

Allen X. Davis

Bubbaloo

Whump! Elena Morais slammed a tray of mail onto my ledge. Big, beautiful Elena Morais. Her flowery perfume enveloped me as the letters clicked by at the rate of sixty per minute. Twelve of us sat at the big green letter sorting machine while twelve little tentacles danced back and forth feeding us the mail. Elena plucked out a postcard and propped it up on my console: a topless Hawaiian girl in a grass skirt. Hoorah! I yelled over the noise of the machine. I looked up and her dark eyes glowed. Hey, we should get us a beer later, I said. It's so fuckin' dry in here I could use one right now! she yelled back. Just pray there's no OT. I glanced at the big clock on the wall. It was only seven. We got out at eleven-thirty; they had until ten-thirty to call mandatory overtime, and if they did all was lost. I wanted that beer with Elena. The suspense was already killing me. A couple of seats ahead of me Phil Goffman was jolting around in his chair more than usual, giving the impression his part of the machine was going faster than the rest. Impossible, of course, with everything synchronized. Suddenly, a loud *BOOM!* The machine stopped, tentacles frozen in mid-air. A cheer went up, for this meant we had an unscheduled break. The last time this happened Mike Gilpin picked up a thick handful of mail out back and with a smile showed me how he had used it to jam the gears. Imagine a huge bicycle chain going off its sprockets and fucking everything up. A blue-shirted mechanic appeared with his toolbox. Everybody out back! shouted Richie Farley, the acting supervisor, not content to

let us chill for a while. He waved his arm toward the machine and shouted even louder, Dispatch the full trays! Clean it all up! Richie looked like Macaulay Culkin, the little kid in the Home Alone movie. As a clerk he was a regular fun loving guy but whenever he clipped on that big yellow acting supervisor's badge he turned into John Wayne. I checked on Phil before heading out back. His eyes were wild. Cackling madly, he told me he had been sending every single Boston Edison yellow payment envelope he saw to Alaska instead of Boston. Why? A dispute over his bill. He would show them! And if he got caught he could just say Whoops! I got confused and hit 9-9-5 on the lower keyboard instead of 9-9 on the upper. The mechanic fixed the problem quicker than we had hoped. Farley pushed a button on his command panel and a school bell rang. He pushed another button and the machine started rolling along. Tentacles began dancing one by one, sucking onto each letter with a vacuum *swoosh*, then dropping it for your viewing pleasure. A *click* as the letter moved away and when you heard that click you keyed in the code like a laboratory rat who could read. *Swoosh. Click. Swoosh. Click. Swoosh. Click.* Something didn't seem right. I checked the speedometer on the command panel when I got relieved. The needle was almost at sixty-one! Farley trying to make up for lost time. I pointed at it. Look! It's at sixty-one! He shook his head and claimed he had timed it. Sixty on the button, he said, crossing his arms. The needle is a little off. Bullshit! I said. I called Gino the union steward over and he went ballistic, shouting and gesturing while Farley, arms still crossed, refused to budge. Gino took out a stopwatch and Farley eventually turned the speed back down. Gino stormed back to his cramped union steward area and kicked the shit out of a file cabinet. Ten thirty came and went with no overtime announcement. As soon as the minute hand on the clock jumped to thirty-one a cheer went up. But at ten thirty-two a barely audible male voice droned over the P.A. system: *All Tour 3 LSM operators on the three to eleven thirty shift MUST remain for overtime.* (LSM: post office speak for letter sorting machine.) A chorus of

boos and complaints. We knew the drill: they would claim the clock was fast. Gino stormed over to the general foreman's desk and thrashed his arms around. Some time went by. The announcement was repeated with MAY remain instead of MUST. A rare victory.

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Freedom! Elena and I burst out the front doors into the warm night with scores of others. People laughed and shouted. Rock music from The Channel nightclub drifted across the sludgy water of the Fort Point Channel. A small plane buzzed overhead like a happy bee. From above came the *crack-crack-crack* of an AK-47 rifle. But that couldn't be. Was I having a flashback? Close to us we heard a metallic *clink-clink* as something fell to the pavement. I picked it up: an empty shell! This was real! Another *crack-crack-crack* and the light at loading dock #1 went out with a *pop* and *tinkle*. Let's get the fuck outta here! screamed Elena and we ran for our lives. We were still jittery and confused when we got to Three Cheers. On the TVs above the bar a news crew replayed video of the plane looping through the sky above our place of employment and above the blue neon sign of Gillette's World Shaving Headquarters further down the channel. From there it flew to Logan Airport, almost touched down, went up into the sky again and finally landed just minutes ago. They showed the pilot's picture. Elena shrieked. It was a guy from Machine H! A heavysset middle-aged Italian guy with short curly black hair and normally an eager grin on his congenial round face. He always wore a loud Hawaiian shirt and always sat at console #12 at the front of his machine like he was leading the charge into battle on the green beast. I figured he must've listened to some exciting stuff on his big black headphones because every once in a while he would rear his head back and bellow Bubba-loooooo!!! It would echo through the entire building. Bubba-loooooo!!! You could hear it miles away like a foghorn on the bay. He had shot and killed his ex-wife in Salem. Then he stole the plane at gunpoint from a nearby airport

