

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



Episode 114: Wherein Crazy Man and the Dog Sidestepper, meet the Wrap Around.

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I've heard it said that the most impenetrable of fortresses is the Prison of Self, mostly because it's almost impossible to persuade the prisoners to leave their voracious appetite for self-help audio books.

The dog, Sidestepper, completely out of character, snarled at this intrusive narrative loud enough to attract the attention of Crazy Man, who said, "Hearing voices again?"

The dog, Sidestepper, glared at Crazy Man with his polka dot eyes so loud that words were unnecessary to say *up yours*, so Crazy Man changed the subject: "Remember the days when you used to accuse everyone, including me, of being your mother?"

These were not well-chosen words; these were words of kerosine tossed into the smoldering embers of an almost forgotten past and the dog, Sidestepper, was having none of it: "I didn't accuse...I asked. I was opening my mind to infinite possibilities."

Crazy Man had no idea what his travel mate was saying, so he changed the subject again: "Some day I'm going to make the biggest and juiciest hamburger ever in the kitchen I might have and it's going to be so big that we can both feast on it for at least a minute."

The dog, Sidestepper, considered this and concluded that Crazy Man wasn't playing with a full deck. Just as he was about to toss this observation out there, he noticed something round and shiny at the edge of the deep dark scary woods. Crazy Man followed his gaze and saw it as well. "What's that?" he said.

A sharp high pitched, some would say frantic, voice cut through the air and pierced the ears of strange dog and stranger man: "I am the Wrap Around and I'm not the dog's mother and I don't have a map to food and you're both bastards."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, (who figured they'd already dealt with this mother thing) were stunned for just over half a second before the dog, Sidestepper, said, "You're just a bunch of metal and you'll never have a mother."

These venomous words cut to the core of the Wrap Around, where, fortunately for the Wrap Around, there was nothing but empty space, like a barbed metal donut. "Ha ha!" said the Wrap Around. "I don't need a mother because I am the mother of all fears."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, laughed and pointed at the Wrap Around and Crazy Man said, "There's nothing scary about you. You're just metal wire with barbs."

"Only when you see me," said the Wrap Around. "But most don't see me as I wrap around them coil by coil so slowly that my barbs insert themselves painlessly until I'm wrapped so tightly that it's almost impossible to unwrap me without my barbs tearing them apart."

"Oh yeah," said the dog, Sidestepper. "Who's them?"

The Wrap around squeezed its coils around its empty core and snarled a high-pitched snarl that seemed less threatening than repulsive and possibly vice versa. "They are those who fear their own core so much they wrap me around them so tight they forget they have a core," said the Wrap Around. "And then I just kind of grow on them, wrapping tighter and tighter day by day, year by year."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, sensing a sob story or something approximating one, immediately fell asleep.

"I am the excuse, the delay, the new routine following the new routine, the self-help workshop that ends with the workshop...the familiar pain that tightens me harder and harder until my barbs and coils become the cliff edge with no leap of faith visible through the wrap. I am..." The Wrap Around, sensing a palpable lack of interest in its compelling story, whipped a loose coil into the air with a loud snap that woke the sleeping pair who, through much practice that made perfect, responded in unison, "So you're that scary thing under the bed at night?"

"Worse," said the Wrap Around, though not a hundred percent convinced that these two were as impressed as they should be. "I am the scary thing inside you that you carry with you day and night."

"So, you just wrap yourself around people..." the dog, Sidestepper began to say.

"No!" said the Wrap Around. "They reach out to me and wrap me around themselves with every failed dream, every fear and doubt, every insecurity, every..."

And the Wrap Around was silenced by a loud snore from Crazy Man, who was never quite as good as the dog, Sidestepper, at playing awake while he slept. But the snore woke them just in time to duck as a length of coil whipped over their heads.

"You will show me respect!" yelled the Wrap Around in a high-pitched, ear-splitting voice that invoked images of thousands of screams at a tiny spider way over on the other side of the room. For just a second or less, Crazy Man felt an impulse to burn down the kitchen he might have, but he suddenly remembered the friendly spider in the cave, Andy Arachnid, and all thoughts of burning anything down flew out of his head like bats swarming out of a cave.

"We only respect the path of adventure and new meanings, lost mothers, maps to food and this outside thing," he said. "And you're a bastard with a core of nothing to wrap around."

