

Bulbs

by Bryan Erdy

"Four damn lights for one basement is stupid enough, but for them to all be burned out at the same time is ridiculous". It's not the first time it had happened to Jason Wentz but he HAD sworn not to let it happen again. Changing light bulbs is probably the easiest thing to do on the planet except when you must go into a completely dark environment to do it. Of course, there were no batteries for the flashlight and his phone wasn't bright enough to double for one so he'd have to do it in the dark. With four bulbs strategically placed between his fingers, Jason opened the basement door and peered into the dark abyss below. The light trickled down to about the fourth step, but from there, he would be on his own. Moving down, Jason smiled to himself that as a child, the dark scared him as it does most children, but the dark of a cool, damp and unnaturally quiet basement scared him like nothing else. It had been his job to put fresh salt into the water softener and that bimonthly job was done with a speed unmatched by most people. That basement creeped him out and the feeling followed him all of his life. But now, as an adult, he had more things to be afraid of. Things that were REAL. Mortgages, ex-wives, unappreciated kids, dull jobs and a receding hairline were much more tangible fears than a silly childhood memory.

Jason continued down and was conscious of the last step approaching. He wouldn't be able to see it and he didn't want to over step it and fall, especially holding a pile of glass. The darkness swallowed him up and he felt the cool stone of the basement floor under his socks. He rounded the corner and began to slowly and deliberately head to the corner of the basement. He used his free hand to feel for a long line of plastic storage tubs that he knew would lead him to the first light. As he glided through the darkness, he noticed that being unable to see wasn't so bad. The real fear came from being so vulnerable. Anyone - or anything - could be down here and he wouldn't know until he screwed in one of the bulbs. Looking past his shoulder, he could see the faint glow from upstairs which was almost reassuring. The tubs suddenly came to an end and Jason knew he was close to the first socket. He reached up, found the burned out bulb and slowly began to unscrew it when the basement door slammed shut with the startling loud crash. Jason spun around and cursed out loud. His heart was racing and he almost dropped the damn bulbs. "What the hell was that?" There was no drat, no pets and no kids present to have done THAT. The silence taunted him and his breathing was getting faster. He reached back up to the socket and quickly unscrewed the bulb. It came off and he laid the old bulb quickly on top of the nearest tub. He took one of the new ones and reached up, finding the socket with an extended finger. His mind was racing and he was doing it so fast that it took several tries to find the groove. Cursing out loud, he finally got it going.... but it was too fast. With his hand shaking, the bulb snapped at the base and glass rained down on his face. He spit thinking it had gone into his mouth but one thing was certain... some of it was sticking to his sweat covered face and it was now littered on the floor. Any step could mean glass in his foot and the reality he was still in the dark and he still had no idea what had close that door. He backed up raising his free hand to grope for another socket. There were three more for crying out loud, He wandered around frantically, wishing there was any light at all. Suddenly, he felt on the ceiling the

smooth texture of glass and knew he's found a light. He was breathing faster than ever and he was on the verge of panic. He started to unscrew the bulb and it broke in his hand before a single rotation. He couldn't believe it. "What the hell?!?" he yelled and as if in response, he heard a giggle.

Jason stopped. He didn't move at all. "Bobby? Is that you? Answer me. Answer your father or I will beat the snot out of you!" Nothing. No sound at all, except for his heart which was racing so fast he thought it would burst. He dropped to his knees and laid the remaining bulbs off to one side and started to walk on all fours in the direction he hoped would be the stairs. In the same time it took for him to be aware of it, he sensed something move past him. Then it was behind him. He crawled faster, with one hand out in front of him groping for the step. He felt tubs, boxes and even knocked over a stack of board games. The electronic sound, muted by batteries that were almost dead, of an "Operation" buzzer went off. He screamed in shock. The noise kept going, droning and droning and Jason could feel the air by him move as if something was circling. There was another giggle, this time in front of him and in the moments before he lost himself to a full blown panic attack, the basement door opened up. He could see the light peaking from around the stair way wall and he lunged for it. Suddenly, a shaped appeared in front of him and he slammed hard into it, collapsing in a pile at the foot of the stairs. Jason winced in pain and realized that whatever it was, he was lying right on top of hit. It was big and it was moving and it was no longer giggling. It was.... cooing. All he knew was that he had to get up, get up those steps and run as far away as he could, but he couldn't move. Terrified beyond words, he knew that opening his eyes meant seeing whatever it was that he was on top of. Whatever it was that moaned in delight at their touch. Whatever it was that smelled like... vomit. The sounds stopped and he felt something slide across his face. It was wet. It was... tasting him. He had to get up, he had to open his eyes, he had to or he would die of fear right there. Suddenly, he felt pressure on his chin and teeth began to pull at his skin. Jason screamed.... and opened his eyes.