

## LENNY WAS RIGHT

By Liane Fazio

Max was used to people walking past him without paying him any notice. Eclipse day wouldn't be any different. The streets were more crowded than usual and Lenny, his best friend who lived one alley over, told him that everyone would probably take off of work to watch the eclipse. "It's either gonna be a slow day or we're gonna end up millionaires. Or maybe the world will end," Lenny told him.

Thinking of Lenny, Max placed his hat between his outstretched feet on the sidewalk, bent his head and slouched against the building. At that angle he could see the people pass by, but they couldn't tell he was watching them. To them, he looked like he was sleeping or sleeping it off. Either way, he was always invisible to them. But it being such a busy day, he could only hope for a little something to be dropped into his hat.

A few hours later, he needed to get up and stretch his back. The innate snips of conversations were boring him, and he wanted to find Lenny to see how he was faring. As he was standing up with his hat in his hands, a \$20 bill and eclipse glasses floated gently into his hat. Quickly looking up so he could thank the generous person, he was bumped in his side and knocked into the building. He clasped his hat and offerings tightly to his chest, but lost site of the person who gave him the money and glasses.

Max took a shortcut down an alley and crossed the street. Craning his neck, he tried to spot Lenny through the throngs of people. There he was in his usual spot near the fire hydrant. Max could tell by the way the sea of pedestrians made a wave around that particular spot. He'd say hi to Lenny later. He had \$20 burning a hole in his hat.

Turning right away from Lenny, he walked two more blocks and turned left and crossed the street to the convenience store on the corner. It was further than he liked to go from his spot but years ago, he struck up a conversation with the owner and it turns out they served in the same war. They were on different sides but they both made it home. The owner of the convenience store allows Max to come in anytime to use the restroom and shop. This side of the street is more upscale, so he wasn't allowed to live there, but he feels like he has an ally in life.

The little bell above the door tinkled announcing his arrival. The store owner looked away from the TV as Max walked in. A fake smile warmed his face. "My friend!" he said. "Ready for the eclipse?"

"Got my glasses right here," Max replied, waving the eclipse glasses.

"Then why aren't you outside? There is only a few more minutes before totality."

Max slapped the \$20 on the counter. "I'm feeling lucky."

Standing at the counter, Max took a coin from the donation tray and licked his lips. The owner made a loud dramatic show of slamming the glass divider and locking it as well as locking the door that lead behind the counter and office.

"I'll be back in a few. Don't want to have to wait another twenty years to see it again," the owner laughed. He eyes Max nervously but walked outside and stood in front of the window, glancing inside to see what Max was doing.

Taking the three scratch-off lottery tickets in his left hand and the coin in his right, Max held them above his head, looked up, squeezed his eyes closed and took a deep breath; his silent prayer sent.

The noise outside swelled briefly and the muted anchorman on the TV looked excited as he stood amongst the eclipse viewers somewhere downtown on the lakeshore. But Max took no notice. He needed only three matching numbers out of nine to win. If you were lucky enough to match all nine numbers then you won the jackpot. He quickly scratched off the entire first card. Scanning the numbers, he didn't have any matches. The crowd outside gave a collective, "Ooooh." Max did the same with the second card and again, not one set of matching numbers. He brushed the residue away without thinking and held the last ticket against his heart.

"Come on, baby," he whispered. Slowly and more methodically, he scratched off the squares one by one. The first square revealed the number 2. Max nodded. The second square was also a number 2. He stopped. The coin trembled in his fingers. Muffled murmurings could be heard from the crowds outside. Scratching off the third square shown, again, number 2. A smile lit up his face. Max saw from the winnings box that matching three numbers he only won \$2. He nodded and continued scratching.

His hand was shaking so much that he scratched off the next three numbers in one swipe. All the number 2. The crowd outside gasped. He just won \$20. Wiping the sweat from his eyes, he stared at the lottery card and jumped up. "Yes!" he shouted. Quickly looking up and around to see if anyone heard him, Max remembered he was alone in the convenience store. Outside he saw the crowd looking skyward and pointing. Some people were hugging each other while others looked like they were crying. Looking back to his ticket, he glanced at the TV, but the picture was just static.

"OK," he whispered. "Here we go."

Taking a deep breath, he placed the coin at the final row of boxes. Max closed his eyes and swiped. The crowd outside roared. Opening his eyes, he gasped. "I won," he said. "I won! I WON!"

The last row revealed all 2s. Jumping up and down and screaming with utter joy he has never known, tears streamed down his face. Max kissed the ticket and remembered that his friend, the owner of the store, told him that if he ever won big on a lottery ticket he should sign the back of it for added protection. Frantically Max looked up and down the counter and spotted a display of pens hanging on a rack in front of the window. He greedily snatched a pack from the rack and opened the box spilling the pens onto the floor. Bending down to take one, he didn't notice what was happening outside.

Gently placing the ticket on the floor in a square of light from the window, he signed the back in his best handwriting. Max hadn't noticed the lights inside the store had gone out. Once again, he kissed the ticket before slipping it into his shirt pocket. He stood up smiling. His gaze automatically fell upon the window and the face staring back at him wasn't his reflection. It was gray, heart shaped and had large black eyes. Max didn't understand what he was seeing until the being raised its weapon towards him.

Max sighed, "Lenny *was* right."