

Paid to be dumb

Karl Detzer

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WANTED • Bright young man of pleasing appearance able to follow orders. No experience necessary. Address Mr. Ferguson, 1919 Lincoln Building.

Mr. Ferguson.
1919 Lincoln Building,
City.
Dear Sir:

Answering your advertisement in this morning's paper, I am twenty-three years old and bright. My appearance, to put it mildly, is devastating. When I get my teeth in an order, I'll follow it to Little America. I'm your crying need. When shall I call?

Yours truly,
Tom Matson.

Tom Matson, Esq.,
Washington Street,
City.

Dear Mr. Matson: You sound bright. Call at ten tomorrow morning.

Yours truly,
Robert Ferguson.

Dear Tom:

I know that I should not be writing you, for your conduct last night was inexcusable. The things you said to Dad would make any parent furious. He had a right to ask about your future prospects, and it is true that you haven't even looked for a job since you left school.

I warned you that Dad was worried enough, with his entire fortune tied up in seven corner lots that aren't bringing in enough to pay taxes, without his thinking he might have a son-in-law to support, too. If you only had agreed with him that every young man ought at least to try to get a job, he would have been reasonable. As it is, he's through with reason where you are concerned. He got to thinking of you at breakfast and spilled his coffee.

It's all off, Tom. I doubt that you can ever convince Dad or me that you are anything but a playboy. So I'll have to ask you not to call again.

Determinedly,
Dorothy.

FERGUSON SURVEY SERVICE
Confidential Memorandum

To: Tom Matson.

Your references have been found satisfactory. As indicated in personal interview, your salary will be fifty cents an hour for eight hour day. Start tomorrow at eight. The survey will require ten days.

Understand that this project is confidential. A national grocery chain is planning a branch store in the city and has engaged the Ferguson Service to check pedestrian traffic at various available locations, in order that it may choose the busiest corner. You will count pedestrians at the northeast corner of First and Hill streets four hours each morning and afternoon. Attached find counting device, which

you will keep in your pocket. Merely press thumb button once for each pedestrian passing corner.

It is important that you tell no one of the survey and that no one sees the counting device. Furthermore, *you will speak to no one while on duty.* I shall make frequent inspections to see that these orders are carried out, and any departure from them will result in instant dismissal,

Robert Ferguson.
Director.

WESTERN UNION

MISS DOROTHY FROST 180 WILLOW
PARK ESTATES LETTER RECEIVED AND
CONTENTS NOTED STOP TELL FATHER I
START BUSINESS CAREER TOMORROW
MORNING STOP FUTURE PROSPECTS
SIMPLY DAZZLING STOP WHEN I HAVE
SAVED ENOUGH WILL TAKE SEVEN CORNER
LOTS OFF HIS HANDS STOP AND DAUGHTER
WITH THEM STOP SORRY ABOUT SPILLED
COFFEE STOP LOVE AND HISSES

TOM

'Operator, please get me Willow Park Estates, Number 56-1. Hello, Dorothy. This is Tom. What? I said this is Tom. What do you mean, so what? Give me a chance and I'll explain . . . well, how can I when you do all the talking? It was this way, Dorothy. I *couldn't* speak to you. Why not? Well, I was working when you saw me. No, I *wasn't* just standing on the corner with my hands in my pockets ignoring people. But I can't tell you what I was doing. It's confidential. That's what I said, confidential. . . listen, Dorothy, I'd tell you if I could, but it's just one of those things I can't I'm sorry you saw me there, because ... no, I wasn't waiting for another woman! If you didn't have such a suspicious disposition. . . hello, Dorothy. Hello! Dorothy! No, never mind, operator, I guess the party hung up.'

DAILY REPORT FERGUSON SURVEY SERVICE

Counter: Tom Matson
Counting Post: First and Hill
Date. Monday. October 18
Total Eight Hour Count: 7617

REMARKS: I have no remarks, but two questions. First, what shall I do if a certain party decides to spend a couple of hours just walking up and down past me with her chin in the air, ignoring me? Shall I count her every time she passes? My second question is this: Do you recommend any special foot powder to ease the burning sensation in my feet that results from standing on them and the cement sidewalk for eight hours every day?

