

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



Episode 141: Wherein Crazy Man and the Dog Sidestepper, meet the scream.

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One day, as Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, made their way at a leisurely pace along the path of adventure and new meanings, they heard a sound that chilled them to the core of their beings. It started as an indistinct acoustic mash like water crashing against rocks somewhere distant and somewhere close. The dog, Sidestepper's, mouth began to twitch as his canine instincts sensed something unnatural emerging from the deep dark scary woods. The sound expanded like a tide of sorrow, inducing tears and heartbreak as it swept across the land. Crazy Man's ears began to spin on the sides of his head, searching for the sound's location, which seemed to be everywhere. It was a storm of regret, burnt feelings, broken promises and painfully missed opportunities. Both Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, felt their stomachs sink and their chests tighten. They felt like they were being suffocated by life itself until the sound abruptly stopped and the sounds of the path of adventure and new meanings along with the deep dark scary woods filled the air with bird song and insects chirping and buzzing and breezes fluttering the leaves in the trees. And of course, a dog barked in the distance.

The soul chill dissipated into a minor discomfort in their stomachs and that was when they saw it. Bursting out of the side of a tree. Ugly and misshapen. The embodiment of dread. The...

"Can you tell your narrator to put a lid on it?" said the ugly misshapen embodiment of dread. "I'm just a scream in a tree and you can call me the scream for short."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, weren't sure about this narrator thing...they were just glad that the scream had stopped screaming.

"Why do you scream?" said the dog, Sidestepper.

"Who will if I don't?" said the scream.

"But why should anyone scream?" said Crazy Man.

Something akin to eyes appeared just above something akin to a scream's mouth in the tree. The eyes bored into Crazy Man's eyes.

"Look around," said the scream.

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, looked around.

"What do you see?" said the scream.

The two journeyers had this one. All they had to do was describe what they saw...no hidden objects, no unwanted surprises...just what they saw.

"Trees," said Crazy Man.

"A sky and clouds," said the dog, Sidestepper.

"Birds," said Crazy Man.

"The path of adventure and new meanings," said the dog, Sidestepper.

"Some neat looking outcroppings of rocks," said Crazy Man. "But we're not going to sit on them."

"Bugs," said the dog, Sidestepper.

"Air," said Crazy Man.

"Air?" said the dog, Sidestepper, glancing skeptically at Crazy Man. "You can't see air."

"Maybe he's seen into the future like I have," said the scream, "to the day when the air will be too hot to breathe. And what will that look like?"

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, felt a sob story coming on and prepared themselves for sleep.

"All that you see will become a wasteland of concrete, steel and plastic," said the scream. "And that's why I scream. I scream for the trees and the seas. I scream for the..."

The scream was suddenly aware of the sound of snoring coming from the two journeyers...and it screamed until the ground shook.

Two pairs of eyes snapped open and the screaming stopped. Several birds that had been flying overhead dropped out of the sky...knocked dead in flight by the scream.

"Sorry to bore the two of you," said the scream. "But that's exactly why I scream. Nobody listens. Nobody cares. But they will...when *they* start to scream."

"Why would they scream?" said Crazy Man.

"They'll be screaming for air and water and food," said the scream. "But it will all be gone."

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, exchanged worried glances. No air? No water? No food? How would they ever find a map to food if all the food was gone? What good would that map be?

The dog, Sidestepper, still wasn't clear on this *seeing air* thing. He looked into the air around him, trying desperately to see air, but all he saw were the things that inhabited the air...things like the tip of his nose, the path of adventure and new meanings, the deep dark scary woods, Crazy Man, the scream...just the usual things...all of them existing in something that couldn't be seen. He felt like screaming.

"But where will it all go?" said Crazy Man.

"Down the toilet," said the scream. "Flushed by the ones who need it."

"But why would they flush it?" said Crazy Man.

"Because they don't know how to take their hands off the flush," said the scream. "Until they eventually flush themselves along with everything else and scream that someone else's had is on the flush."

"I see," said the dog, Sidestepper. "It's kind of like a blame game."

"That's about it," said the scream. "As though blaming fixes everything and there's no need to scream."

"So why do *you* scream?" said the dog, Sidestepper.

"Like I said, somebody has to do it," said the scream. "And besides, I'm a scream. It's what I do."

Suddenly, everything made sense to Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper. Screams scream. It's what they do. They scream. So...everything's going to be OK because the scream is screaming for all of us.

The dog, Sidestepper, explained this to the scream and thanked it for screaming.

The scream let out a long slow sigh. "The day will come when I stop screaming," said the scream. "And that's when I hand the chorus over to you."

Suddenly, the scream sank into the tree trunk and white bark rolled over the protrusion and sealed it. The ground under the deep dark scary woods shook slightly as the scream bled into the soil.

“Kind of a glass half empty thing,” said Crazy Man. “Do you think things would be different if the scream just screamed when good things happen?”

The dog, Sidestepper, was thinking exactly the same thing. “I’m not sure if there would be enough to scream about,” he said.

“Well,” said Crazy Man, “as long as we’re not the ones screaming, then there must still be a map to food and maybe we’ll find your mother.”

“You’re right,” said the dog, Sidestepper. “And I have the perfect idea for doing the opposite of screaming so that maybe we’ll have even more time to find that map and find that mother.” He smiled a disturbing fanged smile. “We can whistle. That should brighten things.”

Crazy Man jumped up high three times to show his excitement. However...

“I don’t know how to whistle,” he said as his entire body and psyche sagged right down the middle of this being.

“That’s OK,” said the dog, Sidestepper. “I don’t know how to whistle either, but it can’t be hard. We just pucker up and blow air through the pucker.”

Sort of man and kind of dog, puckered and blew air through the puckers and created a noise that wasn’t anywhere a whistle, but it was a start and there was always hope when things started, so they strolled along the path of adventure and new meanings blowing air through puckered mouths as they wondered deep into this *outside thing* trying to whistle.

To be continued...

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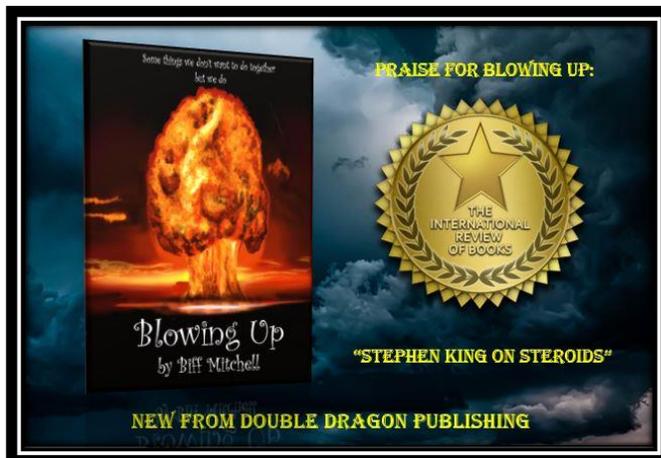
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