

## [Time Off]

Swenson 6/21/39 Part II TIME OFF

The single clock on the wall of the Lunch Room is set conspicuously near the door... The better to receive the respectful glances of the workers, as, four times a day, they enter the room for a fifteen-minute relief period.

Complacently the clock looks down on the munching chattering croud , grouped round the white aluminum-topped tables, meting out to each worker his quarter hour, and with the stern note of a gong at the end of each period, giving the order to return to the machines.

The Postal Telegraph operators have learned to pack a lot of conversation into those few moments over their coffee cups, and their voices, used to submersion beneath the shrilling of the machines, sound sharp and excited in the comparative quiet of the cafeteria.....

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Hello Don. How's the boy?

So, so. This cake is made of rubber.

You said it. I'm sick of the food around here. With fifteen minutes it's not enough/ time to get to your locker and down seven flights to the street before your relief's up. You have to eat here or not eat — and they know it. So what do they give you? - goulash....! Say, where you going on vacation this year?

I get two weeks in July. I think I'll go up North, maybe Maine. Rent a cabin on a lake. Think of it — for two whole weeks, twenty-four hours a day I won't have to lay my eyes on one of those pink sheets with "Postal Tel" on a blue border. No machines, no key pounding, no code strips, no clocks, no nothing — only me and the mountain breezes — oh, boy...!

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That reminds me. Last summer I went fishing with my old man up around Cape Cod. Gee, those were two perfect weeks. But, y'know, the second day away, when I'd managed to put Postal Tel in the attic — guess what? I get a wire — a wire, 3 mind you — from Ernie. You know he was on the night shift. So he sneaks a wire through to me, and it says in code — “Don't forget to sign the timesheet — How's your message rate? I'm having a swell time — wish you was here.” So I threw him a wire back collect and I says, “To hell with timesheet. I sign in on the bay at 5 a.m. My mess rate today was 40 pounds of bass and bluefish. Having swell time without you here.” How do you like that? A peach, huh?

Yeah — We'd better shove along. I got one minute. Hi, girls. Have a piece of rubber cake. So long....

Hello, Ruthie. I've been saving this table for you. Gee, what a relief to get out of [?] that noise. it's quiet here compared to the floor. Even those dishes rattling is/ like soft music to me.

It's the truth. I make it a point to eat a sandwich or something at each relief period, whether I'm hungry or not. [?] Chewing takes the numbness out of my ears.

You can do it, Dot. You don't put on weight. Me, I don't eat. I chew gum instead. I just come in here to get [?] 4 an earfull of silence four times a day.

Last time I weighed I found I lost two pounds. Y'know eating sandwiches and coffee [?] four times a day spoils your appetite for a real meal.

Look, here comes Selma. She's got a ring. Wait, she'll call your attention to it. She's been flashing it all over the place.

Well, girls — Look, at last!

Oh, Selma, how perfectly stunning. I'm so happy for you.

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Here, let's try it on. Gee, I wouldn't mind getting married, just to get out of this place. When'll it be, Sel?

Wait, let me get a bite into this. Aah — corn beef again. They don't have no choice around here. Oh, well, my dears, don't take this little gadget so seriously. You know, I haven't really made up my mind to marry Roy. I only agreed to be engaged to him. He's a sweet boy. I've been in love with him for two years — I never even see another fellow. You know me. But marriage — you know what I mean — I mean it's 5 alright and all that — Maybe later, when you want to settle down, have a couple kids — you know. But when I do that, it probably won't be Roy. He's sweet and all that — nice to run around with — a divine dancer — but, well, you know what I mean — he's too possessive. I want freedom. Still, it gives a girl a certain prestige — if you know what I mean — if she can sport a diamond. Other fellows look at you with respect — they sort of get interested — competition, you know —

Say, Benny sent me a plant for [?] Valentine . Wasn't that sweet? A little note on it: "Don't forget to water me, and I'll grow up to be crazy about you like — your — Benny Goodstein."

How cute. Benny's a cute boy. I could go for him myself. But you certainly got him on the leish, Ruthie.

Yes, but listen to this. Somebody Some fellow on the job's been writing valentines and slipping them in the girls' lockers. Martha showed me one she found yesterday, and today there was one in my locker. Printed on a telegraph form — somebody's using the machine for his poetic outbursts — some modern Romeo, huh? Look, here's one. Read it, it's a darb. 5 You blow upon your fingertips I wish that they were mine The kisses that come from your lips Would be my valentine

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Oh, didn't you know? That's Joe Shakespeare. He's been making up verses for years, and passing them around to the girls. His head's always in the clouds. He's the one guy on the floor that doesn't know what time it is, if you ask him.

Here's the one he sent Martha:

Your beauty always thrills me  
Although you're far away  
No other one can ever be  
So lovely and so gay.  
You're sweeter than the roses  
You'll always be in bloom  
And in your picture poses  
You brighten up my room.

Say, I just heard a thing or two. Did you know Bertha Dixon's expecting a baby? It's begun to show, and the [?] floorman advised her to take a leave of three weeks. Know what she did? She says to him, "Three weeks? Why three weeks? I'd have to 7 lay off for six months." She told him she's going to stay on the job till the last minute. Imagine! I think it's terrible. The poor kid will soon look like a stuffed goose, and everyone will notice her. They say it's J.T.'s.

Oh, well, Bertha won't care. I think she's proud of it.

Let's get up a naming contest. Whoever suggests the best name for Bertha's brat, is exempt from union dues and assessments for three months.

Make it exempt for life, and I'm on.

Listen, I suggest we call it "Postal Nell" if it's a girl! Well, dear, I gotta scam. Want to make my locker before I go back on the machine. So long.

So long, Sel. Take care of the glassware.

Ruthie, that was a dirty dig — you devil! Listen, the new floorman stopped at my machine today, and he says — "How you doing?" So I looks up at him, give him the bright eye,

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and I says, "I could do better without you breathing down my neck every five minutes. The humidity's bad enough", I says, "without that," I says.

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Oh, you didn't really, Dot!

So help me, I did. Well, anyway, words to that effect. If you know what I mean.

He's fresh. I don't like his looks. He has sweaty hands. You know how he puts his paw casually on your shoulder. Gives me the shivers.

The other man we had was better. Old Freddy, Baldy Freddy You could do anything with him. Powder your nose in the middle of taking a rush wire. He wouldn't [?] say a word.

I used to keep a crossword puzzle on my lap and fool with it between times. While I'd be marking the time on the blank with one hand, I'd fill in a word with the other. Gee, one day, though, Freddie came up behind me, and he catches on, and he stoops down, whispers in my ear — "A monkey in three letters is 'Ape!'" He meant it for an insult, but I wasn't phased. I laughed, and wrote it in right in front of his nose. 'Thanx" I said, "You're a big help. If I win the contest, I'll split with you." So he laughed too, and walked on.

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Dot, listen to,me — you watch your step. You may think it's funny, but I've seen girls get the sack for a lot less than that. Never trust a super. They kid with you, and then turn in your number. Next payday, you get a suspension, and then you don't even know who to blame. C'mon, let's get going — it's two minutes to. Let me have your lipstick, Ruthie.

Yeah, it's back to the grind for three more hours. I'm glad tomorrow's Friday. Y'know what I do on weekends? I always turn the clock back one hour — and play I got more time. Get up an hour later, have my meals later and give myself the feeling of being my/ own boss

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for a day. Besides, [?] I get a kick out of dictating to the clock once in a while, instead of it always telling me where to head in. Well, so long girls. See you on the floor.

So long, take care of yourself. Oh, by the way don't forget union meeting tonight. See you there anyhow. So long.