

How to Change a Lightbulb

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Summary: A simple chore leads to an enlightening discovery on an otherwise normal day in the life of young Clark Kent.

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Author's Note: The title for this story popped into my head, and the idea grew from there. Enjoy!

It's late. And getting dark. And I still have too many chores to do before dinner time. Usually this wouldn't be a problem. But today we have company — Mom's family is visiting from St. Louis.

So I have to keep everything...normal. And that means slow.

The hay bales have to be carried up into the loft individually. The wood has to be chopped using the ax, one laborious strike at a time. And the barn has to be swept at an ordinary speed. Such boring, repetitive chores.

Oh, and on top of all that, I also have to change the lightbulb in the barn before it gets much darker. It had burned out late yesterday evening, although I hadn't thought to change it then. I could still see, after all. But my dad couldn't, and so it went on my to-do list, like everything else.

I grab a spare lightbulb from the workbench and pull out the big ladder from the far back corner of the barn. It clangs and groans as I set it up in the center of the barn aisle. The old metal is rusty and pitted in places and has definitely seen better days, but I'm not exactly worried about getting injured.

I stand at the bottom of the ladder, staring up at the partially blackened bulb nearly twenty feet above my head. And I think of how neat it would be if I could just float up there. Bypass this old rickety ladder completely and...

The ground seems to shift underneath my feet as I momentarily become...lighter.

I blink, surprised at the odd feeling. But then it's gone again. The ground is solid underneath me, my feet heavy and weighted.

My heart starts to pound in my chest, and I look down at the ground for a moment, uncertainty filling me. Did I...?

I close my eyes and think it again. Up. Up. Up!

The ground is suddenly no longer at my feet, and my

eyes fly open as I inhale a sharp breath. I look down at the ground...which is now a good ten feet below me.

Panic seizes me, and I fall with a hard thud, barely catching myself with my hands as I land. Dust puffs up from the ground into my face, and I cough instinctively to clear my throat.

"Clark, are you almost finished with your chores? Dinner is ready!"

The voice from the farmhouse startles me, and I leap up and quickly dust my hands off on my jeans.

"Y-yeah, Mom. Almost done in here!" I call back to her.

I hear a response, some vague suggestion to hurry up so I have time to wash up, or something. But at the moment, the last thing I care about is dinner. Cautiously, I glance out the open barn doors and through the walls of the farmhouse into the kitchen. My dad sits at the table, along with Aunt Sue and Uncle Joe, and my mom slices up a loaf of bread fresh from the oven.

No one will see if I try again...

And I'm foolish enough to. After all, I still have to change the lightbulb.

I glance upward again and focus inwardly. Up. Up. Up!

My heart feels like a jackhammer in my chest as the ground again disappears beneath my feet. And I go up and up and up. Then I reach out, calmly unscrew the burnt-out bulb, stuff it in the pocket of my coat, and replace it with the fresh bulb I'd grabbed earlier. The light flickers to life.

I lower my eyes to the ground. Down. Down. Down... Slowly, please.

It obeys. Whatever this new ability is. And I float gently down to the ground. No crash landing.

I look up sharply as I hear the creak of the screen door and my dad's voice this time.

"Clark, come on inside now, son!"

"Coming, Dad!"

My mind reels, and my heart pounds. But I manage to get the ladder put back and close up the barn within a minute or two, and then I jog inside just as my mom sets dinner on the table. After another few minutes, I sit at the table, cleaned up and in a fresh set of clothes. My dad chats idly with Aunt Sue and Uncle Joe about this year's harvest, but when I sit, he turns to me and clears his throat.

"Did you manage to get that lightbulb changed, son?" he asks pointedly, his eyes holding a hint of some emotion I can't quite interpret.

"Yessir, I did."

"Good. I worry about that old ladder holding up." His voice too is laced with...something, and as our eyes meet again, he nods at me almost imperceptibly.

He'd seen me.

I swallow back the lump in my throat and hide a grin.

“The ladder wasn’t a problem.”

He nods more definitively this time and then turns back to the conversation with my aunt and uncle, but I see him stealing glances at me occasionally, a funny glint in his eye.

He’d seen me.

And now he wants to know.

So later — much later, that is — I’ll show him how I managed to change the lightbulb.

And this is one chore I won’t mind repeating.

THE END