgirl from one of the west coast firms that was an All-American. Also, Human Capital says they'll offer Fourteen a part-time mailgirl contract beginning mid-August and extending through the end of the year if she makes the team. She would be on duty Friday through Monday and be able to attend class the other three days."  
  
"I've heard of Mailgirl programs where being a mailgirl is a 9-5, well probably more like 7-7, job which means you're reduced to mailgirl status five times a week. I think the 24/7 model might be easier."  
  
"Well, Fourteen seems to be considering it except she's afraid that Mr Fforde sees it as an opportunity to start a 'Mailgirl at Home' program. She consulted Ten and Ten sent Sam, my Sam, to ask me to help."  
  
"I know Ten was an HR person, but what's she got to do with it."  
  
"Well, she seems to be playing good Mother Mailgirl..."  
  
"Which makes Mistress V bad Mother?"  
  
"And Ms Barnes the evil step-mother. HR sent me Fourteen's college transcripts; more of Ten's work, I'm sure.  
  
"Do you remember Seven? Tiny Oriental woman? She's teaching at Hood, about an hour from here in Frederick. Her former thesis advisor is now the Dean of Faculty there which is how Seven got hired, that and her academic credentials. The Dean is a Mt Holyoke alumna which is where Fourteen matriculated before dropping out to get married."  
  
"So, mailgirls to the rescue?"  
  
"We'll see."  
  
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The next day Megan was cc'd on an email from Ms Barnes announcing the running lineups for the weekend and directing Mistress V to adjust the work schedules to match. She made a mental note to let Brendan know in case he really did plan to show up and watch. There were no more mailgirl interruptions to the rest of her workday to her unvoiced relief.  
  
Her dinner however, was punctuated by a call from Seven, that is Lin Chang. Lin asked if Megan could arrange a meeting with Fourteen within the next few days and Megan suggested Saturday or Sunday post-race. Fourteen would be working on Saturday and Megan could call her to her office or she could set up a meet immediately after the run on Sunday or when Fourteen was in the law library working on her on-line courses.  
  
"Do you have a suggestion as to which would be better?"  
  
"I could send Fourteen down to the Med Center after the run Sunday morning and you could interview her in one of the examining rooms. Nurse Allen, you knew her as Mailgirl One, will be on duty this weekend and she can arrange for you to have as much time as you need. If you get here in time for the race at seven, I'll get you into the building. It's likely to be chaotic so we can slip you in unnoticed. We had quite a crowd for last week's run; the coffee shop did record business for a weekend and I expect more of the same."  
  
"So you want me up and on the road before 6:30 a.m. on a weekend. I thought I left that behind when I my clothing back."  
  
"You could come down Saturday and spend the night in my spare bedroom. We could go out Saturday night or have a girls' night in."  
  
"Girls' night in. If you can handle me hitting on you about life post-mailgirl?"  
  
"I've spent long hours talking to Sarah. She has her Sam to talk it through with, but we still have mutal therapy sessions, sometimes even without wine."  
  
"Oh, I know that feeling. Text me your address and I'll let you know when I start your way."  
  
Megan closed the connection, then muttered "In for a penny, in for a pound" and called Brendan.  
  
"Megan, it's good to hear from you. I'm still planning to come to your run this weekend. Would you suggest Saturday or Sunday or both?"  
  
"Saturday will work better. That will be a lower key run as it will be the eight slowest women through the first two runs. As to how crazy the crowd will be, that remains to be seen. Also, if you'd like we could head off to brunch after the run. Sunday, I'm arranging a clandestine meeting with one of the mailgirls and a former mailgirl, now an instructor at Hood College. I'll explain that when I see you."  
  
"Hey, I'm in the hush-hush business, not you. Brunch however, sounds terrific - do you have a recommendation?"  
  
"I'll ask around. I haven't gone out much at all in the three years I've lived in Maryland. Doing something normal will be a good thing. The run starts and finishes in the parking lot in front of the main entrance to the SG&T headquarters. You'll be able to recognize me, I'll be the woman with clothes on."  
  
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Three passed on Megan's message to Fourteen when they passed on the service stairs sometime that afternoon. Fourteen asked Ten what she knew as they were showering in the Mailgirls' Locker Room at the end of a long workday. The two women made a show of scrubbing each other thoroughly, playing to the onlookers from the lobby above which allowed them the best chance of not being overheard. The Mailgirls Lounge was out of sight, but the mailgirls firmly believed that Human Capital or maybe just the nerds in IT had that whole space wired for sound.  
  
"What does Ms Brooks mean she's working on it?" as Fourteen knelt in front of Ten making sure that the blonde's pubic area was squeaky clean.  
  
Ten gasped, not immune to Fourteen's attention, "I don't know, but HR sent her your college transcripts. She's a good person. She will get back to you as soon as she has something to tell you."  
  
"So, I'll have to run hard on Sunday to preserve my options."  
  
"And I'm so going to get my ass paddled when I don't finish in the top six. Let's just take it one step at a time. Just a little more..." and Ten's orgasm exploded. Five came through the outside door just at that moment and the mailgirls could hear the applause from the onlookers from the upper lobby.  
  
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Looking back, Megan thought of Thursday as the calm before the storm. She actually put in a full day's work, well the usual more than a full day, on banking business and was on the verge of wrapping up a couple of reports that Mr. Bratz had been upping the priority on. Her only mailgirl interaction was when she tracked down Fourteen in the dining room. Fourteen was kneeling down before two bowls in the center of the room, one hand holding back her hair as she bent down to eat a nourishing meal of Mailgirl Chow. Mailgirls were not allowed to use their hands to eat in public and were required to lick the bowls clean. Megan had always found the sheer humiliation even worse than the taste of the Mailgirl Chow.  
  
She casually walked behind Fourteen and paused, speaking quietly. "After the run Sunday I'm going to send you down to the Med Center when there will be someone to talk to about college plans for this semester if you make the team and sign the new contract. Nurse Allen will make sure you're not disturbed."  
  
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Friday dawned bright and sunny. The Washington Post rated their forecast for the day 8/10 as predicted highs in the low-90s and elevated humidity were being short of perfection, though completely normal for Maryland. Megan didn't really have a feel for Maryland's climate, having spent her first two years in state as a cloistered mailgirl, then morphing back to the workaholic life of a financial analyst. Except for the running she spent most of her waking hours in the office and knew little of the area aside from her commute. However, the storm clouds about to dump on Megan were metaphorical, not to be seen in the sky.  
  
