

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



Episode 77: Wherein Crazy Man and the Dog Sidestepper, contemplate the nature of loss. Or is that one of the other episodes?

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Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, had been rolling in the muck and reeds for hours, possibly days, maybe weeks. They looked like bog hell, covered in stagnant swamp water and dangling bits of dripping marine plant life. Their eyes were bloodshot and their throats were raw and both had long since forgotten why they were rolling in the muck.

So they stopped.

“What was that all about,” said Crazy Man.

“Beats me,” said the dog, Sidestepper.

“Are you two finished rolling in the muck,” said a lone child’s sandal floating in in the pond.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, suddenly remembered. They’d come across a child’s lost sandal. Being true believers that every child should have two sandals they, of course, did the only thing that meant anything to them: They fell into the muck of the pond, screaming at the stars about the unfairness of it all. They rolled and roiled and came close to mud-drowning in their

empathy. All this as the child's sandal watched and wished that it had been lost in a pond with less empathy.

Choking back another expression of spontaneous other-directed feelings, Crazy Man looked around at a bog sprawling into the horizon by the path of adventure and new meanings and said, "Somewhere...somewhere out there, a child walks with but one sandal." A tear welled up in his left eye, but it saw what Crazy Man was crying for, decided it wasn't really worth it and ducked back into his eye.

"Her name was Tack," said the sandal. "And she had a nice foot."

"Why would anyone name their kid Tack?" said the dog, Sidestepper.

"Well," said the sandal, "she was short and had just one leg."

This initiated a whole new round of empathetic rolling and wiggling in the muck for just a few minutes. When they emerged from their reverie they faced the sandal.

"How did you come to be here, floating aimlessly in a bog?" said Crazy Man.

"Tack was the first of a new species of human," said the sandal. "She was bred to have just one leg."

"That doesn't make any sense," said Crazy Man. "Everybody's supposed to have two legs." He glanced at the dog, Sidestepper, and continued: "Or four. Why would they give her just one?"

"It was an experiment," said the sandal.

"And just how is it OK to deliberately breed kids with just one leg?" said the dog, Sidestepper. An undercurrent of rage against the experiment laced his words tightly.

"It was determined," said the sandal.

"Determined by who?" said the dog, Sidestepper.

"That doesn't matter," said the sandal. "It was determined."

Crazy Man was beginning to regret his earlier displays of empathy. It was beginning to sound like a cold-hearted plot was afoot along the path of adventure and new meanings. "Determined by who?" he said, joining the dog, Sidestepper, in his rage.

"By those who feel that it's not fair for some people to have just one leg...or none," said the sandal, "while others have two."

"But who are they?" said the dog, Sidestepper.

"Well," said the sandal, "if you really must know...The Grand Council of Fairness for One-Legged People. I think they might be a cover for the shirt industry. They've determined that spending money on two shoes instead of just one impacts the ability to buy more shirts. This is a serious misappropriation of disposable income...according to the Council."

Neither Crazy Man nor the dog, Sidestepper, had a clue what the sandal was talking about...probably because the sandal's sob story had put them to sleep.

"Hey you guys!" yelled the sandal.

They woke up looking around to make sure no more sob story words were floating in the air to put them back to sleep.

"You didn't hear anything I said," said the sandal. "You don't care about Tack or lost sandals. You never cared about us. We've always been nothing but fodder for your empathy. You're just a couple of empathy posers."

The sandal's words might as well have been bolts of lightning striking at the very souls of Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper. This lost sandal called the sincerity of their empathy into question to the extent that they were empathy-frozen: If they expressed their empathy, then they were posers. If they didn't express it, their empathy would bloat their minds until they exploded. They were caught between an existential rock and an angst hard place.

Crazy Man did the only thing that made sense and it was something he was good at...he changed the subject. "Just for the longshot...would you know where we could find a map to food?"

The dog, Sidestepper, caught on quickly and secretly congratulated Crazy Man on his brilliant maneuver. "And my mother," he said. "You wouldn't happen to be my mother disguised as a sandal, would you?"

The sandal, accepting that not all living things care about all living things, even one-legged experiments in consumer manipulation, decided to let the pair off the hook. "I apologize," said the sandal. "You're not posers. You're just not all that bright and I don't have a map to food and I'm nobody's mother and you're both bastards."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were so happy to not be posers that they celebrated by jumping up and down and clapping their feet together. It was a terrible, disturbing sight. The sandal wished it was somewhere else. Several frogs jumped off several paddies and swam to the deepest part of the pond. A one-legged girl named Tack picked up on the psychic continuity of the celebration and looked down to discover that her single foot was bare. She decided to re-trace her steps for the last 22 days and find that missing sandal.

Somewhere on Corporate Earth, The Grand Council of Fairness for One-Legged People exploded for no apparent reason. Some believe it might have been a righteous meteor.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, celebrated far too long. When they finally finished, they looked around at a pond-scape devoid of frogs and bugs...all of which had fled the celebration soon after it had begun.

The sandal was still there and still lost, but hopeful that Tack would re-trace her steps for the last 22 days and find her missing sandal. It also decided that it wasn't going to say anything to the two weird travelers lest they start emoting, celebrating or asking anymore dumb questions.

Sensing they were no longer welcome, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, continued down the path of adventure and new meanings.

"Do you believe in conspiracies?" said Crazy Man.

"Only the carefully planned ones," said the dog, Sidestepper.

Crazy Man had no idea what that meant so he changed the subject. "Nice afternoon," he said.

The dog, Sidestepper, looked up at the blue sky with its lazy white clumps of cloud and nodded agreement.

On either side, the deep dark scary woods seemed to draw back and let the two continue their journey peacefully.

For the time being.

To be continued...

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Check out the blog at: [www.crazymanadventures.com](http://www.crazymanadventures.com)

BTW.....

My third novel has been re-published. There's no giant ant...it's actually a computer virus called the War Bug. The artist didn't read the novel before creating the cover. Later, I wrote a short story about a cover artist who is eaten alive by one of his covers. It was published in an anthology by the same publisher.



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The novel is about a man trying to find his virtual wife and daughter as the internet begins to crash from a war between online city states. His only ally is the virus that started the war. In keeping with the tone of *The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man* and the dog, *Sidestepper*, the novel is completely humorless.

I highly recommend *The War Bug* by Biff Mitchell to Science Fiction fans who can stomach sexual perversion, grotesque humor and total cyber satire.

- Charlene Austin at *The Writers and Readers Network*

Biff Mitchell is a blessed breed of writer who mixes the real, surreal, and potentially real by fusing philosophy, science, human emotions, humor and terror. And *The War Bug* is this writer at the top of his game.

- Susan DiPlacido, Author of *Strut* and *Suffle Up and Deal*

I don't think the human race will ever have the emotional stability to become software.

- Cassie Mae Hayes in *The Reality Wars*