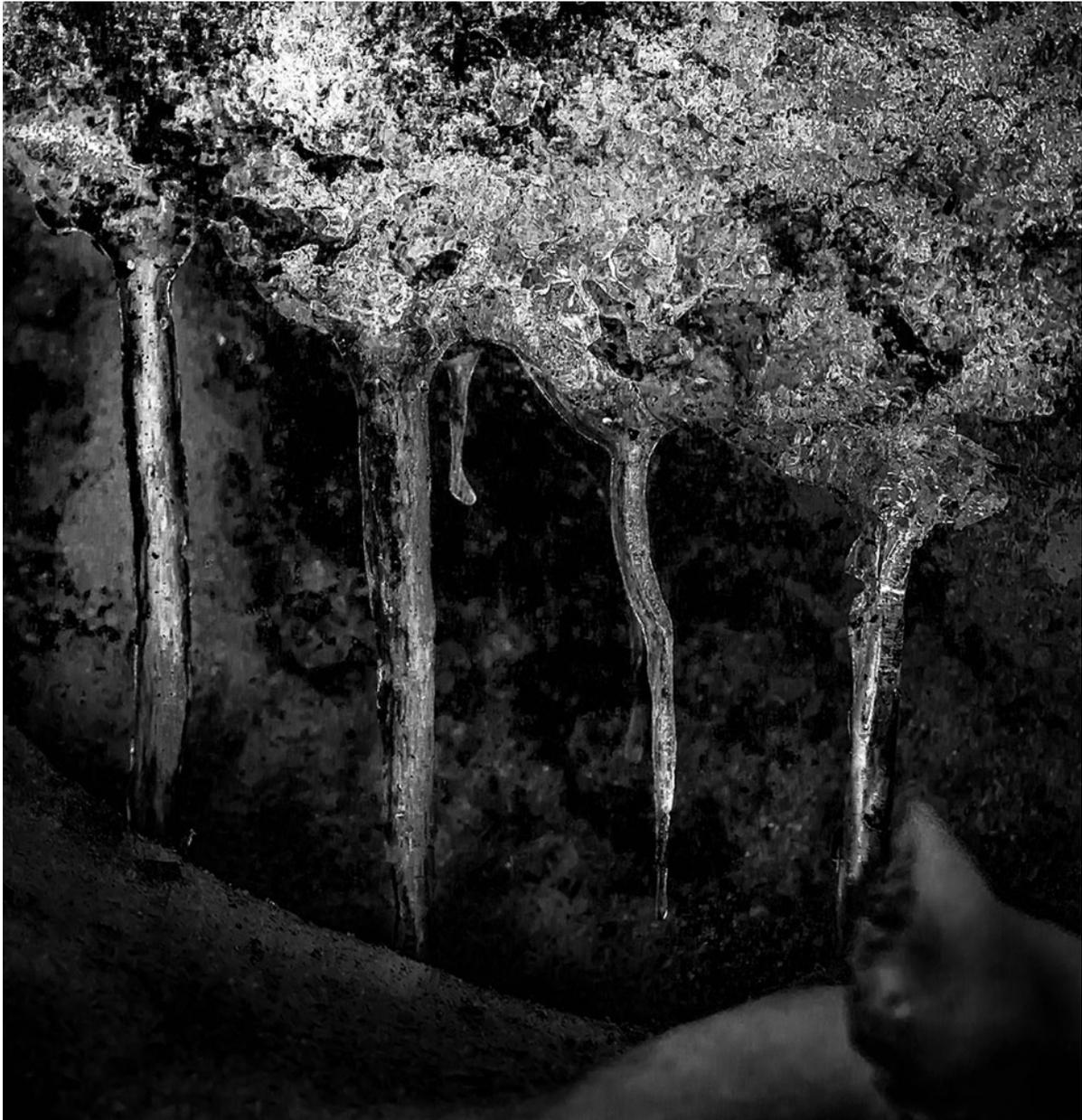


The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper



Episode 69: Wherein Crazy Man and the Dog Sidestepper, meet the mystical icicles.

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Everything that is...eventually isn't and becomes what was. The dog, Sidestepper, hung on to this thought like a fur ball caught in his mind. He didn't like thinking about these things too deeply through fear that, by acknowledging them, he would speed up whatever existential threat such thoughts would make real. *And everything that wasn't...well...wasn't.* If ever a dog believed that thinking was a painful process in a random world, now was the time for the dog, Sidestepper, to embrace the absurdity of everything.

“Thinking about the absurdity of everything again?” said a smiling Crazy Man. “You have to stop all that angsting or you’ll fall out of your own mind.”

“What does that mean?” said the dog, Sidestepper.

Crazy Man thought for 3.345 seconds, give or take, and realized that he didn’t have a clue what he meant. “I’m still working on that.”