She had just done the final revision of her analysis of the proposed Downing Brothers deal and sent it off to Mr Bratz when her in-box pinged with a calendar appointment. She had a 2 p.m. meeting scheduled in Conference Room 5C with Ms Aldridge, the VP of Financial Development from the Chicago office - Tad's mother, Mr Starne's ex-wife, and Megan's one-time boss who Mr Starnes alleged had engineered Megan's tranfer to Maryland and the Mailgirls Program.  
  
After a late lunch at her desk Megan climbed the stairs to the fifth floor for her meeting with Ms Aldridge. Her thoughts were of brunch with Brendan, meeting up with Seven, and Fourteen. The door to the conference room was closed, so she knocked and heard a brisk "Come in."  
  
Megan entered to find to find Mailgirl Two trembling in the "Toes" position while Ms Aldridge circled the young black woman who was straining to the ceiling, clearly hoping not to be found unkempt. Twenty-two was down in "Knees and Forehead" with the top of her head against the wall and her asshole winking at the room.  
  
"Oh, if I had known how much fun this was, I would definitely have paid a visit while you were Mailgirl Two. Well, don't you have anything to say to your old boss?"  
  
"I guess Mr Starnes was correct when he told me that you were responsible for me being selected as a mailgirl."  
  
"Of course, Megan. You really shouldn't have led my poor husband on."  
  
"I did not."  
  
"So you say. Mailgirl Two, get down into position next to Mailgirl Twenty-two. What do you think Megan, should I call for Mailgirl Twelve to complete the set?"  
  
"No, I think this is quite enough. And these two may have actual work to do."  
  
"Nonsense, the other mailgirls can pick up the slack. They may just have to scurry between offices a little faster to make sure all those important messages get delivered."  
  
"Have you called me here for some other reason than to watch you indulge yourself, Ms Aldridge?"  
  
"Oh yes, dear. I'm trying to convince the Board of Directors to expand SG&T's Mailgirl Program to the Chicago and San Francisco offices. So, we're putting together a video presentation highlighting the success of the program here in Washington and as you are the only mailgirl that I know personally, I thought that I would ask for your input."  
  
"Don't do it."  
  
"Not that input. I want your feedback on the rough cut of the video. And of course, we're waiting on your little race to show how the program is accepted in the local business community. We'll be videoing the runs this weekend and then return for the race in October. Now, just pull up a chair and I'll show you what we have so far."  
  
Ms Aldridge proceeded to project a video mixing shots of the Board of Directors voting, the SG&T Maryland complex under construction, and graphs of productivity, sick leave usage, employee retention and the like with images of naked Mailgirls running through the office space making deliveries, the Mailgirls' Lounge and Dormitory, mailgirls grooming in the Locker Room, mailgirls kneeling to eat and drink from their bowls in the dining room, and so on.  
  
"What do you think, very persuasive, no?"  
  
"Ms Aldridge, SG&T is not going to be able to recruit any young, professional women if you spread the Mailgirl Program across the entire bank. I've been told that one reason we're selecting and training mailgirls to run in the Corporate Challenge is that women won't accept a transfer to Maryland."  
  
"The larger reason is that positions don't open up here very often. I do believe this is the way forward. And now dear, I'd like to show you the other video - the one I show to female employees that need a bit of guidance."  
  
Megan watched in horror as her time as a mailgirl played out on the screen beginning with stripping down in Human Capital that first day, the training at DDE, the cold showers, eating Mailgirl Chow out of a bowl on the floor, posed in all the humiliating positions throughout the complex, and the inevitable clips of being paddled, caned, and flogged. There were also passages of Megan frantically fingering herself to orgasm in the Mailgirls' Lounge, in the shower, and even in the stairwell between deliveries.  
  
"Once I show them this video it's amazing how they see things my way. It's also popular viewing among the men thinking of transferring to Washington.  
  
"Well, that's all I wanted to show you. Now, run along and leave me with this pair. The Chicago office is sadly lacking in mailgirls to play with."  
  
Megan fled, leaving Mailgirl Two and her sister behind.  
  
\* \* \* \*  
  
Megan messaged Mr Bratz saying that she was going home sick, locked down her computer and desk, and headed out to the safety of her condo. This whole mailgirl business was seriously impacting her time spent actually doing banking and investment work. She left a message on Sarah's voicemail and then took a long, hot shower trying to scrub herself clean. She realized the shower bit was mostly symbolic, but hot water was proof that she was no longer a mailgirl.  
  
Sarah called while she was on the couch eating her dinner of fudge ripple. Sarah was horrified at Megan's near-incoherent recounting of the meeting with Ms Aldridge and the videos. "You need to find out where Mr Bratz and hell, even Mr Dawlish stand. If they don't support you, you need to find another job and let Samantha fend for herself. Do you want me to come over tonight? Or send Brendan?"  
  
"No, I'm just going to get through this weekend and then talk to Mr Bratz on Monday. I'm meeting Brendan for brunch tomorrow and then Seven-that-was is spending the night here Saturday before meeting with Fourteen after the run Sunday. Hopefully, Ms Aldridge left Samantha in shape to run. If not, I will take that to the Fifth Floor."

**Chapter Ten**  
  
Another too early Saturday morning. Megan looked for Brendan as she walked up to the building, but didn't spot him among the crowd beginning to gather near the starting line. SG&T was the place to be weekend mornings. Megan wondered if they were going to post a schedule of training runs once a team was selected. She, or Mr Starnes, was going to have to speak to Security about protecting the mailgirls while running - this whole project just called for crazies to come out of the woodwork, or woods, in this case.  
  
All the tables overlooking the Mailgirls' Locker Room were occupied, everyone looking down at the floor show below. Megan could feel eyes following her as she descended to the lower lobby and entered the Locker Room. Six of this morning's group were already waiting for her, then Eight and Twenty emerged a few moments later.  
  
"Okay, based on the last two weeks none of you figures to make the top six and qualify for the running team. Anybody want me to push the pace to give you your best shot to keep running?"  
  
"My brother used to brag that he and his lacrosse teammates would take turns hiding out below the hill when running laps in practice, any chance we can take turns ducking out in the woods?"  
  
"Mr Starnes will pay better attention than the lacrosse coaches and they keep an eye or camera on all of us for security reasons - that idea just sounds like an invitation for Ms Barnes to come up with a new and exciting punishment. I'm willing to stroll through this run, but you're going to have to convince Mistress V that you were trying or the mandated half-dozen will just be the start. Everybody topped up on water? Then it's up and out."  
  
Megan led the way up the stairs and out through the lobby where she was startled to see a Channel 5 news van across the parking lot. A camera man was videoing the crowd near the starting line. Was this Ms Aldridge's work or Fox News looking for ratings?  
  