FERGUSON SURVEY SERVICE

Memo: To Tom Matson.

Reference your first question, count any party who passes, no matter how often. You will find that no party will pass more than three or four times a day, and even so, that particular pedestrian is a potential customer for a store at said location. Answering second question, have you tried hot foot baths in the evening?

Robert Ferguson.
Director.

Tuesday, October 19.

Memorandum to Mr. Ferguson:

This party I mentioned in yesterday's report passed me again today. I kept check of the number of times and it was exactly two hundred and eleven, not counting the times she stopped and stared at me while I tried to ignore her as required by your instructions. Shall I keep on counting her?

Tom Matson.

Memo to Mr. Matson:

I can't be bothered with reports of nuts who have nothing better to do with their time than stand and look at you. If this party annoys you again, call the police. And don't forget to count the policemen.

Ferguson.

Thursday, October 21

Dear Dorothy:

There is very little sense in your acting the way you have these past four days. I have told you that I am under orders to speak to nobody while on duty, and if you and Greta Garbo and Mae West were to come along arm in arm and all start chatting at me. I'd have to keep right on being silent. So it will do you no good to walk up and down trying to ignore me. However, in about a week I'll be able to tell you all about it and ease your curiosity, which, if I must say it, seems a little extreme. Meantime, I'll appreciate it if you stay away.

Tom.

Friday, October 22.

Dear Tom:

So you did recognize me! I thought from the blank stare with which you have been greeting me that you'd never even heard of me. Dad says it's a good thing that this side of your character has come out before it's too late. I agree with him, and if I want to amuse myself by watching you making a fool of yourself, I've every right to do it. Don't think I don't understand. What you call a business proposition is just a bet you're trying to win standing around looking like a sap. Well, go ahead and win it. It should be easy for you.

Mike Doran, the Greek god from New Haven that I told you about, is coming through town tomorrow, and he says he wants me to show him the sights. Believe me, I'm going to do just that. You'll be seeing us. Until then,

Dorothy Frost.

WESTERN UNION

MISS DOROTHY FROST 180 WILLOW
PARK ESTATES KEEP THAT LOP EARED
MORON AWAY FROM ME STOP I'M
WARNING YOU LAY OFF HIM STOP LOVE

TOM

WESTERN UNION

MR. TOM MATSON 2364
WASHINGTON STREET WHERE'S YOUR
ROLLICKING SENSE OF HUMOR YOU
SHOULD SIGN QUOTES LOVE AND HISSES
UNQUOTE TO BE IN BEST FORM PERIOD
MIKE JUST ARRIVED SEE YOU LATER

DOROTHY FROST

"Calling Car 81, Car eight one. Go to the corner of First and Hill Streets. A fight. WMMP, calling Car 81. . ."

"Hello, sergeant, this is Car 81. For gosh sakes, send along some help. There's five thousand people on the corner of First and Hill. It's so crowded we can't find the fight."

"Car 54 — 67 and Cruiser 14. First and Hill Streets. A riot. Step on it! Emergency squad, First and Hill Streets. Special gas gun squad, First and Hill Streets. A riot. Get rolling, everybody."

DAILY REPORT

FERGUSON SURVEY SERVICE

Counter: Tom Matson

Counting Post: First and Hill Street

Date: October 23

Total Eight Hour Count: 16,161

REMARKS: I am not bringing my report to the office in person because I have been unavoidably detained. In fact, I am in jail, but I expect to be out and ready to start counting again at eight

o'clock in the morning. However, I shall require a new counting device, the police having confiscated mine under the impression that it was a deadly weapon, which is laughable on the face of it, as it wasn't the counting device but my knuckles that did the dirty work.

