

## The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper

Episode 20: Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper, learn that good is enough...from a tree-



dwelling fungi

When judging words, it's always good to check out the source and the best source is the eyes. Always do your fact-checking in the eyes. Words can tell lies and maybe *these* words will tell you a lie about a strange man and a dog that walks sideways...like these two...

"I heard that army uniforms used to have edible buttons so that you could eat them when you're starving to death," said Crazy Man. He looked down at a bright orange and red clown outfit that terrified him and regretted not having an army uniform. "I could eat a button right now."

"Well," said the dog, Sidestepper, "we don't have army uniforms with edible buttons..." He smirked a very disturbing and very toothy dog smirk and said, "So button it up."

A zip of anger shot across Crazy Man's eyes but, before it could unzip a single shard of eyeball fury, it got the joke and Crazy Man did a series of clown flips that terrified him. But he got the joke.

"Someday we'll find something to eat," said the dog, Sidestepper. "And after we've eaten the introductory stuff off the bones, we'll have something we can gnaw on to keep our teeth sharp."

Crazy Man tried not to think about the dog, Sidestepper's, teeth getting sharper. His smiles and smirks were already disturbing enough. "Or," he said, "we could just enjoy a good burp or two. I

like burping...it brings out the best of the food...all of it mixed together in a happy stomach mush that..."

Just then, a voice called out from the deep dark scary woods.

"You can eat *me*..."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, stared at a *mouth* jutting out the side of a tree, undulating in an almost obscene manner as it spoke.

"I don't eat mouth," said Crazy Man. The dog, Sidestepper, nodded agreement.

"I'm not a mouth..." said the mouth. "I'm a mushroom," said the mushroom. "...people eat us all time...on steaks and salads and stuff...we must taste really good...c'mon take a bite and tell me how good I taste."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, gave each other a knowing look. "But," said the dog, Sidestepper, "why do you want us to eat you?"

"It can't be worse than sticking to the side of this tree doing nothing but...existing...I always thought there would be more to it...this existence thing..."

A faint stir of familiarity burped quietly in Crazy Man's stomach. "So," he said, "you don't mind if we eat you?"

"Not at all..." said the mushroom. But the air thickened around the mushroom with the solemnity of a less than happy puppy. "...but," said the mushroom, tentatively, "...being a mushroom and all...sometimes...well...we poison people...but we taste good during that last meal..."

"Are you poisonous?" said Crazy Man.

"I'm not really sure..." said the mushroom. "...they don't tell us these things..."

Once again, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, exchanged serious glances.

"So you don't want to eat me...?" said the mushroom.

"No!" said Crazy Man. "We only eat poisonous things when we don't know their poisonous."

This seemed to make sense to all present until the dog, Sidestepper, gave into the inevitable.

"Are you my mother?"

The mushroom scoffed, as mushrooms do, and said, "...no...I'm not your mother and you're a bastard..." The mushroom turned its fungal presence on Crazy Man and said, "...and I'm pretty sure I would have poisoned you if you had eaten me."

Crazy Man felt all bubbly and clay-turning inside and said, "Gee, that's really swell of you to warn us."

"No problem...do it all the time."

A meaningful silence ensued in which man, dog and mushroom communicated on a level of mutual trust at not having eaten or poisoned each other. This was a beautiful thing and the three of them vibrated with joy so intensely that the deep dark scary woods closed in threateningly to stop the joy. There would be no woodland joy this day. Or any day.

But that was OK. They'd already mongrel-melded into a wonderful array of motherless dog, man who couldn't remember if he had a kitchen or not and a potentially poisonous mushroom sticking out the side of a tree.

"I think you're both good people..." said the mushroom.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were overjoyed at hearing this wonderful news: they were good people. They'd always wanted to be good people. They weren't sure what made them good,

but surely to gawd a mushroom wouldn't lie about such a thing. It had to be true. They had to be good people...just as they'd always wanted. In keeping with the situation they started jumping up and down and bouncing their heads on their shoulders as they sang out of tune and Crazy Man said, "Did you hear that? We're good people. We've always wanted to be good people and now we are. And now all we have to do is figure out how to become better people."

His words triggered a monumental fit of spontaneously combustible ideas that blazed into being for a brief second and blazed out of being a brief second later...like neutrinos passing through cheesecake. The two bounced around for days or weeks, bouncing ideas and theories as their heads bounced on their shoulders. "We can make lists of good things to do and bad things to avoid," said the dog, Sidestepper, gleefully. "We can have more meaningful conversations about the initial plausibility of everything," said Crazy Man. "I don't know what that means," said the dog, Sidestepper, "but I'll bet we'd be much better people if we did that." "We sure would be," said Crazy Man.

"Wait...!" said the mushroom.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, stopped jumping up and down. Their heads stopped bouncing on their shoulders. They stared at the mushroom expectantly, waiting for it to tell them how to become better people.

"You don't have to be better people..." said the mushroom.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, stared...speechless, uncomprehending. What was this mushroom saying?

"There's too many *better* people in the world..." said the mushroom. "...what we really need are more *good* people...lots more good people."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were both disappointed and elated. They wanted to do all sorts of stuff to become better, but just being good and not having to do a lot of stuff sounded OK as well, so they went with the mushroom.

"You must be some kind of tree-side guru," said Crazy Man.

"Naw..." said the mushroom. "...just a tree-bound mushroom...but sometimes I have a good idea...in fact.." The mushroom pointed its presence down the path of adventure and new meanings and said, "...mushrooms hanging around on the sides of trees have been known to provide bearings for lost souls and you two..." Imagine a mushroom snickering on the side of a tree. No. Don't do that. The mushroom composed itself and said, "...well...you two look like you could use some found-soul news..."

The two nodded agreement, though tentatively, not really being sure what they were agreeing to.

"Just follow the path," said the mushroom, this time with an earnest and caring tone. "...be the good you are and follow the path..."

At that instant, a heavy dark cloud thing passed over the deep dark scary woods and a bolt of lightning shot out of its black underbelly and turned the mushroom into steam.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, gawked for a few minutes or maybe a few hours at the smoking hole in the side of the tree where the mushroom no longer was. Crazy Man was the first to figure it out. "It was starting to lecture."

The dog, Sidestepper, frowned sadly and nodded. "But it's nice to know that we'll get to where we're going just by doing what we're doing and being who we are."

“So,” said Crazy Man. “Where are we going?”

“I thought *you* knew that.”

“I thought *you* knew that.”

They pondered this for a moment or twenty and came to the same conclusion. Crazy Man pointed ahead to where the path of adventure and new meanings cut straight through the deep dark scary woods and disappeared into a sky suddenly devoid of heavy dark cloud things full of electricity. “I’ll bet there’s food somewhere up there, where the sky dips into the land.”

The dog, Sidestepper, smiled...all tooth and doggie lip and starry-eyed...and said, “And I’ll bet there’s all kinds of mothers up there and I’ll bet one of them is mine.”

Crazy Man thought about this for an unspecified period of time during which he managed somehow to execute three intricate clown dances, all of which terrified him. “I’ve been wondering,” he said, “what you’re going to do when you find your mother.”

“Well,” said the dog, Sidestepper, “with these pole legs. I won’t be sniffing her butt.”

“That’s very un-doggie-like of you,” said Crazy Man.

The dog, Sidestepper’s, tiny tail wagged like a hand-held milk skimmer on caffeine and he said, “Yep...no butts about it.”

And man and dog followed their laughter down the path of adventure and new meanings, unaware of what wonders awaited them but sure that things couldn’t actually get any weirder for them.

Or could they?

To be continued...

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