"Five minutes, ladies" and then Megan jogged over to speak to Mr Starnes. "What's going on?"  
  
"We're making the news. My ex-wife, your ex-boss, has promised them interviews with the two of us. I've called Jeremy, but his cell phone just goes to voice mail. Do you want to talk with them before or after the run?"  
  
"I'd rather not appear on the Ten O'clock News drenched in sweat so it better be now. Plus, I can make it clear we're not postponing the start which will keep it short."  
  
Mr Starnes waved over the camera man and reporter while Brendan strolled up. "We can't get results into the local papers for any race on the Striders schedule and you get a camera crew for a time trial. I'm impressed."  
  
Megan was impressed that Brendan was looking at her and not staring past her at the eight naked women standing around the water table. "Mr Starnes, this is Brendan; Brendan, this is Bob Starnes who is my co-lead on the Mailgirl running program. Step back if you don't want to be on the news."  
  
The stereotypical tv news reporter - thin and blonde, short skirt and blazer - came striding towards them on her four inch stilettos. "I'm Tiffany Ambergris here with Megan Brooks and Bob Starnes at Sloane Guaranty and Trust in Montgomery County where eight nude mailgirls are about to run a ten kilometer race. Megan, can you tell us what is happening?"  
  
Megan looked directly at the reporter, "Tiffany, SG&T is hosting the Maryland Corporate Challenge 10k race in October as part of our outreach to the local community. SG&T is determined to be not only a gracious host, but also a competitive force in the event. Last fall our women's team finished well back. Local management realized that we have a pool of extremely fit, active women that we could draw from in fielding a team. None of our current twenty-four mailgirls have a track background, so this is the third in a series of weekend trials to select a group for further training in preparation for the race. The eight mailgirls that are not on duty today will start their run in a few minutes, the other sixteen will run tomorrow morning."  
  
"Will they be wearing running attire for the race.?"  
  
"No, nudity is a condition of their employment and at SG&T being a mailgirl is a 24/7 commitment for the length of their two year contract. They will just be wearing the collar with their ID tag, an ankle bracelet for the timing chip, and we're still sorting out a proposal for a sports bra, though that may be just for training. I imagine their race numbers will be stenciled on their chests and backs. And now if you'll excuse me, we have a race to get underway."  
  
As the mailgirls moved to the starting line Megan heard the reporter speak to the camera man, "Frank, try and get some footage of the girls running that we'll be able to put on the air."  
  
As Mr Starnes called out "Ready, steady, go," Tad pushed off on his bike, and the run began. Megan strided through the 1km loop around the parking lot and heard Mr Starnes call out "three fifty-five", then "three fifty-nine, four minutes" as she began the second lap with a detour by the water table to grab a cup of water. Megan eased into a comfortable pace leading the way across the parking lot and onto the tail into the woods. She reached the road noting the now familiar line of cars parked along the other side and the comforting presence of the SG&T security car. When she turned left onto the road she glanced over her shoulder back along the trail and was surprised to see just a lone mailgirl a good fifty yards in arrears. Turning left again on the road leading back to SG&T she could only see three mailgirls on the road behind her which meant the other five still hadn't emerged from the woods for the first time. This group was definitely resigned to the inevitable paddlings and had apparently come to the conclusion that they might as well put it off. Megan hoped that Ms Barnes and Mistress V wouldn't go nuclear at the finish. She eased her pace still more.  
  
The crowd along the course from the edge of the parking lot to the finish was even larger and louder than it had been the previous week. Well, it wasn't that loud when she strode by, but the noise grew behind her as the mailgirls exited the woods. Megan made the turn to start her third lap and could see only four mailgirls stretched out along the course behind her. She kept glancing to her right and saw three more enter the parking lot before she picked up the trail again and disappeared into the wood.  
  
Re-entering the parking lot she noticed Frank the camera man in position to video the crowd cheering on the mailgirls along the final straight. He wasn't recording her progression along the course. Starting the final lap she could hear Brendan shouting encouragement although she was sure that he could tell that she wasn't running flat out - still, she reflexively picked up her pace. She found herself just cranking her stride a bit faster and crossed the finish line for the final time to Mr Starnes' call of "forty thirty-seven."  
  
Brendan handed her a cup of water as she came to a halt. "You looked very comfortable out there and finished with a rush."  
  
Megan saw Mistress V standing by the water table, riding crop in hand. Brendan gestured to the forbidding figure whose quasi-dominatrix garb stood out in the casually attired crowd of men, "Who is that woman?"  
  
"That's Mistress V - though I learned recently that her name is actually Wilhelm. She's the sort of den mother to the mailgirls and responsible for keeping them in line. And yes, I've bent over in front of her while she applied six of the best to my bare behind with that crop, or more commonly a paddle. Stick around and you'll see her use it on the last place finisher."  
  
Megan looked back along the course and could see Seven and Eight striding along together.  
  
"This is our slow heat and it looks like they all decided that they weren't going to avoid the paddle so they wouldn't kill themselves to get to the finish and confirm it."  
  
Mr Starnes called out "Forty-one thirty-eight as the two women finished. Twenty was next in "forty-one fifty-five" then Eighteen and Twenty-four in "forty-two seventeen." Finally, One, Five, and Twenty-one trotted in together in "forty-three oh-one."  
  
Mistress V advanced on the three tail-enders "Mailgirls One, Five, Twenty-one bend down over that table and assume the position." The three women rested their torsos on the water table knocking aside and squashing paper cups of water and grabbed the other side of the table, spreading their feet shoulder width apart. Her first blow caught the well-rounded backside of the plump redhead just above her ass crack, then a backhander landed at the top of the thighs of the tall blonde Twenty-one. The first strike to One's buttocks split the difference. Megan heard Brendan suck in his breath at the casual brutality of the beating while Tiffany stared avidly at the spectacle.  
  
Then, "Mailgirls, back to the Locker Room, now." and the eight naked women headed straight for the building entry and disappeared inside.  
  
Tiffany said "Too bad we can't use that on the evening news. That would do wonders for our ratings." Then she turned and walked over towards Megan. Megan was happy to see Jeremy shouldering his way through the crowd in the tv reporter's wake.  
  
"Frank, come over here for the wrap-up.  
  
"Well, that was very enlightening Ms Brooks. I understand that the initial impetus for this project came when SG&T Management realized that their fastest woman last year had been working as a mailgirl until just before the race. Did you find that delivering messages in the nude was sufficient preparation for the event?"  
  
