

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



Episode 70: Wherein Crazy Man and the Dog Sidestepper, face the forever but not eternal.

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Without warning, the path of adventure and new meanings opened into a giant chamber with walls soaring high out of sight inside the depths of the cavern that's not a tavern. A field of rocks and boulders worn and smoothed by time and water stretched into an endless horizon of nothingness. Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, approached with caution. If ever there was a setting for horrors beyond the imagination of man and dog, this was it. Monumental silence plugged the chamber with deathly stillness. Nothing moved, nothing breathed.

Nothing.

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

"Hear what?" said Crazy Man.

"Nothing," said the dog, Sidestepper.

"Hearing voices again?" said Crazy Man.

"No," said the dog, Sidestepper. "I thought I heard a noise coming from somewhere over those stones."

"What did it sound like?"

"Nothing."

Crazy Man stood still and listened. He closed his eyes. He held his breath. He emptied his head of thoughts about maps to food. He fell to his knees and pressed his left ear to the ground and listened. He pressed his right ear to the ground and listened. He lay down on the path of adventure and new meanings and fell asleep in listening mode but nothing disturbed his sleep. No noises. Nothing disturbed the air with potentially rogue frequencies. In fact, he woke under the weight of an overbearing silence that robbed his surroundings of the cadences of life.

"You're right," he said. "It's nothing."

"No, it's something. We're over here...over here!" said an unseen voice.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, looked in the direction of the voice but all they saw were rocks and the big emptiness behind them. However, there were two piles of stone on the rocks and they appeared to be placed and balanced very carefully by unknown forces.

"C'mon over and talk to us!" said one of the rocks. "We're cairns. We don't bite!"

Assuming the two piles of rocks were another non-life-threatening horror in the cavern, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, walked carefully across the bed of rocks and stopped a few feet away from the cairns.

"Please don't get us started on moms and maps," said the cairn to the left. "The answers are no, no and you're both bastards."

"We can kick you so that you're not a pile of stones carefully balanced by unknown forces," said Crazy Man. "But we won't because we're wondering about all that emptiness behind you."

"Oh yes," said the cairn to the right. "You don't want to get too close. Fall into that and you float in nothing forever."

"Sometimes longer," said the other cairn.

"How can you float longer than forever?" said the dog, Sidestepper.

"Because..." said the cairn, "when you reach forever there's always room for improvement."

"That doesn't make any sense," said the dog, Sidestepper. "Once you reach forever...that's it. It's all done. It's forever."

"Maybe for you," said the cairn, "but not for us."

"Why's that?" said Crazy Man.

"Because we're stone," said the cairn on the right. "When you write on us, it's forever...and writing can always be improved with good editing. It can be finished...and then not finished...but finished again. And then some more."

"But it's not forever until all the editing is done," said Crazy Man.

"Just because it's forever, doesn't mean it's the end," said the cairn.

"Yes it does," said the dog, Sidestepper. "If it's forever, it's all done...there is no more or it wouldn't be forever."

"And you've been to forever, have you?" said the other cairn.

"No," said the dog, Sidestepper. "You can't just go to forever because..."

"We rest our case," said the cairns in unison. "Just stay away from the emptiness behind us."

"You'll fall forever," said the cairn on the right.

"And then some," said the cairn to the left.

Crazy Man wished he had some dynamite so that he could blow up both cairns but it occurred to him that these two cairns were the next horror in the cavern and he began to wonder about the nature of horror. Maybe the real horror was the cavern itself. Maybe they were in the deep dark scary cavern forever.

And then some.

But then, they hadn't met any clowns. Crazy Man decided to do what he did best...change the subject.

"Why are you two piled up in front of an eternal emptiness?"

"Hey fella!" yelled both cairns.

"Who said anything about eternal?" said the cairn on the left. "We were talking forever, not eternal."

Crazy Man refused to take the bait. "So, then, why are you piled up in front of an emptiness that stretches into forever?"

The cairns considered this for more cave time than there was cave before the one on the right said, "Something to do."

"Yeah," said the cairn on the left. "We get to sit here and not have to do anything but sit here...right here at the edge of the emptiness that reaches into forever."

"And then..."

"But doesn't that get boring after a while?" said Crazy Man.

"Nope," said the cairn on the left. "We have lots to do."

"Like what?" said Crazy Man.

"Like counting air," said the cairn to the right. "We love counting air."

"I've counted the most air so far," said the cairn on the left.

"No you haven't," said the other cairn. "I've counted lots more air than you."

"No way," said the other cairn. "You're not supposed to count clouds."

"There's no clouds here!" said the other cairn. "How can I count no clouds?"

"You count mists. Mists are low lying clouds."

"No they're not! And besides...there's no mist here. Just all that emptiness back there and all these rocks up here and us," said the other cairn. "No clouds. No mist. No cheating."

"Maybe not in your world," said the other cairn. "But I've seen you calculating in the mists you deny. Cheater."

"I'm not counting air with you anymore," said the other cairn.

"That's fine with me," said the other cairn. "You cheat anyway."

By this time, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were beginning to realize the insidious horrors the cavern had warned about. There were no giant soul-devouring spiders here. There were no monsters hidden in crevasses, and the cairns were actually a warning not to walk over the precipice and fall into the emptiness forever. And then some.

The real horrors in the cavern were the pockets of pettiness that wasted their time. Realizing this, the two journeyers backed away from the still arguing cairns and slipped quietly back onto the path of adventure and new meanings.

After a while, the dog, Sidestepper, said, "I'm glad I'm not a cairn."

"Why's that?" said Crazy Man.

"Seems like being caught between a rock and nowhere."

Crazy Man chuckled and then laughed, and the dog, Sidestepper, laughed.

They chuckled and laughed and giggled as they made their way to the next horror as the path of adventure and new meanings snaked its way through the cavern that's not a tavern.

To be continued...

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