

The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper



Episode 71: Wherein Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper, see the light.

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When you see the light at the end of the tunnel you can charge backwards like crazy or jump to the side. You can plead and cry, but you're going to die. There's no getting off this ride, no escaping the light.

The dog, Sidestepper, kept this narrative to himself and he was beginning to wonder if Crazy Man might be right in assuming that he was hearing voices in his head and might need canine therapy.

"Did you hear that?" said Crazy Man.

On the other hand, maybe his travel mate was beginning to hear the narrative as well. Maybe they were both nuts.

"Yep," said the dog, Sidestepper, eagerly. "So you're finally hearing the voices too, are you?"

"What're you talking about?" said Crazy Man.

"The stuff about the light...the tunnel," said the dog, Sidestepper. "That narrative voice...you can hear it now?"

Crazy Man eyed his canine buddy closely, looking for signs of stress and reality detachment, but it was difficult to tell one way or another given the tiny body with the tinier head and almost impossible to see wee tiny mouth under the tiny polka dot eyes. "I meant the sound of a light switch," he said. "You know, like a light being turned on..."

At that exact moment, a light appeared ahead of them beyond a tangle of cave growth as though it had just been switched on. To their astonishment, the light spoke to them.

"I am the light at the end of the tunnel. I am the end of darkness and the beginning of life in the light. I am your beacon of salvation splitting the hopelessness of your journey into small manageable portions of

desperation with positive foreseeable outcomes and satisfactory conclusions. All you have to do is let me eat one of you.”

Finally...the warnings of the cavern that's not a tavern were starting to make sense. What worse horror could they possibly face than to be eaten by the light? One of them was a going to become a light meal.

The dog, Sidestepper, being slight of frame and overwhelmingly weird hoped that the light didn't have esoteric tastes. Crazy Man wanted to be back under his bed with his empty bottle of wine, crying. In fact, both dog and man began to cry. They fell down and rolled around in the guck of the unfairness of it all. Neither of them wanted to be eaten and that was that.

The light started laughing. Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, stopped rolling in the guck and crying. They peered hopefully into the light hoping the other one would be eaten.

“I'm not going to eat anyone,” said the light. Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, relaxed and started laughing. Neither of them would be eaten today. Whew!

“At least, not until you get closer.”

They fell to their knees...sniffing and sobbing and begging not to be eaten.

Once again the light sent out a roar of laughter and said, “Just kidding. In fact, I don't eat stuff. I mean, look at me...I'm light. Do you see a mouth? Teeth?”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, smiled nervously and decided it was a good idea to stay as far away from the light as possible just in case they might be blinded and devoured.

“So you're the ones who saved us from the Martians,” said the light. “I heard they were going to release mass destruction from otherworldly weapons of planetary annihilation but you two out-classed them with superior insights and unmatched vocabularies.”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, glanced quickly at each other. Without speaking, they determined their course: lie like hell and make the light happy.

“That's right,” said the dog, Sidestepper, “We are mighty verbal warriors with great insight into alien invasions and the inner workings of the alien mind.”

The light laughed. “OK. If you say so.” The light flickered and shimmered and said, “I kind of have my doubts about this whole alien thing but I like a good rumor. So...what can I do for you?”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, relaxed when it became obvious that nobody was going to be eaten and they liked that the light knew the truth about the aliens...even though there really were aliens, but not the kind that invade planets...just the kind that put planets off-limits to the rest of the universe.

“We have our doubts too,” said Crazy Man. “We really did see aliens...but they scared themselves away.”

This didn't make any sense to the light, so it changed the subject. “Do you have the key?”

Taken by surprise, the two journeyers wondered what the light was talking about until Crazy Man realized that the light was referring to the key on the key chain in his pocket. “Yes,” he said. “We have the key.”

“Let's see it,” said the light. “If it's one of those fancy computerized keys, you can turn around right now. The only acceptable ones are those you put on a key chain...the kind you can make as many copies of as you want...for just a few bucks. Do you have such a key?”

Crazy Man held the key up to the light. He shook it a bit to create a sense of cinematic movement that he was sure would impress the light. Unfortunately, he was extremely tired and even more hungry than tired and this caused his hand to go into key chain shock and he dropped the key and key chain and they disappeared in a fissure in the cavern floor. Crazy Man stared wide-eyed, tongue-tied and fearful that now the light would eat him. He dropped to the ground and tried to shove his hand into the fissure but it wasn't wide enough.

“Hey!” said the fissure. “I resent that thought. I'm wide enough...your hand is just too big. Bastard.”

Jeez, thought Crazy Man...a fissure that reads minds.

“Ignore the fissure,” said the light. “You don't really need the key.”

“What?” said Crazy Man, pulling his fingers out of the fissure.

“Gee, thanks, light,” said the fissure. “Every time I try to have some fun...”

“Live with it,” said the light. “Your consternation really cracks me up.”

The fissure groaned and the light laughed.

“What?” said Crazy Man again. “What do you mean by I don't really need the key?”

“Yeah,” said the dog, Sidestepper. “He carried that key a long way. What's it for?”

“Nothing,” said the light. “But it adds a taste of mystery to the whole journey along the path of adventure and new meanings thing...right?”

“No,” said Crazy Man. “I wanted to use that key. For something. Anything. I carried it and nursed it. I stroked it and caressed it and...”

“OK,” said the light. “That’s enough of that. You can both walk through me now.”

“Walk through you?” said Crazy Man.

“Or,” said the light, “you can stay in the cavern that’s not a tavern for the rest of your lives...which won’t be long until the cavern creatures wake up and drive you crazy with bad poetry and pun. And then you’ll die. Your choice.”

“And you won’t eat us as we pass through?” said a suspicious Crazy Man.

“Naw,” said the light. “I just shine and show the way. Stuff like that.”

“What’s on the other side of you?” said the dog, Sidestepper.

“A way out of the cavern,” said the light. “You’ll be back on the path with the deep dark scary woods on either side waiting to devour you.”

“OK,” said the dog, Sidestepper. “We can live with that.”

They walked slowly forward and were bathed in the light. Their footsteps (and paw steps) felt like walking on air. It was warm and both man and dog felt a deep sense of calm. The light was so bright they couldn’t see a thing but they kept stepping gingerly forward, encouraged by a profound sense of relaxation that was almost womb-like.

“By the way,” said the resounding voice of the light, “things might be a little messed up on the other side of me. But you might live through it.”

Before they could say WHAT? in unison, they fell like meteors into the world on the other side of the light.

To be continued...

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