Jeremy came up beside Megan and responded, "Our management doesn't explain their decisions to the workforce any better than anywhere else, so that supposition is pure speculation. What we do know is that Bob Starnes and Megan Brooks are fine athletes with strong backgrounds in the sport and devoted to meeting SG&T's goals both professionally and in the community. I'm Jeremy Digness of SG&T's Community Relations Department and I can answer whatever questions you have while Megan has a chance to shower and change out of her running gear."  
  
Megan gasped "Thank you." and bolted for the building.  
  
\* \* \* \* \*  
  
An hour later sitting down to brunch with Brendan, Megan was still shaken. "Ms Aldridge must have tipped her off. Thank God for Jeremy - I know I was about to do something that I would regret."  
  
"What were you going to do? And who is Ms Aldridge?"  
  
"I don't know what I was going to do, but it wouldn't have come out well. Ms Aldridge was my boss in Chicago and according to Mr Starnes engineered my transfer to Maryland and the Mailgirls program. She showed up yesterday and showed me two videos: one promoting the Mailgirls program and a second documenting my life and times as a mailgirl. She says she shows the second video to women who 'need a bit of guidance.'"  
  
"Ms Aldridge sounds like a real piece of work. Can't you bring her up on charges of sexual harassment?"  
  
"That's always a tough charge to make stick and usually damages the complainant as much as the guilty party. Add in that I'm trying to re-establish my professional standing post-mailgirl experience and I think I'm better just to soldier on. I've gotten some solid expressions of support lately and I want to build on that and not remind everyone of those two years where I ran around naked, abasing myself to everyone in sight."  
  
Brendan looked dubious and concerned. "Well, all right. I take it you expect tomorrow's run to be a different proposition from today."  
  
Megan was much happier with the change of topic. "The eight women that ran today were the slowest in the trials over six and eight kilometers and none were excited about racing. Tomorrow's group isn't excited either, but a number of them have real talent and are competitive so they can lose themselves in the effort. They're all in excellent shape - mailgirls lead a healthy, active life, eat a wholesome nutritious diet, and get plenty of rest. Mailgirls are also constantly demeaned and told they are the lowest of the low so doing well at something is pretty heady stuff. Mr Starnes and I have both tried to point out to Ms Barnes - the Mailgirls coordinator - that pride in racing well and the mental abuse of mailgirls is contradictory, but the party line looks to be the old 'floggings will continue until morale improves.'"  
  
"How do you put up with all of this?"  
  
"Well, I was well compensated financially for my time as a mailgirl and I enjoy the job I'm doing now. Plus, I feel I have to keep an eye on my sister and every now and then I feel like I can strike a blow against the system. The Corporate Challenge may be a positive thing and I may have a chance to help rescue Fourteen who is fearful that one of our senior legal people wants to make her his personal mailgirl. That's part of what I've got going on tomorrow morning - I'll let you know how it works out."  
  
Brendan seemed to be ready to keep the date going past brunch, but Megan was still somewhat shaken by the morning's events and begged off, saying that she had a friend - female - coming for an overnight visit and needed to straighten up the guest room. Their goodbye kiss was more than just a peck on the cheek and both Megan and Brendan parted feeling that this relationship was worth exploring farther.  
  
\* \* \* \*  
  
Back at her condo Megan dropped notes to Sarah and Lin about the Fox 5 camera crew. Then it was fresh sheets on the bed in the guest room and generally straightening up her already tidy home. She was at the grocery store picking up snacks for the evening when she got a text from Lin saying 'heading your way.'  
  
Not quite an hour later Megan was sitting on her balcony when a sky blue Miata pulled into one of the guest parking spots. A few minutes later her phone pinged to announce a new message. She stood up and called out "I'll be down in a moment" and waved when Lin looked up at her.  
  
Megan raced down the stairs and met Lin on the walk leading to the building and flung her arms around the petite Oriental woman. "It's so good to see you" surprising herself with the force of her feelings. Stepping back she continued, "You look really good, college life must suit you."  
  
"And look at you: clothes, shoes, and everything. Do you know when you make your television debut?"  
  
"I'll probably watch the ten o'clock news tonight, but if not I'll wait for Jeremy to let me know."  
  
"Boyfriend?"  
  
"No, Community Relations at SG&T. But, I did have a brunch date this morning after the run. He's a friend of Sarah's partner and a runner."  
  
"You may be in recovery. Let's not talk Mailgirls just yet. Can we do something normal - check out the pandas at the Zoo..."  
  
\* \* \* \*  
  
Several hours later, two carefree, smiling, very attractive women climbed the stairs to Megan's condo. They'd eaten at the Zoo where the only unattached men in sight invariably had small children in tow. So the pair were admired, but not hit on. As she unlocked her door Megan suggested, "How about I open a bottle of wine and we sit out on the balcony until the mosquitos drive us in? White or red?"  
  
"That sound lovely, white, I think."  
  
Lin was leaning back, looking over the parking lot, when Megan emerged with a bottle and two glasses. "This is an Albarino from a Maryland winery; I picked it up at the farmers' market in Silver Spring before my Saturday mornings became dedicated to mailgirls."  
  
Lin accepted a glass and raised it in salute. "Catching up or Fourteen, first?"  
  
"Fourteen, I think. Then we can go on to the wider world."  
  
"Well, assuming this part-time gig flies, we'll admit her and we've sketched out a tentative schedule of Tuesday/Thursday classes and a Wednesday seminar. She can take the MARC train up to Frederick Monday evening and then back here Friday morning - it'll be a reverse commute. She can bunk with me this fall and sort out housing and transport for the spring semester later. The admissions counsellor says that Fourteen shouldn't have any problem finishing her degree this academic year." Lin paused to sip her wine appreciatively.  
  
"That sounds great. Let's hope she runs well in the morning."  
  
"So how does this Mailgirl racing team work?"  
  
"There are unlimited entries in the Corporate Cup - one firm had nearly fifty men and women running in last year's race. Only the top five men and women score - you add up their places and that's the team total; low score wins like in golf. I finished three minutes ahead of our next woman last fall and she took a job downtown. So, our effective team will be me and six mailgirls to be chosen by Mr Starnes and me. Three and Four look to be shoo-ins for the top six. Ms Barnes said SG&T is acquiring a former All-American from a West Coast company - did you know they can buy, sell, and trade mailgirl contracts? - and so she'll take a slot. Fourteen is one of five mailgirls, including my sister, in contention for the last three places. This special arrangement may give her extra incentive tomorrow. None of our current twenty-four mailgirls were serious runners in their previous lives and I'm not sure how excited they're going to be to give their all for SG&T while baring their all for SG&T."  
  
