

The Pigeon Savior

by Jerry Ratch

The window washer started saving pigeons whose feet were wrapped in fine black thread, the result, he informed me, of picking through trash bins. They are very intelligent, he went on to explain. (Right, trash bins, I thought to myself.) People tend to avoid the man because he is a little disheveled and could easily be taken for some kind of bum, or a human pigeon himself, with his same day-in day-out plaid shirt and unshaven, scruffy look. And too, once you got him going on the subject of pigeons, well, you just couldn't shut him up.

He had two of them in two shopping bags beneath the table we were sharing. There were air holes cut into the brown paper bags, and one of them was poking its beak out through one of the holes, and making some noise, moving around in its bag. "They get a little restless, " he explained. "That's how they let me know they're hungry."

I think he was in need of some kind of human interaction. I've never seen anybody talking to him, ever. I guess I'm about the only one. He usually has his head buried in somebody's discarded newspaper early in the morning while having his cup of coffee at The Loser Cafe, before making his window-washing rounds up and down the avenue. But at least he's not part of the trust-funder crowd that normally occupies all the outside tables when the weather is okay.

I always wondered how all those lame pigeons got that way. And, well, now I know why no one ever talks to this man, this pigeon savior. "Why do you do it?" I asked him.

He looked at me like I had just asked the most stupid question imaginable. "Because no one else will," was all he said.

