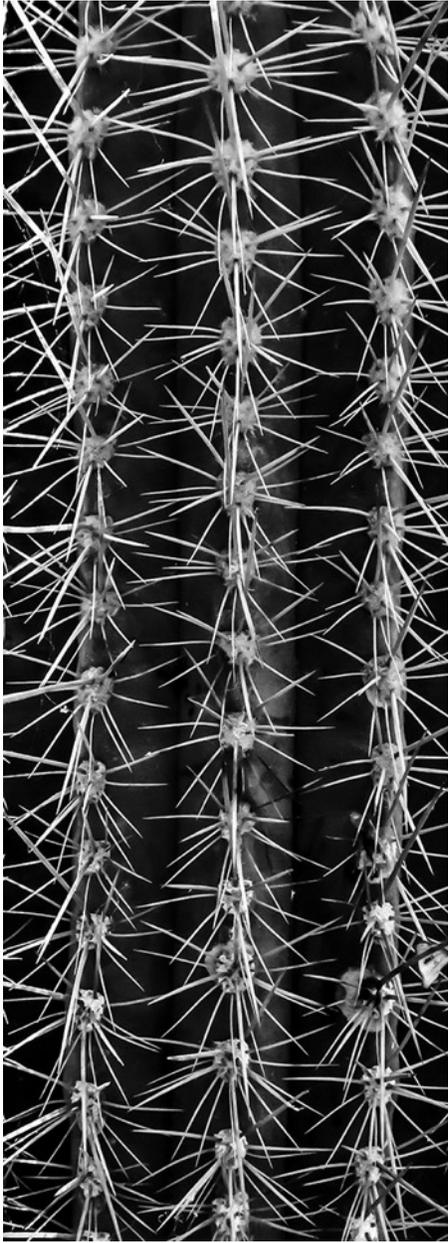


## The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper



Episode 43: Crazy Man Meets the Dog, Sidestepper, get into a prickly argument with a fine example of vertical symmetry.

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Rumor has it that life's a bitch and then you die. I think this is why there's such a roaring stampede flooding into the hereafter. People have just plain had it with the bitch. But then, just how reasonable is this? I mean, who makes life what it is? Life? The universe? The fish? Life doesn't

know you until it catches you. The universe doesn't seem to give a shit about anything. And the fish? Well, the fish.

"You mean you really can't hear that?" said the dog, Sidestepper.

"Hear what?" said Crazy Man.

"That voice," said the dog, Sidestepper. "That voice again...yakkling away about life and rumors and...fish. You didn't hear anything about fish?"

Crazy Man entered a state of deep self-inspection, mentally questioning his mind, his ears and his ability to self-inspect, deeply. This went on for more than a fraction of a millennia but less than that as well. Which brings us to his well-inspected conclusion: "Nope."

The dog, Sidestepper, considered the negativity inherent in the word "nope" and decided that his travel mate might not be playing with a full deck. But then, who on the path of adventure and new meanings ever played with a full deck? It was the nature of the path to scatter the cards and stick one or two under its belt.

"That was me," said a very prickly example of vertical symmetry. "You're talking about the life's a bitch thing, right?"

The dog, Sidestepper, said, "Yes." He craned his little doggie head closer and said, "That was you?"

"Yep," said the example.

"But you're just a cactus."

(Clarification: "Yep," said the cactus.)

"And you're just a weird looking dog," said the cactus.

"And you're not my mother," said the dog, Sidestepper.

"Have you ever met your mother?" said the cactus.

"Maybe...no," said the dog, Sidestepper.

"Then how do you know I'm not your mother?" said the cactus.

The dog, Sidestepper, looked the cactus up and down and said, "Well...we don't look alike."

"Oh, right," said the cactus. "So everybody'd supposed to look like you to be your mother."

This was too much for Crazy Man...all this talk about mothers when his stomach was starting to growl out entire symphonies of food-bare misery. "You can be his mother...for just one day...if you have a map showing where we might find some food."

"Only a bastard would say such a thing to a cactus in shock over the loss of its pockets."

"You had pockets?" said Crazy Man.

"No," said the cactus. "Cacti don't have pockets. What kind weird question is that?"

"But you said..."

"I know," said the cactus. "I lost my pockets when they made me a cactus."

"But," said the dog, Sidestepper, "you still wouldn't have had pockets because you would have been nothing before you were a cactus and nothing has pockets until it's something."

"Exactly," said the cactus. "And then I became a cactus and lost my pockets."

This made sense to Crazy Man at some esoteric level of potential possibilities... an argument steeped in initial plausibility if you were a slave to renegade words and marauding thoughts. But the dog, Sidestepper, wasn't having any of it. This cactus simply wasn't getting the point.

"You never had pockets! You don't have pockets! You'll never have..." In that instant, he was frozen in a cube of thought whose meaning melted over his mind like cerebral lava. "Cacti don't

need pockets. Why are you in shock about something you don't need, never had and probably don't even want?"

The cactus considered the brutality of the dog, Sidestepper's, words just long enough for a wave of self-reproach to flood the canine sensibilities. Tears shot out of his eyes like bullets of grief and he fell to his knees and begged the cactus to forgive his thoughtlessness. "I had no right to question your pocket situation. It was cruel and demeaning to all dogs."

The cactus laughed.

And laughed.

And laughed.

We won't get into time frames, but cactus laughed for a long time before it pointed every single one of its spines at the dog, Sidestepper, and said, "Chill out, strange little doggie. I was just messing with your head. I'm a cactus. I don't have pockets...never have. Never wanted them. I mean, why would I even need them? Nothing to put in them. Ho. Ho. Ho."

It was likely the 'Ho. Ho. Ho.' that did it. Crazy Man's mind snapped, and his voice tore across the cosmos with a might roar. "Blessed are those who have lost the pockets they never had!"

This made no sense to the cactus, the dog, Sidestepper, the cosmos and Crazy Man. So, he stood there with his eyes ablaze for nothing and wondered if he really was who he was...which was already in doubt considering that he couldn't even remember if he had a kitchen. And a pizza pan.

The cactus noted his bewilderment and said, "That's all right. Everything's fine. Come over here and give me a hug."

And what the hell?

"Ouch!" said Crazy Man.

"Ouch!" said the dog, Sidestepper.

And the cactus, gazing upon spine-bleeding travelers on the path of adventure and new meanings said, "When your mind is tricked by trick logic, you will say ouch."

(For reasons of basic human decency, the remainder of this episode will be...)

"So," said a dog, Sidestepper, with about a zillion bleeding cactus pin-holes from cactus-hugging, "Let's get the hell away from this stupid cactus."

And the two turned their back on the prickly cactus and continued down the path of adventure and new meanings as they shut out the cactus' call: "Hey guys, I could do with a back rub! C'mon...what's a pin hole or two between..."

At which point that sky fell down on the cactus and drowned it in un-dropped rain.

But that's another story. Coming soon.

"Did you hear that?" said the dog, Sidestepper.

To be continued...