"So, refresh my memory about Fourteen."  
  
"Tall, classically beautiful brunette, late 30s. I wasn't a psych major, but my take is that she was deeply depressed post-divorce after a series of miscarriages which left her feeling inadequate/guilty, pick your adjective. Mr Fforde in the legal department here was a law school buddy of Fourteen's ex and he arranged her to not only get hired as a mailgirl, but also to take on-line courses. She kneels in front of a computer in the law library where he can monitor her via webcam. I'd say he's one of our typical management perverts, but she's pulled herself out of her funk and this part-time gig seems like it could be a good stepping stone back into the normal world. For a pervert, Fforde's done well by her, but she doesn't want to be swallowed up by him."  
  
"And you've arranged a meet in the Med Center post-race?"  
  
"Yes, just you and Fourteen, aka Marie Hyland Briggs, with Susan to run interference."  
  
"And how is the former Mailgirl Two?"  
  
"Well, work's great except for the shits that can't let go of me as Mailgirl Two. My boss has been especially supportive in a thoroughly professional way. Things are at best tense with my folks who are still horrified by me as mailgirl and firmly blame me for Samantha signing up. She really gets off on being a mailgirl; she treats it as a two year cos-play experience with pay. I'm exploring a relationship with a nice guy - we'll see how that goes if I'm majorly outed because of the whole mailgirl running scheme. But, a visible boyfriend may help rehabilitate me with my folks. And that assumes I don't freak out at a 'normal' relationship after two years of sustained debasement, frenzied masturbation, and girl-on-girl sex. For the past year it's just been me, my fingers, and my trusty vibrator.  
  
"So what has Mailgirl Seven moved to?"  
  
"My father decreed he no longer has a daughter and my mother will not challenge him. I meet up with my brothers and their wives, but they don't mention me in his presence. Dr Smithers saved me. She rages against mailgirls in general and SG&T's treatment of me in particular, so she lined up the job for me when I left and has mothered me for the past year. She's married, but childless, so select students wind up filling that niche for her. I'm finally getting to the point where I can get back into dissertation mode and move on with my life. No boyfriend/girlfriend in sight, just self abuse."

"We are a sad pair. Five is living with Sam and waiting for her clearance to come through to work at Sam's agency. One is manning the Med Center here. Three is an executive assistant on the Fifth Floor working directly for Mr Soames. Four resigned, but followed Twelve to San Francisco - you'd think they'd know lesbian couples are mainstream in any major city these days. Six is in law school in New England; the original Eight is a model/actress/waitress in New York; Eleven went to work for a bank in her home town. Three, Six, and Nine re-upped as mailgirls; the replacement Eight is closing out her two years. All but Eight will be running tomorrow morning."  
  
Lin looked down at her wine glass. "Two years as a mailgirl was hell. I'm not sure that I'm ever going to recover - it was a life changing experience. The most painful part was the dehumanization, the constant humiliation, the former colleagues, the one-time friends who abused you, reveled in your pain, spit in your water bowl...  
  
"The beatings, eating Mailgirl chow out of a bowl on the floor, cold showers, being locked into a cage to sleep on a cold stone floor - those were awful, but I now appreciate the comforts of life so much more now. But the closeness of a shared experience with seventeen other amazing women, most of whom I would never have gotten to know otherwise, much less been intimate with. It was like girl scout camp on steroids with little of the back-biting and petty jealousies of middle school and high school. And the sex..., I miss being kept at that low boil and then just having to rub one out in the shower or in the stair well. I earned many a demerit for a late delivery because I paused on the landings between floors to relieve the tension. I miss the cuddling, the finding solace in the arms and the pussy of another mailgirl - fingers and vibrator have never brought me to orgasms the way that One and Six could. I loved those women desperately, but then I just ran as soon as I walked out of the Locker Room for the last time put on clothing again."  
  
"You haven't been with anyone since you left?'  
  
"No, I haven't had the courage to move on as yet. I have taught a class plugged fore and aft with dildos wondering if there were any of my students that would be right to get to know better. Not the just out of high school students, but one of the older non-traditional who has known something outside of home and school."  
  
Megan hesitantly asked, "Would you like to sleep with me tonight?'  
  
Lin grinned. "Yes, and in all senses of the word sleep since you're dragging me off to SG&T at mailgirl a.m."  
  
"You know, I haven't had sex in a bed since I left Chicago. And then there's the whole process of getting our clothes off - we never had to bother with that step as mailgirls."  
  
Lin put down her wineglass and stood up. Let's take this inside unless you want to replicate another part of the mailgirls experience and let everyone see."  
  
"Actually, I've always been partial to outdoors sex and I don't believe we'd be obvious rolling about on a blanket on the balcony."  
  
"I don't know about that, I remember you as a screamer. Someone walking across the parking lot would certainly hear, if not see us."  
  
Megan slid open the door into the condo and said, "my bedroom is this way."  
  
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"Explain to me why we're up this early." grimaced a bleary-eyed Lin Chang.  
  
"I'm up because I don't run well on a totally empty stomach; so I'm toasting myself a bagel to go with my orange juice. You could have spent another half hour in bed asleep and picked up breakfast at the coffee shop during the race."  
  
"Am I riding in with you or driving myself?"  
  
"If you're heading directly back to Frederick after interviewing Fourteen then we drive separately. If you want to come back here post-run we can drive in together. I'll have to stay long enough to spring Fourteen from the Med Center and who knows what other mailgirl related issue I may get sucked into. I am not taking work clothes so I will not be going up to my office afterwards - there's always work that I could be doing, but I'm planning on escaping SG&T for the rest of the day."  
  
"We can take the Miata and leave the top down. It should fit in better with the party crowd than your stodgy little Toyota.  
  
Fifteen minutes later Lin and Megan were sitting in a line of cars waiting to turn into the SG&T parking lot. "This is crazy. It's not even 6:30 on a Sunday morning and the parking lot looks like Black Friday at the mall - before Amazon."  
  
"Pull into Mr Dawlish's spot. He won't be here this hour of the morning and I'll square it with Security. They and the IT guys respect ex-mailgirls much more than the rest of the workforce does. I'll take you down to the Med Center and re-introduce you to Susan before I head down into the locker room and check in with our runners."  
  
As the two women walked towards the entrance Lin pointed at the small back pack Megan was carrying and asked, "What did you bring?"  
  
