

The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper



Episode 97: Wherein Crazy Man and the Dog Sidestepper, meet the floating cat face.

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Crazy Man had never been a big fan of Alice in Wonderland with all its impossible creatures and fantastical adventures. *Giant pipe-smoking worms and talking cat heads? Who writes stuff like this?* he thought just as his line of thought was interrupted by a giant cat face hanging in the air before them, blocking their passage on the path of adventure and new meanings.

“Are you the Mad Hatter and the door mouse?” said the cat face.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, stopped in mid-stride and stared at the cat head looming before them, stretching at least ten feet over their heads and almost touching the darkness of the deep dark scary woods on either side. It floated about three feet off the ground, making a dash under it unlikely for a dog with long stilt-like legs and a human currently sporting a giraffe disguise (for some good reason) to just roll under and be on their way.

Feeling somewhat diminished by the cat face looking at him when it said, “door mouse,” the dog, Sidestepper, said, “No. We’re a reconnaissance party for the alien invasion that’s going to begin in about a half hour, give or take a week or so.”

The cat face glared at him in a withering *I’d-like-to-see-you-die* way and said, “I don’t believe in aliens...just witches and gods and goddesses. And I don’t believe in tooth fairies...anymore. And I don’t believe in aliens because, if there were aliens, they would have invaded long before now.”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were confounded.

“In fact,” said the cat face, “I don’t think either of *you* exist.”

That was the last straw. Crazy Man was having none of this. Who did this floating face think it was? He stared steely-eyed right into those green floating eyes and said, “We exist more than you exist.”

This caused the cat face to think, which, as everyone knows, is a dangerous state of being when you’re floating in the air with no rational support. The cat face dropped. And bounced. And dropped. And bounced. The cat face smiled. The cat mouth opened and spewed laughter like pouring too much cream into your morning coffee.

“Ha ha,” said the cat face. “I can bounce. I’ve always wanted to bounce. Ha ha! From now on I will be known as That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment.”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, exchanged knowing glances...the cat was crazy.

“That’s right,” said That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment. (Gee, did I forget to mention that the cat face could read minds?) “I’m a crazy cat and I float and I bounce because that’s all I have left after I lost my kitty litter box...with my body still in it.”

Suddenly, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were on a self-righteous empathetic collision with That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment’s plight. They rolled around on the path bemoaning the terrible lot of floating cat faces, the loss of one’s litter box, the further loss of one’s body. In a monumental surge of unrestrained empathy, they embraced the little things that amuse the disembodied...like hanging in the air and bouncing ever so lightly on that flimsy bridge between this and that and the other thing.

As they slithered around the ground crying and imploring the gods of floating heads and missing bodies to show a little mercy on That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment, they managed to squeeze in a few quiet pleas for maps to food and missing mothers and were assured that they were both bastards but not to worry because all the world’s a bastard.

Finally, one day long ago or not so long ago, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, figured they’d empathized enough with That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment and it was time to make a little sense out of things.

“Why are you hanging in the air over the path of adventure and new meanings and blocking our way when you could be hanging in the air over a tropical beach and blocking surfers from shark-infested waters?”

That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment smiled an ancient knowing smile born of primal awareness and classic catology. Its eyes glowed and its whiskers glittered. Fireworks exploded in the sky three inches over it’s head. They were small explosions, being smaller than the head, but they looked cool and they were sincere. That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment opened its mouth and said, “Meow.”

For a moment, Crazy Man believed that maybe the universe might actually *be normal*...

The dog, Sidestepper, also had a sudden thought: *Things might actually be normal*.

That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment (Did I mention that it could read minds?) wasn’t about to let anyone or anything make the mistake of normality and said, “I’m here to warn you.”

“Warn us about what?” said the dog, Sidestepper, who was still just a tad slighted at being called a door mouse.

That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment thought about this and said, “You don’t want to know.”

“No,” said the dog, Sidestepper, vigorously, like one awaiting long sought knowledge. “I want to know.”

“Alright then,” said That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment. “Both of you...come closer.”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, wasted no time in stepping closer, both of them unbuttoning their minds to the concept of knowing...whatever that knowing was...but it had to be special coming from a cat face bobbing over the path of adventure and new meanings.

As they stood inches away, That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment looked to the left and then to the right to ensure that no unwanted ears were in sight and whispered, “There’s a path ahead of you.”

Sometimes, knowing what you already know is a pleasant confirmative re-knowing in the sense that, if you know something twice, then you’ve known it more than once. For some, this has a strange intrinsic meaning. For Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, it was nonsense. This insidious That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment had no idea why it was floating in front of them, blocking their way, intruding on their journey.

“We know there’s a path ahead of us,” said Crazy Man with solemn exactitude.

“Can you prove that?” said That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment.

“Well...” said Crazy Man with less than solemn exactitude.

“Yes!” said the dog, Sidestepper, noticing that his travel buddy might not have an air-tight answer and might not actually be able to prove anything beyond just being in this outside thing. “You’re on the path and you’re ahead of us, so the path must also be ahead of us.”

That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment was not pleased. It was suddenly apparent that the dog was right and there’s no denying canine truth no matter how long you hold your breath. Apparency spread like a bushfire along the path and through the deep dark scary woods; it seeped into the pores of living things and turned caterpillars into butterflies in an instant. It coated the underbellies of clouds with a Teflon-like shield against all that will never be apparent and it bounced like a ping pong ball between fact and fiction.

One particular ill-tempered tree in the deep dark scary woods was deeply offended by That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment’s lack of respect for canine truth that it huffed and puffed and blew itself down right on top of the face, which scowled and jeered as boughs and branches poked into its material form and sliced and diced it until the tree’s trunk pushed That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment into the ground and squashed it like a wobbly ball of Jello.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, stared at the Jello’d That Face That Bounces With Much Merriment, trying to figure out what had just happened. They stepped around it and continued down the path of adventure and new meanings...silent for a while, lost in thoughts about trying not to think, until Crazy Man said, “Maybe we should have left with the aliens.”

“And miss all this adventure...the new meanings?” said the dog, Sidestepper. “And this outside thing.”

Crazy Man smiled and his eyes glazed over. “Do you think we’ll ever find a map to food...and your mother?”

“Sure,” said the dog, Sidestepper. “I mean, look...there’s a path ahead of us.”

And the two strolled into the horizon of the path of adventure and new meanings ahead of them, oblivious of the deep dark scary woods on either side.

To be continued...

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