

**The Mark of Max
(Static Voices Ignored)**

by Edward K. Brown II

"Morning.
Could you tell me which way it is to the nearest convenience store?"

Max had no clue.
As the city's shoe attendant of the streets,
He focused his attention to the job at hand.

Max studied his reflection in the toe of the shoe
He was commissioned to clean.

Max was concerned,
Deeply concerned.

"Make a right at the corner, and go won four blocks.
You'll find a 7-Eleven there..."

Hey you!
Make sure you get the bottoms!"

Looking up from beneath the brim of his baseball cap with a smooth face...

"I usually save the Windex for car windows,
But I will use it this one time, especially for you.

Max enjoyed patronizing his patrons.
He did not speak to his customers unless he was addressed directly.
So, when he had the opportunity to gloss his personality, he seized it.

Thinking of the constipated dog whose droppings brought him fortune
While watching the man walk away with squeaky-clean shoes,
Max's mouth curved slightly askew as he
Crumpled the crisp dollar in his hand, shoved it in his pocket, and
Set his cleaning materials aside to take a lunch break.

"How--?"

Max tried not to care.
He could only worry about
His immediate,
His present
Reality.

Bitter thoughts,
Chewed lips,
Clasped hands,
Max lived in his own nature.

Taking a walk...

The streets were busy,
Busy not with pedestrians,
But with pigeons.

Dressed in dirt
The pigeons pecked at the ground.
In unison
The pigeons' head rose as Max passed by.

They sensed something about him,
But as he continued on
The pigeons went back to their pecking,
Their search for a decent meal.

Max,
Walking through the pigeon parade,
Liked the idea that they lived off the streets.

Removing his cap and wiping his brow,
He wondered if he could eat them.

Placing his cap back on,
He decided to go to the park.

Finding a bench,
One with a trash can adjacently placed,
Max claimed quickly his territory
And searched silently in the can for his meal.

The pigeons flocked to his side.

"Time for eats!"

Max,
Turning his head as if he were a child
Cramming his hand into his mommy's purse to find a piece of candy
Pulled out a grimy package.

"Ooh!"

What do we have here?"

The anxious crowd's eyes
Were upon Max,
The package
And each other.

"IT'S A SURPRISE!!!"

The crowd fluttered.

Max laughed,
Took a half eaten burger out of the packaging,
And hid his meal behind his back.

"YOU BELONG IN A COOP!!!"

With that shouted,
He turned
 and forced
 down
 his

Delicacy.

Once finished,
He belched, kicked his feet at the crowd
Dispersing them,
And hurried back to his corner.

Upon arrival
He discovered that his cleaning materials were missing.

"MY WINDEX!"

Blurred,
Max tried to figure
A different way
Of earning
An income.

Solved.

He closed his eyes to prepare himself:

*Back in the bushes I can feel the beat.
 I imagine I am in the jungle, but actually, I am on the street.
 People pass by. They laugh. They cry.
 They wonder who I am, for they cannot look me in the eye.
 People think that I am dirty, that I am just a slob.
 However, I am a person, a person with no real job.
 But I work hard, like an animal at the City Zoo.
 For if I did not, I would starve in reality: still homeless, still blue.
 I have not lost respect for Nature. I am no fool.
 I am living in the jungle where survival is the golden rule.
 I listen for the beat. I can hear it come.
 "Mister, can you spare a quarter?" This is my life as a bum.*

Something hit Max on the side of his head
 Awakening him from his mantric haze.

Finding a quarter on the ground
 He heard a man shout,
 "COFFEE!"

Max disliked coffee,
 And
 He detested handouts
 Let alone "throw-outs,"
 But he swallowed
 His cost/less quarter;
 For pride was his best tasting meal.
 It made him feel warm.
 It gave him the energy
 To move on.

Max now had a \$1.25 for new cleaning materials,
 But the profits were not significant enough for him
 To reinvest in his business.
 He needed to find more capital.

"Marooned."

His mind could not carry him from his plight.
 So,
 He walked,
 Searched,
 And hoped.

As the day settled into late afternoon,
Max found himself at the park, amongst the pigeons,
Disgusted.

He could no longer tolerate
His street colleagues.
They disturbed him.
To Max,
The pigeons were like chickens,
Dirty little chickens;
Yet,
They were distinguished like doves,
Dirty little doves.

Exhausted, he raked his face in anguish.
He saw his own reality.

“Get away from me!
Fly away!
Leave me alone!”

Max closed his heart.
He wanted to stop.
There was nothing left.

“MARK THEM ALL!!!”

He ran down the street
Spitting epithets as we went.

Pedestrians moved from his path.

Alerted to the situation,
A couple of police officers pulled Max aside,
Calmed him down,
Seated him,
And stood beside him,
Hoping that the people would go about their business.

Max,
Wringing his own neck,
Asked where was Thoreau when he needed him most.

The officers looked at each other
And shrugged their shoulders.

There was no answer for Max.
He retreated into his coop.

He closed his eyes.
Air rushed through his nostrils.
He jittered and made a grumbling noise
As he went into his
 deep,
 deep,
 deep,
 sleep.

[BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT]

I lie in bed.
Lost in my head.
I laugh. I cry.
I'm crazy. I want to die.

I see my thoughts.
I reach at it.
It's an allusion.
Shit!

What was that?
I hear my thinking.
I am confused.
No, it was nothing.

On my body stand my hair.
I lie in bed with no one nowhere.
I ask myself, "Is it real?"
I lie in bed with my thoughts I feel.

I lie in bed. The tension mounts.
I remember it is the thought that counts.
In bed I lie,
Lost, waiting to die.

[BREATHE OUT, BREATHE IN]

Max
Finally
Allowed
His
Mind

To lie
Fallow.

By this time a crowd had formed.
Their heads turned looking
At Max,
The officers,
And each other.
For they had never seen something so absurd.

"It's too bad we can't eat him."
"Yeah, his is a fat one isn't he."

The officers tried to disperse the crowd
By kicking their feet at them.

Upon doing so,
The crowd few away
Leaving their mark on Max and the officers.

"Damn pigeons!"

"Hey, don't sweat it.
How 'bout we have some coffee at the-ah Donut Shop?"

"Huh, oh, yeah. Sounds good."

Wiping off the public's problems
The two officers walked away
Leaving Max at peace,
Feeling like priests.