

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



Episode 38: Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper, learn the true meaning of art. Sort of.

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Suddenly, and for no explainable reason, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were in a random art gallery with a magnificent collection of one colorless painting. They stopped, stood and gazed for a timeless period that left them puzzled.

“I don’t get it,” said the dog, Sidestepper. “It looks like someone broke a giant pane of glass in a mud puddle.”

Crazy Man was too busy also trying to understand the painting to hear these discouraging words. He stared at the painting with all the wisdom of man who had no idea if he had a kitchen or a garage, leaning his head to one side and then to the other. He tried crossing his eyes and spinning them in their sockets. He stood on his head for an hour, staring, just staring, trying to comprehend what he was seeing, but to no avail. All he could comprehend was the headache from the blood swamping his brain. “Maybe it’s a riddle,” he said. “Maybe the artist is challenging us to solve it.”

“You’re not far from the truth, traveler on the path of adventure and new meanings.” said the painting.

Holy smokes...a talking painting.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were so shaken to the core of their combined intellect that they danced a jig as they reveled in the joy of having come *not far* from the truth. The painting, being art and being accustomed to strange reactions, allowed them time to calm down...until it was apparent they would dance a jig right into the end of all things if they weren't stopped.

"Hey guys!" said the painting. "You can calm down now. I know I can be impressive and cause intellectual, emotional and spiritual changes in even the most hard-head sub-being, but I think it's time for us to engage in meaningful dialogue on the nature of me."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, stopped jiggling. They had a sudden unquenchable thirst for meaningful dialog

"So you're a riddle," said Crazy Man.

"Sometimes," said the painting. "And sometimes I'm just here for the enjoyment of my colors and composition. But it's in the figuring out of what I am that my true meaning is comprehended."

"And what is your true meaning?" said the dog, Sidestepper.

"That's up to you," said the painting. "No matter what my creator intended, truth is kind of a personal thing." The painting paused long enough for the two to comprehend the painting's true meaning but, from the looks in their eyes, the painting risked being on permanent pause. "But I evoke something larger than a gallery of one and smaller than the sum of all knowledge."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, considered this for a moment and realized they didn't have a clue what the painting was talking about. Crazy Man was doubly befuddled because he'd started *not far* from the truth and now he was somewhere *far away* from it.

The painting, in sympathy for his befuddlement, continued. "I make the viewer *feel*."

The two journeyers narrowed their eyes and cocked their heads to the left in a well-coordinated act of mutual suspicion. *Feel something?* they thought...in unison. They laughed at the painting's naivety. "Just throw a rock at them," said the dog, Sidestepper. "They'll feel that."

"That's not what I meant!" said the painting. "I meant a different kind of feeling...the kind that makes you aware of your existence." A silence reeking of endless regret followed. "But I seem to be losing my ability to do that."

"So maybe you should try throwing rocks at them," said Crazy Man.

"That's not the way of art," said the painting. "That's the way of politics and superstition. I'm less blatant. I make my viewers feel by capturing their interest and making them contemplate life, death...the meaning of life, if only for a moment. I please them with a composition that swallows them with rhythm and mystery. When that doesn't work, I use shock and insults. But it's becoming harder each day to reach viewers losing their ability to feel."

After a massive effort at empathy with art, which lasted for an arduous ten seconds, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, fell asleep. They could have pulled it off if the dog, Sidestepper, didn't snore louder than a marching band on speed.

"Hey!" said the painting. "This is important stuff I'm talking about."

The two jump-opened their eyes and assumed their guilty as hell expressions. The painting's words had a far-away sense of truth, but it wasn't a truth they particularly wanted to hear.

"No one wants to see beyond their sundry position in life," said the painting. "I used to lodge myself in that part of the viewer that resides between dreams and wakefulness, but, apparently, that's no match for reality TV or the latest cell phone."

Crazy Man wondered if he might have a cell phone sitting on a counter in the kitchen he might have, but he wouldn't have known how to use it anyway. So he wondered if he had a television so that he could watch reality...but nothing came to mind.

"I can see by your confusion that you have no idea what I'm talking about," said the painting. "In fact, no one understands me anymore and no one wants me anymore. So I think it's time for art to inspect the viewer."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, suddenly felt inspected. It was uncomfortable. Creepy. They weren't all that fussy about this reversal in roles. "Stop that!" said the dog, Sidestepper. "It's weird."

"OK," said the painting. "Time for the last resort."

Something in the painting's tone disturbed the two travel companions in ways they could not explain.

"Looks like it's beginning to work," said the painting.

"What's beginning to work?" said Crazy Man with a vague tremor in his voice.

"The last resort," said the painting. "I'm going to feel the feelings you refuse to feel. I'm going to fill those feelings with meanings you refuse to acknowledge."

Whatever that disturbing something was that the two felt emanating from the painting swelled into a grim wall of angst. It expanded beyond the confines of the gallery and filled the sky and the deep dark scary woods surrounding the gallery. It inundated horizons. It chugged and screamed and grew bigger and scarier.

"You can't ignore me!" said the painting. "I am what you are."

With those words, the painting exploded and the gallery collapsed, leaving nothing but the deep dark scary woods, which was just fine with the two.

"What was that all about?" said the dog, Sidestepper.

"I don't know," said Crazy Man. "But I think that painting was trying to say something to us."

"I think maybe that painting should have tried to feel *us* a little more instead of exploding with its own meaning," said the dog, Sidestepper.

Crazy Man tried briefly to understand these words but quickly decided that they probably weren't going to offer any clues to the whereabouts of food or mothers, so he responded in the only way that made sense. "I wonder if I have a television."

The dog, Sidestepper, smiled a toothy canine smile that caused the hair on Crazy Man's neck to curl. "I'll bet you do, and I'll bet you watched a lot of cooking shows."

Crazy Man was encouraged by these words and he felt an overwhelming need to find food that he could cook for the dog, Sidestepper, and his mother.

In the meantime, something strange lay before them on the path of adventure and new meanings.

Go figure.

To be continued...

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