and headed south. He flew UNDER the Tobin Bridge. He shot the skywalk on the fiftieth floor of the Prudential Tower. He shot parked cars near Fenway Park. He buzzed Logan Airport, shutting it down for an hour before attacking the South Postal Annex and heading back to Logan. Miraculously, no one was hurt except for his ex-wife. They said she had divorced him after a fight over a television channel. The clerks on Bubbaloos machine voluntarily memorized extra zip codes for a half buck more an hour. Their machine ran at fifty-five instead of sixty. Most were smart. Some may have been geniuses. But in my opinion fifty-five was too slow. It gave you too much time to think. I told the bartender about him always hollering Bubbaloos for some strange reason. It's bubble gum, silly! said Elena, and I remembered seeing packages of Bubbaloos at the store. Dontcha know it's also your Honey Bunny? said the bartender. Your Sugar? Your One and Only? Elena slapped her hand to her heart. Jesus, Mary and Joseph! He was wailing for his wife all this time and we didn't even know it! The bartender shook his head sadly and said Kill the things you love, right?

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The next day: Rage. So-called management KNEW this maniac was in the air shooting up the city. They had been briefed by Boston police and state police who told them he was possibly headed our way, but still they let us leave without saying a word. We all could've been killed! They held a meeting in the cafeteria in an attempt to justify their negligence. Standing room only, packed to the walls with angry workers. The chief culprit was Mike Donnelly—a tall, red headed dork in a suit who got his job through his upper management hack father. As acting tour superintendent he had been in charge of the whole facility, which comprised the old building and the new building stuck together. Except for red hair instead of gray, he was a carbon copy of the unsmiling old fuck. In ridiculous, convoluted doublespeak, Donnelly claimed he had let us leave the building to keep us safe. What? This was because they thought the building—not people—would be his

main target. The building must have stretched three or four city blocks down Dorchester Ave. Did this idiot really think there was no safe place to hide in that massive structure of stone and brick? Did he fear Bubbaloo might blow the whole place up with a rocket launcher or a bomb or something from a tiny little Cessna airplane? So you put us in harm's way to keep us safe? shouted Mike Gilpin. You could hide in the building but not us? You're a worthless piece of — Shame on you! boomed a burly custodian. Donnelly adjusted his microphone and straightened his tie. I'm proud to report, he said, that not a single one of my people was hurt in this unfortunate situation. We're not your people! screamed a black lady who normally was outgoing and kind. And you're not ours! Disgusted, I worked my way to the back of the crowd and gazed out the glass wall at South Station right next door. Trains sat by the platforms. People streamed back and forth. I pictured steam rising from the engines like in an old movie as the last boarding call was made for New York or Chicago. All aboard! I wanted to be out there too, doing normal things with normal people. Elena nudged me and whispered Look what I brought for swing (post office speak for lunch). She opened her pocketbook and I glimpsed a fat joint resting in there like a jewel. I nudged her back and said Hey, I brought a little something too.

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After swing we felt no pain. Farley pushed the machine faster and faster and it rushed and roared like a locomotive. This time I said nothing. I turned Elmore James up loud on my headphones and let some of the mail fly by without keying anything. The sky is cryin', screeched Elmore to a slow blues beat. Look at the tears roll down the street. And it hit me: those bullets falling from the sky and bouncing off the street were Bubbaloo's tears, maybe the only way he knew how to cry. Some letters I sent to the upside down or backwards bins. For others, whether I could read them or not, I hit #3 on the bottom keyboard for

unreadable. In my mind it morphed into unreachable—exactly how I felt at that moment in time. I poured my heart out with Elmo on Every Day I Have the Blues and then his slide guitar started singing and crying as me and the speeding machine charged on:

<i>Swoosh</i>	<i>Click</i>	Unreadable
<i>Swoosh</i>	<i>Click</i>	Unreachable
Nothing		<i>Swoosh</i>
Going		<i>Swoosh</i>
	Anywhere	
	<i>Click.</i>	