"Nothing exotic, just a towel and a dry top and socks and shoes for post-run. I'll leave it in the Med Center. You can wind up soaking wet in a summer race between perspiration and getting sprayed by water to stay cool along the way. At a normal race I'd just peel off the wet top and towel off wherever I left my car, but in this crowd I'll do that out of sight."  
  
They entered the building to find every seat taken outside the coffee shop and elsewhere in the lobby with a two to three deep crowd at the rail overlooking the lower lobby and the glass wall of the Mailgirls Locker Room.  
  
"If you think they're checking us out now, this is nothing compared to the interest I'll draw when I descend to the lower lobby and walk into the locker room."  
  
Megan led Lin up to the Security Desk guarding the passage into the SG&T office spaces. "George, this is Professor Lin Chang; you used to know her as Mailgirl Seven. She's in town this weekend and wants to visit with Nurse Allen while the run goes on. She's seen enough naked women running about."  
  
The middle-aged guard waved his hand towards the inner entrance and said, "Sure, go ahead. Welcome back Ms. Chang, the new Seven isn't half so pretty."  
  
Lin blushed and responded, "Thank you, George."  
  
As they walked down the corridor towards the Med Center Lin commented, "You know, I'm really impressed with Fourteen. I didn't give any thought to my dissertation for those two years and she's carried a nearly full class schedule despite a more than full-time work commitment."  
  
"Well, she's had it a little easier than we did. There are twenty-four mailgirls now as compared to the twelve, then eighteen for most of our time - and the bean counters have convinced Human Capital to think about the cost of extra hours for hourly employees as opposed to salaried. Plus, I suspect her lawyer friend has protected from from some of the after-hours events. The beatings and utter debasement of mailgirls haven't changed though.  
  
"I would have thought it would have been harder for an older woman, but she'd already been beaten down so far as her marriage unraveled that the group debasement was easier to bear. I wouldn't say that the mailgirl experience helped her, but I think it did offer her a safe space to recover. And in a somewhat twisted way her self-mage was affirmed by being accepted as a mailgirl We used to be put down for being small busted, but there was always this track running in my head saying 'yes, but I wouldn't be kneeling here in the nude if those sickos in Human Capital didn't think I was beautiful.' Add in her doing well in her college courses and she has received continuing positive reinforcement."  
  
Lin chimed in, "I've read Dr Scott's book based on her PhD thesis, but she is a anthropologist. I wonder if there's a graduate student in Psychology somewhere also living the life. There's thesis material for many fields in the mailgirl phenomena, but sadly not in Mathematics." She sighed dramatically, then added, "We can laugh now, but it was a shitty two years while we were living it."  
  
The two women entered the Med Center where Nurse Allen looked up and cried, "Seven!"  
  
Megan put her back behind Susan's desk and said that she would be back after the race, not that either Nurse Allen or Professor Chang noticed as they were hugging and crying and paying the rest of the world no mind.  
  
Megan retraced her steps back to the lobby and then it was down the stairway to the lower lobby and the Mailgirls Locker Room ignoring the crescendo of interest from the crowd above. Nearly all twenty-four mailgirls were visible - her sixteen runners and most of the eight women who were on Sunday mailgirl duty. Mistress V was looming over the runners who were in Knees position, snapping her crop against her high boots as she hectored her charges - probably speaking about their behavior before the crowd of spectators that would be lining the course today.  
  
"...any misbehavior today will earn you at least a half-dozen blows in addition to any due for tardy finishes." is what Megan heard as she entered the locker room. "Now remain in position until Ms Brooks leads you to the starting line."  
  
"Good morning, ladies. We're running ten kilometers this morning. That's once around the parking lot following the yellow line and then three trips off campus following the blue line. That's the course that the Corporate Challenge will be run on in October. For most of you this will be your last run unless we go for a repeat next year. I haven't gotten a firm answer from the fifth floor, but my assumption is that at least five of you will make the racing team and possibly more if they want to hedge against someone being injured over the next eleven weeks.  
  
"So, up the stairs and out to the table by the finish line for some water. It's hot out there and you need to stay hydrated, so we don't overwhelm Nurse Allen with heat-prostrated mailgirls."  
  
Megan turned and led the way out into the lower lobby and up the stairway to a deafening chorus of cheering men. The visitors had apparently been well briefed by their SG&T hosts as the interaction was all verbal, no one reached out to cop a feel of any of the sixteen naked women heading towards the entry to the outside world.  
  
Sometime after Megan had entered the building someone - Megan bet on SG&T Security - had roped off a corridor from the entrance to the start/finish line. The outside crowd was even more raucous than the men in the lobby and Megan could feel herself shrinking from the wall of noise and intense stares at the passing parade. She grabbed a cup of water from the table and walked over to Bob Starnes and Tad.  
  
Bob said, "You'll be happy to hear that Corporate Relations rejected the offer of a beer truck in the parking lot this morning."  
  
Megan responded, "From the sound of it I think a large portion of the crowd brought their own. I don't see any barbecues, but it reminds me of tailgating in the Big Ten."  
  
"I thought you went to a small college?"  
  
"Yes, but I went to Iowa for my Masters and attendance at a home football game was part of new student orientation and I got the whole experience. We had nothing like it for D3 cross country and track meets, not even Nationals. On the whole, I prefer a sober crowd or none at all to alcohol fueled enthusiasm."  
  
"We've got Security out in force to manage the crowd in the parking lot and lobby. Jeremy reports the County, State, and Park Police have been squabbling over who has jurisdiction over the stretch of road through the park. No camera crew this morning - your job is to focus on the run and the mailgirls that will make up the running team."  
  
"I expect to let Three and Four lead today while I run along with the women that look to be on the bubble. Let's get everyone on the starting line."  
  
With a minute to go before before seven a.m. Megan and sixteen naked mailgirls were standing behind the painted white line; Tad was standing by his bike, eyes fixed on the vision at the start. Bob Starnes gestured to let Megan know it was time. "Ready, steady, go" was nearly lost in the clamor from the cheering crowd.  
  
Tad jumped on his bike and started pedaling as the women started forward following the yellow line. Megan settled in alongside her sister, a few yards in arrears of Twelve who had bolted into an early lead. Megan knew Fourteen had reason to make the team, but had no feelings as to the motivation of the other fifteen. Three and Four had run well over six and eight kilometers, but did any of them care? Twelve led through the first lap in 4:01, slower than Megan had run yesterday, then followed Tad's lead along the blue line for the first of three laps.  
  
