

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



Episode 81: Wherein Crazy Man and the Dog Sidestepper, meet the *almost* lost.

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Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were deeply offended by the wrong path pretending to be the right path even though they all knew it was the wrong path, but the dog, Sidestepper, had a theory that might temper some of that offense.

“So,” he said, “if we just took the wrong path but it was the only path, then wouldn’t that be the right path?”

Crazy Man thought about this for as long as he could stand the entire process of thinking, which everyone knows is painful and explains why so few people dare to think. When he reached the point where his mind was about to explode, he did the only reasonable thing: he changed the subject. He pointed an unsteady finger ahead and said, “What’s that in front of us?”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, gawked, yes gawked, at what appeared to be shards of ice shifting and smashing into each other in a field that stretched endlessly to the left and right but led straight into the deep dark scary woods in front of them. It was a chilling sight but even more disturbing was the sound. It saturated the air with moans of anguish and a sense of heart-breaking remorse that brought both travelers to their knees.

“What are you?” yelled the dog, Sidestepper.

The sound of torment from the field muted slightly and Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, had a sense of the field suddenly becoming aware of their presence.

“The wrong path tricked you into coming here, didn’t it?” said the field. “But that’s OK...does it all the time. But you should have taken the path less traveled even though it was nowhere to be found.”

Still on his knees, Crazy Man said, “The wrong path is a bastard that led us astray and, like the dog said, what are you?”

The field churned violently and emanated a wave of hurt that flowed deep into the ground where it broke the hearts of hibernating insects.

“I am the Graveyard of *Almost* Hopeless Souls but you can call me GAHS,” said the Graveyard of Almost Hopeless Souls, heretofore referred to as GAHS. Its mass roiled and hissed and filled the air with a sickening odor.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, rose from their knees, tears in their eyes, nose and snout running snot over their mouths, and bawling for less than a year and more than a minute because emoting has no sense of time.

After a while, a thought occurred to the dog, Sidestepper: “What’s an *almost* hopeless soul?”

The GAHS stopped roiling and did some thinking of its own. “These are the ones with frozen souls, those with feelings subdued by time and circumstance to the point where feeling becomes shameful in their eyes. These are the ones who spit in the beggar’s cup.”

“Sounds hopeless to me,” said Crazy Man. “Not *almost* hopeless.”

“Not much for self-improvement, are you?” said the GAHS.

After a short period of self-evaluation, Crazy Man said, “You wouldn’t happen to have a map to food, would you?”

“No,” said the GAHS. “And you’re a bastard. So’s the motherless dog.”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were deeply offended by the GAHS’s words.

“No offense meant,” said the GAHS.

Suddenly, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were no longer offended; in fact, they were sort of taken by the concept of *almost* hopelessness.

“OK,” said the dog, Sidestepper. “I’m sort of taken by this concept of *almost* hopeless souls. What makes a soul *almost* hopeless?”

The GAHS, after determining that the dog was sincere in its sort-of-taken-ness with the concept of *almost* hopeless decided that, though the dog might be an imbecile, the question was not imbecilic and might even contain an atom of legitimacy which meant that the GAHS had to explain itself in a non-imbecilic manner.

“Can I get back to you on that?” said the GAHS.

“No,” said the two in unison.

“Bastards,” said the GAHS. “Now I actually have to think.”

So the GAHS thought for a while and then for a while longer at which point it granted itself an extension on the period of thinking and a moratorium on the period of non-thinking and ending with a holistic evaluation of its conclusion.

“They’re not completely hopeless,” said the GAHS with the authority of one who has thought and evaluated in spite of the pain of thought.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, pressed the GAHS for an explanation.

“These are the ones with a little yin in their yang,” said the GAHS, “and a little yang in their yin but they don’t know where to begin to absolve themselves of their hearts made of tin.” The GAHS laughed uproariously and said, “Did you see what I did? Did you see that? I made a poem.”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, didn’t see it. They were asleep.

“Hey you two!” said the GAHS. “I was just pouring my heart out! In rhyme! And you fall asleep? You bastards!”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, immediately woke up after hearing that name the world and everything in it seemed to have reserved for them.

“Sorry,” said the dog, Sidestepper, “It was beginning to sound like a sob story.”

“Not *my* sob story,” said the GAHS. “The stories of the countless *almost* lost souls. The are human beings. Sort of. Well...probably more ass than human. They come here with frozen hearts and...” The GAHS noticed Crazy Man’s eyes starting to close. “Hey!”

Crazy Man’s eyes opened like two saucers spinning on his face. “Here!”

“As I was saying,” said the GAHS, “they come here with frozen hearts...but not frozen enough...just *almost* frozen enough. When they arrive, I freeze the living hell out of them. Have you ever had the living hell frozen out of you?”

“No,” said Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, in unison.

“Well, it hurts,” said the GAHS. “It hurts more than being burned to death. It hurts more than being eaten alive by spiders. It hurts more than having to wait for hours for customer service...got a few of those here...the service ones...I keep them longer than the others.”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, looked at each other and back at the GAHS.

“Longer than the others?” said the dog, Sidestepper. “So, you eventually let them go?”

“Yep,” said the GAHS. “Once the hell is frozen out of them, they melt and turn into water and away.”

“Where do they flow to?” said Crazy Man.

“Probably to Hell,” said the GAHS. “Being *almost* hopeless doesn’t let them off the hook.

“So much for self-improvement,” said Crazy Man.

“So,” said the GAHS, ignoring Crazy Man’s comment. “Left or right?”

“Left or right?” said the dog, Sidestepper. “What’s that supposed to mean?”

“The path goes in one direction...either left or right...you choose.”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, gazed (they’d already gawked) at the mass of *almost* hopeless souls stretching into horizons on both sides. Noticing their consternation, the GAHS have them a clue: “Go left...the right leads to the end of the earth where you’ll drop into chaos forever.”

“Gee,” said the dog, Sidestepper, “we really appreciate the clue. But how do we get across all those almost hopeless souls?”

“Start hopping,” said the GAHS.

To be continued...

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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 eat alive by one of his covers. It was published in an anthology by the same publisher.

You can buy the ebook version in a variety of formats here:

<https://doubledragonbooks.com/>

Or you can get the Kindle version here:

<https://www.amazon.com/dp/B08W8KZZXF>



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.