These brave words caused the Wrap Around to consider just for a fraction of a fraction of some unit of time that empty space at the core of its being where it suddenly realized nothing existed. And if there was nothing there to wrap itself around, then how could it be a Wrap Around? Suddenly, it was confused and started to spin in circles and unravel and stretch along the rim of the deep dark scary woods, creating a one string fence that was guaranteed to keep nothing out and nothing in.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, stared at the fence and then at each other and back to the fence and back to each until Crazy Man's head began teetering on his shoulders precariously close to falling off. Both considered this to be a sign that it was time to stop staring and get on with the journey.

Back on the path of adventure and new meanings, the dog, Sidestepper, already facing Crazy Man (what with stepping sideways and all) said, “Guess that Wrap Around thing missed the point.”

“What’s that?” said Crazy Man.

“Life is all about eating the donut,” said the dog, Sidestepper, “no matter how big the hole.”

Once again, Crazy Man had no idea what his travel buddy was talking about so once again he changed the subject. “At least you didn’t ask if it was your mother.”

The dog, Sidestepper’s, lips curled around two rows of razor-sharp teeth that could have been a smile or a snarl but there would be plenty of time for both as they journeyed into a horizon that seemed never to end.

To be continued...

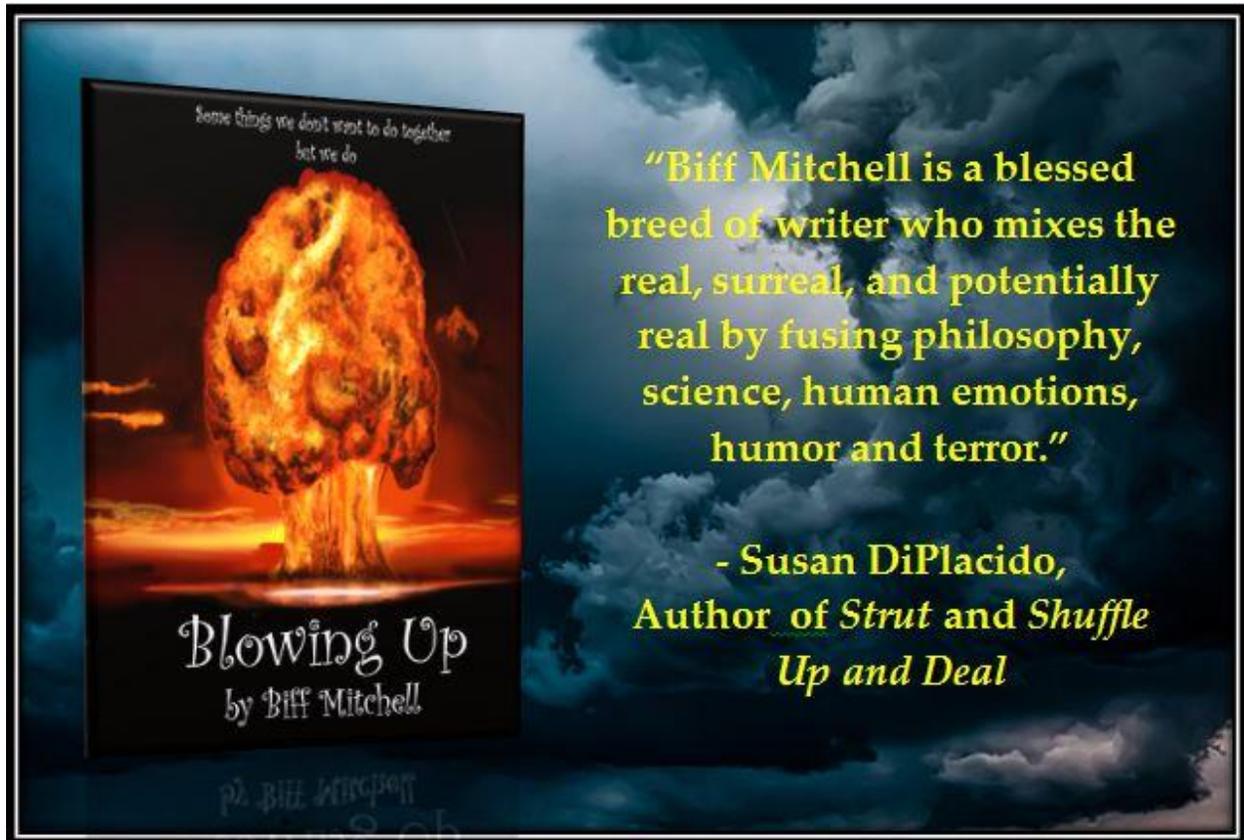
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