Megan continued to run easily behind Twelve, noting gratefully that the road portion of the course was coned down the middle with police stopping traffic at both ends while the mailgirls traversed that stretch. She grabbed a cup of water from the table near the finish line, taking a healthy swallow as Twelve made the turn to start lap three to Bob Starne's call of "Sixteen-o-seven." Unlike yesterday, there were a half-dozen women in a line just behind her and another clump not far back.  
  
Fourteen surged past Megan and Twenty-two as they reentered the parking lot for the second time. Megan accelerated smoothly past Twelve to pull even with Fourteen as they began the final lap at "Twenty-eight sixteen."  
  
"You're doing well, but we still have another three k to go so you want to spread your effort over the whole lap."  
  
Fourteen choked out, "The fix is in. No one else cares if they make the team, so none of them will challenge me. Six fewer blows to the ass is just not much of an incentive."  
  
"Bob Starnes and I have both told Ms Barnes that we need to provide some reason to run fast. I'm not going to fuss about today, but we need to provide some carrots for the other women leading up to the race in October."  
  
Four came up on Fourteen and Megan as they turned onto the road for the final time and said, "Three stepped on a rock back there and is hurting bad."  
  
Megan said, "I'm going to have to get you all in shoes before the race; yet another argument with Ms Barnes. Maria, when we finish I'll tell you to escort Three to the Med Center while I run interference with Mistress V."  
  
Four started to pull away as they made the final turn towards the finish and Megan decided to stick with Fourteen. The cries from the spectators were deafening so she didn't hear Four's time as she finished thirty yards clear. "Forty eleven" greeted Megan and Fourteen.  
  
Three was in knees position at Mistress V's feet near the end of the water table. Bob Starnes called out another time and Megan turned to see Twelve and Twenty-two come to a halt with Fifteen and Two about to finish and a line of mailgirls following.  
  
Megan grabbed Fourteen's elbow and steered her over towards Mistress V commanding "Fourteen, Tad; take Three down to the Med Center." She continued, "No, Mistress V, you and I have fourteen other mailgirls to deal with." as Fourteen and Tad led a hobbling Three through the roped off corridor towards the building. Megan noted the thin red lines across Three's buttocks; Mistress V hadn't wasted any time punishing Three's non-finish.  
  
The women that had finished were mostly clustered near the water table with cups of water trying not to draw Mistress V's attention. Twenty-three was off to the side talking to a young woman - Megan recalled that she was a local hire so the woman was probably a friend or relative. They were both ignoring the men pushing ever closer. Curious, Megan walked over towards the pair and Twenty-three spun around when the other girl warned of her approach.  
  
"Ms Brooks, this is my friend Heather; she wants to be a mailgirl."  
  
"That's not a career choice I can recommend" Megan responded looking at the blushing blond, automatically assessing her by mailgirl standards. Cute, girl next door look, probably only a B cup.  
  
Heather burst forth "I got into Penn State, but my folks can't afford it and won't take out a loan so I'm stuck with going to AACC and living at home. Bonnie says I could make enough to pay for college and I'd rather room with her instead of my brothers."  
  
"I wouldn't call it rooming exactly The money's good for a high school graduate, but the life is hellish and there is no guarantee that you'd still be college material after two years of being treated like an animal."  
  
Heather looked shaken but said, "I could do it."  
  
"I still wouldn't advise it, but if you want to talk some more about being a mailgirl, just hang around until all this is over. My car is the the blue Miata over there" Megan gestured off to her right.  
  
The last finisher, Seventeen, crossed the finish line to deafening cheers, but looked wholly rung out. She leaned into Bob Starnes and went limp which induced a chorus of whistles from the spectators who weren't focusing on the dozen or so mailgirls standing by the water table.  
  
Megan jogged over and asked, "Do we need to get her to the Med Center?"  
  
"Probably heat issues, wouldn't hurt to get her inside into the A/C and have her lay down where someone can keep an eye on her. First, we get some water into her."  
  
Mistress V was rounding up her charges and pointed at Megan, "You, Ms Barnes wants you down in the locker room with the other mailgirls."  
  
Megan ignored the implication of 'other mailgirls' and just said, "I'll be down after Mr Starnes and I get Mailgirl Seventeen to the Med Center.:"  
  
"You do that, Missy."  
  
Bob offered "I can help her to the Med Center."  
  
Megan snorted "No, I need to point out to Mistress V that I am not a mailgirl and no longer have to follow her orders or those of Ms Barnes. Besides, I need to check on Three and get Fourteen headed that way."  
  
"We do have to discuss which mailgirls we select for the team. Are you up for a working lunch today?"  
  
"I've got a friend visiting, but she'll be heading off this afternoon. Can we slide that into the dinner hour?"  
  
"Okay, it's a date. Text me when you're free." Bob turned and headed off to supervise the clean-up of the finish area.  
  
Megan muttered, "Not a date, not a date" as she helped Seventeen back into the building and down the hall to the Med Center.  
  
She opened the door to the Med Center and ushered Seventeen in calling out "I've got more business for you, Susan."  
  
Nurse Allen looked at Seventeen's flushed visage and said, "It's too hot out there to run."  
  
"Not my idea. Where are Three and Fourteen?"  
  
"I sent Three back to the locker room. She has a stone bruise and six welts across her backside - I put ointment on her butt, told her to stay off her foot, not that she'll be able to follow that advice. Fourteen is is Exam Room 2."  
  
The door to Exam Room 2 opened just then and Fourteen emerged followed by Professor Chang.  
  
"Oh, good, you're finished. I'll walk Fourteen back to the locker room and should I meet you here or out at the car, Lin?"  
  
Lin looked at Seventeen and said "Either the lobby or the car. It depends which location looks less crazy."  
  
"Well, if you go out to the car, there is a Heather who was talking to Seventeen who says she wants to be a mailgirl. You can counsel her just as well as I could."  
  
"Maybe a cup of coffee in the lobby then. I'll be the non-panting female amoung all the horny men."  
  
Megan walked Fourteen out of the Med Center and down the hall and saw that the lobby was largely emptied out. When they started down the stairway she saw that the locker room was empty - hence the lack of spectators - and surmised that Mistress V had taken the other mailgirls back into the dormitory.  
  
"How was your discussion with Lin?"  
  
"Oh, she was wonderful. She said that I've been admitted and even worked out a schedule for me for this semester. She says I can stay with her at college - no it's not like that, even I could see that she's totally into Nurse Allen. I had forgotten that they were so hot and heavy when we were all mailgirls together."

"You know, I hadn't put that together. You're absolutely right. Maybe we'll see more of Professor Chang around here from now on." The two women passed through the locker room and into the dormitory which Megan had last entered when she was still Mailgirl Two.  
  
