

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



Episode 48: Crazy Man meets the pumpkins

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Once upon a time there was a strange man and a strange dog who set off on a precarious journey along the path of adventure and new meanings. The dog was in search of the mother whose abandonment of him turned him from a lovable, normal puppy into an abomination of the word

*dog*. Not that he wasn't still lovable. He was just weird. As for the strange man...he just wanted to check into this *outside thing*. And he might have a kitchen.

And a pizza pan.

On their journey they met many strange and fabulous creatures and gained powerful wads of wisdom that they secretly hoped to turn into a movie or...or maybe a rock opera...or a photo novel. But that's a secret for now.

And then the dog died.

As much as it sucks...sometimes we don't get to be included in our own stories but, on the other hand, sometimes they're still told.

Crazy Man was aware of none of this as he followed the path up a riverside hill on a course directly toward some orange objects shot-spotted over the top of the hill. From a distance, they appeared to be plump orange gemstones, the kind used to decorate large objects like lost temples and sunken treasure galleys. Crazy Man had heard about these things. Pumpkins, they were called and they had something to do with magic and witchery and cosmic confluences that only the chosen would understand and this made Crazy Man feel that he was one of the chosen because, having seen the pumpkins and verified their existence, it just followed that the chosen would also exist and, since he was the one to verify the existence of the chosen, then he must be one of the chosen himself.

Or they could have been just big orange vegetables.

Uh oh.

"Hey you!" yelled a pumpkin the size of a large dog. "You might want to tell the narrative voice you dragged in here that it knows shit about pumpkins."

Crazy Man was stunned. A talking pumpkin.

And look...the hilltop fields before him were covered with thousands of picked pumpkins, all of them awaiting gutting and cutting, candles and pies. But that didn't appear to be their problem.

"We're not vegetables!" yelled a large white pumpkin to his right.

"We're fruit!" yelled a small orange and purple pumpkin to his left.

"We're the fruit of the earth and no less," said a large wise-looking pumpkin, quiet and self-assured in its fruitfulness.

At that moment, something strange happened. The earth under Crazy Man began to vibrate and then shake. A faraway sound from the direction of the highest rise in the hill grew into a roar as thousands of pumpkins, big and small, rolled over the rise and stopped short of the pumpkin fields around Crazy Man.

"Bastards!" they screamed as their top stems rose up and down...an army of orange rage emanating hatred and insult.

"Vegetable!" screamed a pumpkin so big it could easily have been carved into a Bilbo Baggins house with a sauna in the attic. "We're vegetables."

The thousands of pumpkins in the fields surrounding Crazy Man reared on their bottoms and emanated hot hostility at the bio-bohemianism of their confused cousins. From the rear of the force, a mountain of orange appeared, big enough to be carved into Bilbo Baggins condos. "There is only one place for us in the ultimate scheme of things and that place is the winter squash. We are fruit. And all others are false winter squash!"

Infuriated by the mountain no of orange the pumpkins on the hill screamed in unison: “There is only one winter squash and that squash is a vegetable pumpkin. All others are false squash!”

Things were looking bad but not hopeless. They weren’t attacking each other with carving kits...until one of the squashes on the hill flipped its stem at the pumpkins in the fields...and then it was on. You don’t give an army of pumpkins the stem. The pumpkins in the fields grumbled and groaned and began to roll forward as they yelled, “Fruit of the vine! Fruit of the vine! Squash the accursed interlopers! Fruit of the vine!”

The pumpkins on the rise began to roll forward yelling, “Veggies of the leaves and the roots. Veggies of the leaves and the roots! Squash the unbelievers. Veggies of the leaves and the roots!” And suddenly, they began tumbling down the rise, thousands of pumpkins, big and small, orange, yellow and white...all of them seething in mindless semantics.

They just kind of...splashed into each other. Thousands of splash, splash, splashes. Slippery seeds and mashy guts exploding across the fields...stems and skin and pulp knocking birds out of the sky. They screamed their slogans: “Veggies of the...” Splash. “Fruit of the Vine!” Splash. “I’m not really fussy about either of...” Splash.

Every pumpkin died that day. The carnage was never forgotten by the trees, the barn, the grass...and, yeah, birds never few over that hill again.

*Wait a minute*, thought Crazy Man. *The barn*. Rising not far before him was the side of a barn with a window and chairs and...pumpkins. And there wasn’t a single strand of pumpkin splash on any of it. He strolled through the pumpkin muck and up to the barn.

“Bunch of idiots if you ask me,” said one of the pumpkins.

“Oh, look everyone,” said a pumpkin with its stem sticking unnaturally high into the air and pointing at Crazy Man. “A splash man!”

Crazy Man looked down. He was splattered from his chest down to the clown...he looked away, terrified.

“What was that all about?” he said.

“Buncha idiots,” said the first pumpkin. “Place is gonna stink for weeks.”

“All that pie gone to waste.”

“All those Jacko lanterns.”

“All the roasted seeds.”

“The candles.”

“Whose the funny looking guy?”

Crazy Man was suddenly the focus of great interest as all perceptions... “Who’s funny looking?” he said.

But he kept his priorities in mind. “I’m looking for a friend’s mother.”

If a pumpkin could nod knowingly, all those pumpkins gathered outside the barn that day would have nodded knowingly.

“So you’re that guy with the dog,” said a pumpkin. “He’s a bastard. You’re never going to find food.”

Damn. Mean pumpkins.

And then something strange happened. Through some slats in the window behind the pumpkins, he saw something that looked familiar. He squinted his eyes and thrust his head forward. A shadow in the window moved weirdly like a segmented chop stick and rose up past a small polka

dotted bundle and waved to him. Crazy Man's heart raced. He ran, arms swinging, head spinning and bouncing right up to the window, reached out and put his palms on the frame and began to pull up the window when the movement he saw turned out to be a reflection of himself.

He smiled, nodded to the pumpkins and made his way back to the path of adventure and new meanings...feeling not so alone.

For now, anyway.

To be continued...

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