

The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper



Episode 57: Wherein Crazy Man and the shopping cart, Wheels, meet the many paths.

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Things were suspiciously quiet on the path of adventure and new meanings as Crazy Man and the shopping cart, Wheels, strolled and rolled through the shadows of the deep dark scary forest.

“What’s in there that makes it scary,” said the shopping cart, Wheels.

Crazy Man thought about this for seven and a half steps before blurting, “Scary stuff.”

“What kind of scary stuff?”

“Clowns,” said Crazy Man. “Clowns...all through the deep dark scary woods. Behind toadstools. Under rotting logs. Clowns, hiding in the leaves, in the bushes, in the...”

He stopped walking and took a deep breath. The shopping cart, Wheels, searched the deep dark scary woods for clowns.

“What do they look like?” said the shopping cart, Wheels.

“Awful,” said Crazy Man. “They smile.”

Having never smiled due to mechanical realities, the shopping cart, Wheels, smiled (proving once again that mechanical realities are only as good as the mechanic) (or something like that) and said, “Maybe clowns are just upside down and they’re not really smiling...they’re scowling. Would that make them less scary?”

Crazy Man decided that responding prudently and accurately to the shopping cart, Wheel’s, question might require something painful, like thinking, so he said, “Nope.”

The shopping cart, Wheels, suddenly stopped coasting and came to a coaster wheel sliding stop. Crazy Man looked straight ahead, eyes wide. Before them, the deep dark scary woods had joined roots on both sides and pulled themselves onto the path, completely barring the pair’s passage. But there was a strange-

ness about the trees; they were twisted and wrapped around each other and themselves. There was no telling which roots belonged to which tree and which tree owned which bough. It was an arboretum catastrophe. Crazy Man wondered if he had a sword somewhere in the kitchen he might have. He screamed so loud his head spun in circles and his eyes popped out of his head, "Do you have clowns! Clowns?"

A gentle rustle flickered through the humus and moss around the roots of the trees and they swayed slightly.

"Nope," said one of the trees. "No clowns in here." (Hey, we all know at least one tree that can talk. Right?)

"Why are you blocking us from the path of adventure and new meanings," said the shopping cart, Wheels.

"We're not blocking anything," said the tree. "We're offering you choices."

"Choices for what?" said Crazy Man.

"For your journey," said the tree. "You have to choose. Or else."

"Or else what?" said Crazy Man.

"Or else you won't have a choice," said the tree. "This is where the path becomes complicated."

Crazy Man was having none of this. As if the path wasn't already complicated enough. "And what if we don't want a choice?"

His words stunned the trees, their roots, the detritus on the ground and the very air around the trees. There was much confusion, outrage and anger. "But you'll be ignoring the options," said the tree. "You can follow the path of adventure and new meanings, not knowing where it's taking you or if you'll ever get there, or you can follow one of us."

"Does one of your paths lead to a dog's mother?" said Crazy Man.

"I do!" yelled one of the trees from way at the back.

The other trees seemed to sigh and inch away from the tree from way at the back.

"OK," said the tree from way at the back. "Maybe not. What's a dog?"

"Don't pay any attention to him," said another tree. "He's a fake distraction. The rest of us are genuine distractions. You can trust us."

The shopping cart, Wheels, being a way-out-there-on-the-edge kind of shopping cart, considered the possibility of choices at the root level of choosing between making a choice and not making a choice and decided it was time to sleep. Crazy Man agreed... and man and shopping cart slept in place until the cows came home and left again. When they woke, the trees were still in front of them and they still had no idea what the hell these trees wanted.

"What do you want?" said the shopping cart, Wheels.

"We want you to make a choice," said one of the trees.

"I will take you to a place where all your dreams will come true and you'll have the brightest smile, all white and gleaming..."

"Don't listen to him," said another tree. "You might not like some of your dreams and your gleaming smile might not have a mouth to hold it. I, on the other hand, will take you directly to a large steaming bowl of porridge."

"Will there be brown sugar on the porridge?" said Crazy Man.

"Mountains of brown sugar!" said the tree. "Just step over here and put your foot on my roots."

"Wait a moment there, fella," said still another tree. "He means it when he says a *mountain* of brown sugar. Last guy he took there ended underneath a thousand feet of brown sugar mountain and his demise wasn't sweet at all. Come, step on my root and I'll take you to a dog's mother. You can explain what a dog is on the way."

Crazy Man had doubts, serious doubts. Being a self-taught expert on human/tree interactions in the context of barred passage on paths, he was well familiar with the dangers of being buried under mountains of brown sugar. First, he looked down to make sure that he was wearing his archery sweater. He was. He was happy to see that he was wearing his steel toe boots and not the wide weird ones that sometimes spooked his feet. He was ready to make a stand.

But the shopping cart, Wheels (occupying just one dimension and therefore saving time by having to think in just one), beat him to it. "I just want the sweet lovin' of groceries in my basket!"

Which, of course, was far from the truth and totally inappropriate for the occasion and everyone present laughed at the shopping cart, Wheels, even though none of them were sure about what exactly it was they

were laughing at, proving once and for all that there are no field guides that truly explain trees. The laughing continued for six hours, six minutes and six seconds before the spell dwindled from storm to puddles.

“You’re a funny shopping cart,” said a tree. “Therefore, we’ll let you and your weird friend pass without having to make a bunch of new choices that, to tell the truth, lead nowhere.”

“Nowhere?” said Crazy Man.

A deranged copse of twisted boughs laughed and said, “We’re distractions, you silly strange little man. We try to sway from your path so that we can kill you.”

“We like killing journeyers with their own indecision and lack of conviction,” said another tree.

“So we can just...” the shopping cart, Wheels tried to say.

“Yeah...” said a tree. “You can just coast on through. Careful about the roots though. Don’t want you to trip on your trip.”

An invisible field of chuckling tickled the funny bone of the situation and Crazy Man and the shopping cart, Wheels, strode through the menagerie of twisted trees and roots and emerged in the sunshine of the path of adventure and new meanings just in time to barge into a world where all the rules were unhinged.

To be continued...

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