

The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the Dog, Sidestepper



Episode 147: Wherein Crazy Man and the Dog Sidestepper, meet the fallen tree.
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NOTE: The Existential Adventures of Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper will be on hold after Episode 150 (coming up in a few weeks) until the Fall in order to give the production crew (me) a chance to take new photos and plan new adventures.

The odds of being struck by lightning are over 1 in a million each year of your life and the odds are that you'll die from something else much sooner because not everyone is lucky enough to be struck by lightning.

"Hey, look at me!" said a fallen tree, obviously a victim of lightning. "I was hit by lightning...I'm one in a million! One in a million!"

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, had always been a little suspicious of lightning. They knew that somewhere and at some time, lightning was striking trees and knocking them down. They'd always felt that lightning was a bastard for its attitude towards trees and they couldn't understand why this tree was so happily demolished by lightning.

"C'mon clouds...hit me again. I'm on fire," said the fallen tree. "Hit me!"

The dog, Sidestepper, scratched behind his ear with his hind foot (no small feat considering the distance between his elongated leg and his tiny doggie ear) and considered the wreckage this fallen tree had become. And it was asking for more!

"C'mon clouds! That all ya got?" said the fallen tree.

“Um,” said the dog, Sidestepper, “I think if you get another lightning strike, you’re going to be smoke and smell and nothing else.”

Crazy Man nodded enthusiastic agreement. He knew a thing or two about lightning and he would never advise anyone to mess with it.

“Says you, little dog with funny legs,” said the fallen tree. “I’m a mighty tree and my boughs reach into the heavens and I fill the air with my beautiful leaves.”

The dog, Sidestepper, realized that this fallen tree had not seen itself in a mirror recently.

“Do you know what you look like?” said Crazy Man.

The fallen tree thought for a tree-moment and said, “I’m a mighty tree and my boughs reach into the heavens and I fill the air with my beautiful leaves.”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, long-time fans of trees and supporters of tree rights, were deeply saddened by this fallen tree’s denial.

“You’re no longer attached to the ground,” said the dog, Sidestepper. “You’re laying across it and well on your way to being bug and fungus food.”

“Says you,” said the fallen tree. “I’m a mighty tree and no lightning is going to uproot me as I reach for the heavens and fill the air with my beautiful leaves.”

“Try that now,” said he dog, Sidestepper.

The fallen tree went silent. Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, watched curiously as its boughs and branches twitched slightly. Its leaves shook apprehensively. Its trunk attempted to roll into an upright position. A powerful sense of frustration and confusion flared from the fallen tree.

“What the hell!” said the fallen tree. “Nobody told me about this!”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, looked up, down and around...anywhere but at this fallen tree just beginning to realize that maybe it wasn’t so good to be one in a million after all. The fallen tree tried to drag itself across the forest floor thinking that maybe if it went to higher ground things would be different but it was hopeless; its roots had been the target of a recent phenomenon called Root Buggers, bugs that specialized in eating the roots of fallen trees, especially those struck down by lightning.

“Where the hell are my roots!” screamed the fallen tree. “Nobody said anything about losing my roots! I need my roots to push up to a higher place where my boughs can reach into the heavens and I can fill the air with my beautiful leaves.”

Crazy Man cringed as he told the fallen tree, “Maybe if we stick you into a hole in the ground, you’ll grow new roots.”

“But that’s still not going to help your broken boughs and branches,” said the dog, Sidestepper. “And I don’t think you’ll be filling the air with your beautiful leaves.”

“Why would you say that?” said the fallen tree.

“Because you don’t have any leaves,” said the dog, Sidestepper.

A dense quiet swelled out of the ground and the trees and the sky, leaving not a note of sound, not even the sound of an ant scurrying across the dried remains of the fallen tree’s mangled trunk and branches. It was like sound was air in a tire that someone had suddenly deflated, leaving a flat foreboding that lasted about 73.50 seconds before the air itself cracked open with a long spine numbing scream from the fallen tree. For hundreds of miles around trees and bushes cringed and were grateful that, by the grace of Nature, some other tree had been the lucky one in a million.

The fallen tree screamed, whimpered, cried, cursed, screamed some more, moaned and screamed a lot more, giving its all in defiance of lightning but, unfortunately, too late. All that screaming and self-pity had sapped whatever presence the fallen tree had possessed and it crumpled into tree dust and was absorbed by the hungry forest soil.

“Did any of that make sense to you?” said the dog, Sidestepper.

“Yep,” said Crazy Man. “Stay away from lightning if you’re a tree,” said Crazy Man, “because lightning hates trees.”

“Hey! Wait a minute!” said a stray bolt of lightning looking for something to electrocute. “It’s not us, it’s the clouds. They hate trees and they throw us at them and we get all the bad press. We love trees and we would much rather burn down houses and people walking unattended on golf courses.”

Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, were astounded. All their lives they'd feared and hated lightning and now here they were...best friends with a stroke of lightning.

"Hey guys," said the stroke of lightning. "We're not really best friends and your search for a dog's mother is doomed just as your search for a map to food is doomed and you're both bastards."

Suddenly, Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, no longer wanted to be friends with bolts of lightning at which point the bolt of lightning saw a stray ant, dove at it and lit it up leaving just a puff of smoke, a tiny ant scream and, for some reason, the smell of burning chicken in the air. Above them, a cloud snickered.

"All this time," said Crazy Man, "we've maligned and persecuted lightning for doing what the clouds are doing. I feel cheap and used."

At that moment, the snickering cloud rained on Crazy Man and the dog, Sidestepper, for forty minutes and disappeared for lack of water.

Soaked clothing and fur matting their existence, the traveling duo dripped and shook and danced the Dance of Dry Things until they were dry and feeling kind of cool from all the dancing and they continued their journey along the path of adventure and new meanings.

"Do you think the trees and ants should stay inside when there's thunder and lightning?" said Crazy Man. The dog, Sidestepper, smiled and said, "Kind of defeats the purpose of having trees and ants, doesn't it?"

To be continued...

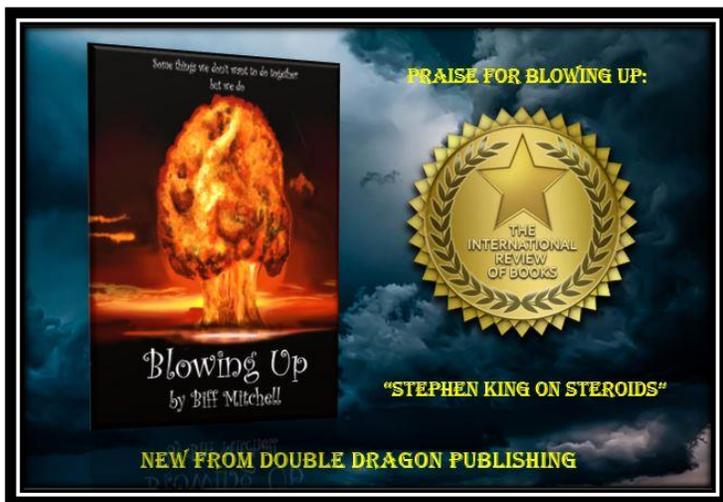
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