The mailgirls were lined up against the wall in Knees position except for Mailgirl Twenty-two who was lying face-down on the spanking bench with Mistress V on one side and Ms Aldridge on the other. Mistress V gestured to the row of mailgirls and said "Fourteen, knees."  
  
As Fourteen dashed over to take up her position Ms Aldridge looked at Megan and said, "Ms Brooks, I have a proposition for you. I will personally oversee Mistress V doling out twelve of the best to each and every one of these mailgirls beginning with Mailgirl Twenty-two with the promise of another dozen to come in the next week or..." She paused, smiling sweetly at Megan, "...we'll forgo all that if you take your sister's place for a mere six strokes of the cane. I feel like I missed so much when I was in Chicago during your two years as a mailgirl."  
  
Megan sputtered, "You can't mean that. I'm not a mailgirl any longer and having these women beaten because you're obsessed with me is just wrong."  
  
"I prefer to think of if as something that just gives simple pleasure to a top executive at SG&T. Surely, you have some empathy for these girls - are six blows from the cane too much of a sacrifice to avoid twenty-four strokes for each of these twenty-four innocent girls? Let's see that's 24 x 24 ..."  
  
"Six hundred and seventy-six" Megan said numbly.  
  
"Yes, I remember that you were always good with numbers. Now, which is it to be, dear - or should Mistress V just begin with this girl while you make up your mind? I think we'll have to strap her down, twenty-four seems like just too much to bear without moving."  
  
"You bitch. Let my sister up."  
  
"Of course, I am. You don't become a senior executive by playing nice. Get those sweaty clothes off and she can join the other mailgirls and watch."  
  
Megan kicked off her shoes and skimmed out of her running shorts and top. She reached behind her back to unhitch her bra and then stepped out of her panties.  
  
"You can hand those to me. I understand that handing over your panties is a mailgirl tradition. I'll let you keep the socks. Now, bend over this bench; I think that's a better position for a caning than lying down. Do you need Mistress V to strap you down."  
  
"No. Just get this over with."  
  
Megan leaned over the bench, feet spread wide and hands holding onto either side of the bench; she had had two years to learn this particular stance.  
  
"Oh yes, and thank Mistress V for each stroke."  
  
Megan heard the whir of the cane and then felt a line of fire across her bare buttocks."  
  
"Thank you, Mistress V."  
  
She managed to stay silent otherwise until the fourth stroke when a cry of agony burst forth from her lungs. She leaned her head down onto the bench and stoically bore the last two.  
  
"Well, that was very enjoyable. No, no, don't bother seeing me out. I have a flight to catch this afternoon. It was so nice to see you again, Megan."  
  
Megan stayed leaning over the spanking bench until she heard the door open and close. She straightened up wincing in pain and collected her clothing, less panties, dressed, and started towards the exit. She then turned and said, "Mistress V, I trust you'll keep Ms Aldridge's part of the bargain. There will be no beatings beyond the six strokes promised the slowest eighteen."  
  
Megan walked slowly up the stairway to the upper lobby and went straight to the Security Desk.  
  
"George, do you monitor the video from the Mailgirls Dormitory here?"  
  
"No ma'am, we just have the feeds from the outside cameras. The interior cameras are route to the office down in the basement. Harry's working that desk today, he can answer any questions."  
  
"Thank you, George; I'll do that. If you see Professor Chang tell her that I'll meet her here in the lobby or out at her car shortly."  
  
She stopped by the Med Center to change into dry clothing and collected her purse with her employee id. Her employee id as a mailgirl had featured a full-length photo of her nude body, her current id had the normal head shot.  
  
Nurse Allen popped out of Exam Room One to see who was there and asked, "Are you ready to leave?"  
  
"No, I'm going downstairs to talk to Security. Do you know where Lin is?"  
  
Susan blushed, "She's still here, we're getting caught up."  
  
Megan smiled and said, "Does Exam Room One afford the same opportunities for mailgirl interactions as the dormitory?"  
  
Susan blushed even deeper and said, "Yes, but I have to worry about interruptions from random someones seeking medical aid. Just give a call when you're finally heading home."  
  
Megan took the service stairs which she had traversed so often as a mailgirl down a flight and found the Security Office. An older, balding man opened the door at her knock and said, "George called to say you'd be down. Mistress V really laid into you; I thought you were past all that now."  
  
"So did I, Harry. The trade off was six strokes for me or twenty-four for each of the mailgirls including my sister who was laid out on the bench when I walked in."  
  
"How did that happen?"  
  
"Ms Aldridge was my boss in Chicago and engineered my transfer here in the first place. She's still got it in for me."  
  
"And that's the Ms Aldridge who called to tell us to delete the recording of the video from the dormitory cameras this morning.?"  
  
Megan groaned, "You didn't, did you."  
  
"Well, of course, we followed orders and it's scrubbed clean off our system. You'll need to talk to the IT folks - you know they haven't done any such thing. I advise talking to Damon in the morning. Not too early, they work to their own schedule."  
  
"Thank you, Harry. I'm going to nail her ass to the wall."  
  
"You do that, Ms Brooks."  
  
Megan turned and headed back up the stairs wondering if Heather would be waiting to talk to her.  
  
\* \* \* \*  
  
On the drive back to Megan's condo Lin asked, "What's with your fidgeting in the seat? My driving's not that bad."  
  
"Six strokes from Mistress V's cane; sitting is painful."  
  
"You're still subject to Mistress V even as an analyst?"  
  
"No, but when I walked into the dormitory with Fourteen Ms Aldridge offered me the choice of my taking six stokes or all twenty-four mailgirls getting twenty-four, starting with my sister who was laid out on the bench in front of me.  
  
"I went down to talk to Security about getting the video to take to HR, but they told me Ms Aldridge had ordered them to delete that file. Harry also said that he was sure that IT would have a copy and to talk to them in the morning. If they have the video, I'll do my best to nail Ms Aldridge on sexual harassment charges. In either case I'll go to my doctor tomorrow to document the damage to my ass. With that and testimony from the mailgirls that may be enough, the video would help though. I'll call Sarah and ask her advice, she's the lawyer."  
  
"Good luck with that. I know as mailgirls everything was stacked against us. Hopefully, that doesn't apply to ex-mailgirls."  
  
"Fourteen seemed pleased after talking to you and she was the second mailgirl finisher today so she will make the team; now if the part-time contract comes through... And what's with you and Susan?"  
  
"There were somethings that didn't suck about being a mailgirl; Susan was one of them. Well, she did suck in a literal sense and I've got a dinner date with her tonight."