The dog, Sidestepper, snickered, realizing that Crazy Man was talking out of his butt...but he decided to stop thinking regardless. They’d been traveling through the cavern that wasn’t a tavern for what seemed like ages multiplied by ages and they were beginning to think the cavern’s warning about the horrors ahead of them was just so much cave talk. So far, all they’d seen was a hungry little spider waiting for its food delivery. In fact, they were both kind of disappointed. So far it had been like riding a roller coaster with no rise into the sky and no horrifying plunge back to the earth...no screaming.

“Step lightly through your heavy thoughts,” said five icicles in unison as they melted from a crevasse in the cavern wall.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, stopped abruptly and stared.

Can you imagine...talking icicles.

“We are the mystic icicles of yore,” said the icicle to the far left. “We greet you from a place of mystical displacement.”

“And what makes you mystical?” said a skeptical Crazy Man.

“We drip,” said the icicle.

“What’s so mystical about that?” said the dog, Sidestepper. “My nose drips when I smell dust mites.”

The icicles were silent for a moment. Even the dripping stopped. Then, the second icicle from the left said, “You obviously don’t understand the nature of dripping.”

“It’s mystical,” said a small icicle hanging around behind the other four. “You have to *feel* the drip.”

“You have to *become* the drip,” said an icicle that wished to remain anonymous.

“You have to *be* a drip,” said the second icicle from the right.

This didn’t go over well with the other icicles.

“No!” said the anonymous icicle. “Nobody wants to *be* a drip. You have to *become* the drip. There’s a difference.”

“Yeah,” said the icicle on the far left. “To be or not to become? That’s the question. I think.”

“And the right answer is...” said the small icicle from behind the others. It left its words dangling in the air for a moment. And maybe for a moment too long. “...um...I forgot.”

The other icicles made strange icicle sounds of disapproval and impatience.

“Don’t mind him,” said the second icicle to the right. “He’s new here. Doesn’t know his drips from his drops.”

“He’s not all that mystical yet,” said the icicle to the far right. “But we’re hoping that, after ten thousand drips, he’ll begin to understand.”

“But I still don’t get what’s mystical about dripping,” said the dog, Sidestepper.

“It’s all in the timing,” said the icicle to the right. “It’s a delicate balance between drips.”

“Balance is everything,” said an unidentified icicle somewhere deep in the crevasse.

“Without balance...” said the small icicle, “...you have imbalance and therefore im-mystical...not mystical.”

A breathless silence settled over the crevasse like a guillotine blade about to fall on the small icicle and sever its balance. The small icicle shuddered under the deluge of unspoken animosity and decided it was a good time to drip without comment.

“But,” said Crazy Man, “even if the drips are balanced, what makes that mystical?”

“Try dripping ten thousand times,” said the icicle to the far right. “You’ll have a mystical experience.”

This made sense to Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, both of whom had never given much thought to dripping and pretty much had to take the icicle’s explanation at face value.

“So,” said the dog, Sidestepper, “since you’re the mystical icicles of yore, can you give us enlightenment about where my mother is and where we can find a map to food?”

“Nope,” said the icicle on the left. “Not our job. And you’re both bastards.”

The dog, Sidestepper, ignored the insult and focussed on the narrative proper. “Then what is your job?” said the dog, Sidestepper.

“To drip,” said the icicle.

“But what’s the point in dripping?” he said.

“To become mystical,” said the icicle to the far right.

“But what’s the point in becoming mystical?” said Crazy Man.

“To drip,” said the icicle.

Crazy Man wished he had a flame thrower. Or even a lighter. He would give these mystical icicles and their ping-pong reasoning ten thousand drips in ten minutes until there wasn’t a drop of drip left, but it occurred to him that, if this was the next of the horrors they would face in the cavern, then maybe he should save his flame thrower thoughts for another time.

“It’s been nice talking to you,” he said in a sing-song voice that really didn’t sound like him. “It’s been a truly different experience but we have to be on our way now.”

The mystical icicles of yore were impressed with the impression they’d made on Crazy Man and began to drip faster.

“We wish you much enlightenment and insight on your travels even though you’re bastards,” they said in unison...and their words impressed themselves even more, causing them to drip ever faster.

“I think I’m zeroing in on ten thousand drips,” said the small icicle in back.

“Whoa!” said three icicles in unison as water poured off their tips like a leak in the plumbing.

In less than a minute, the icicles became a waterfall of freshet melt dripping into a mystical pool of water where they all melded into one enlightened thought...which was lost forever because everyone knows that pools of water can’t talk

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

“I’m not sure,” said Crazy Man. “It was mystifying.”

And once again laughter rang out along the path of adventure and new meanings as it wound through the depths of the cavern that is not a tavern, taking the two journeyers onto the next horror.

To be continued...

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