I might as well explain what happened, so you will have the truth, rather than the garbled story which no doubt you will get from the newspapers. I was standing at my corner with the counting device in my pocket, checking the pedestrian traffic as usual, when this party that has been trying to annoy me came along. She had with her a big galoot that I never did care for, and when they came up to me, he stopped and began to laugh, as if there were something funny in a young man trying to earn a living in a dignified manner. It burned me plenty.

But I obeyed instructions and did not open my mouth, just kept on clicking the counting device in my pocket, although I didn't register the fellow, because he is only part human, being nothing more than a football player from New Haven, and you instructed me to count nothing but men and women.

Well, he laughed and laughed and a crowd began to gather and the crowd laughed, too. Still I didn't say anything, but continued to click the people who were gathering rapidly. And then this galoot said to the party that was with him that it surely was luck she'd ditched me when she did because I probably would spend the rest of my life standing around on a street corner.

Still I didn't say a word, but I gestured for him to get out of there. I gestured first with my chin and then with my arm and finally with my foot. My foot gesture was a little wide, I guess, and perhaps a trifle hard, for he let out a yell and turned around and tried to hit me. And man to man, Mr. Ferguson, you'd have done the same thing I did. I let him have it, and although I'm not very large, my rage was such that it took him by surprise. I gave him just a few taps, not more

than thirty or forty, and the crowds kept gathering faster and faster, and I could use only one hand, because I was pressing the thumb button of the counting device with the other.

I didn't mean to push him through the window of the barbershop, but the big cow suddenly went backwards, and right through the window, and the barbers all came running out screaming for the police.

Then the police came, and I checked them off too, as you advised. I was able to count only sixty-eight of the police, although I may have missed some, for by this time several other people had joined the fight under the impression that the Reds were rioting under instructions direct from Moscow, and larger crowds were gathering all the time, which made it very difficult for me to keep up with my counting device, it being only a single action, whereas I could have used one that counted by the dozens.

Unfortunately, I had to leave with the police fifteen minutes before my eight hours were up, but as you will note, the total for the day is more than twice as much as any other day, due chiefly to the crowd attracted by this galoot falling through the window. I hope this explains why I need another counting device before I can go to work in the morning.

ACCIDENT WARD
CITY HOSPITAL

ENTRY REPORT: Mike Doran, admitted 4:41 p.m. Contusions and lacerations of scalp, chest, back, arms and legs. Several teeth missing, referred to dental ward. Entered by Police Department.

FERGUSON SURVEY SERVICE
October 25.
Red Star Food Markets,
Chicago, Illinois.

Gentlemen: Attached you will find

report of the ten locations checked for pedestrian traffic the past week. We regret that you do not desire a longer survey. However, as you will note, the property at the corner of First and Hill Streets, owned by S. D. Frost, 180 Willow Park Estates, shows a much higher average than any other location under consideration.

You will note that this average is considerably increased at this point on the final day of the survey, due, no doubt, to special Saturday crowds. Hoping this will prove satisfactory,

I am,

Yours very truly,
Robert Ferguson, Director

Dear Tom:

How can I ever apologize enough to you? I certainly can't do it by letter, so you must come tonight for dinner.

Dad wants to congratulate you, too.

After I told him what happened Saturday, he was furious, until he read in the paper about how you had been employed by a counting device. But how was he to know that you were counting pedestrians, since you would not tell me, which shows your high sense of honor, because of Dad owning the corner, and your not wanting to betray your employer by giving Dad special advantage.

But when the Red Star Market lawyer called this morning and said his company wanted to talk price, it was all very clear to Dad; he sent his own lawyer right down to the police station to get you out. You were a genius, Tom, stirring up all that excitement, so as to get the crowds there, and to think of your going right on counting all the time! In fact, Dad says you are just the kind of person he needs to assist him in handling his properties.

We'll be expecting you at six-thirty.

Love and Hisses,
Dorothy.

P.S. Mike left the hospital at noon and went back to New Haven.