

Strange Things

By [Deadly Chakram](#) <dwelf82@yahoo.com>

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Summary: Strange things are happening to a pre-teen Clark Kent.

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Author's Note: This fic is in response to the challenge issued by LadyTPower, which asked that a fic be written around a Disney song. I'm a legitimate sucker for all things Disney, so of course I answered the challenge. It also quite nicely fell into the Father's Day challenge as well. Double challenge FTW!

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"Dad!" cried a twelve-year-old Clark Kent as he raced across the dusty front yard of his family's farmhouse.

It was still not quite *officially* summer, but Kansas had already been suffering from a month of blistering temperatures, during which not a single drop of rain had fallen. The oppressive heat had withered the grass and all but shriveled the crops; it would have, if not for Jonathan's staunch refusal to allow their livelihood to fail. Every day, Clark's father would check on the crops. Every evening, when the sun was closer to setting and the temperatures would drop to a more tolerable level, he would figure out which crops needed water the most and irrigate them, carefully ensuring that he didn't go over the limits placed by the state while the drought ban remained in effect. All of the farmers Clark knew were doing the same, resulting in eerie patches of greenery where farms stood out against the otherwise brown and dead landscape, each reminding Clark of pictures he'd seen of an oasis in the desert. Even the town square in Smallville had been allowed to burn in the sunlight and the once-inviting park turn to so much pale brown, dry dirt.

Clark sped around the house at breakneck speed and found his father tending to the blackberry patch that Martha had insisted on starting the year before, after Clark had discovered his love for the tart berries and couldn't get his fill from the ones Martha bought from the town grocer, Mr. Keller, on what had become a weekly basis. Jonathan looked over, straightened up from bending as he checked the health of the leaves, and wiped his glistening brow with a pocket handkerchief.

"Phew," Jonathan said as he squinted up at the hazy sky. "Hot today. Not as bad as yesterday though."

Clark mimicked his father's stance and also consulted the sky, using one slender hand to shield his eyes from the bright sunshine. "The wind's picked up and I feel like the clouds over to the west are getting thicker."

Jonathan nodded. "I think so too."

Clark took a deep breath and concentrated. "Maybe we'll *finally* get some rain." He grinned impishly. "Just in time to ruin your famous Father's Day barbecue tomorrow."

"Maybe," Jonathan agreed with a laugh. He mopped his

forehead again. "The Lord knows we could use it. We can't afford to go through another bad summer." He sighed a little and shook his head. "Anyway, there's nothing we can do about it. Did you want something?"

"Yeah," Clark hedged, embarrassed. He hung his head, studying the ground as he toed at a small anthill. He clasped his hands together, wringing them slightly in a perfect copy of the way Martha did when she was particularly upset about something. "I wanted to talk to you about something. Something...important. Do you have a minute?"

His father put one big hand on Clark's left shoulder and smiled gently, and Clark knew he was hoping it would put his son at ease. "I *always* have time for you. Let's go inside and get a couple of lemonades, shall we? Get out of the sun for a bit so we can talk in comfort."

Clark thought it over. "Mom's in the house. Can we go to the barn instead?" he nervously asked.

Jonathan's eyebrows shot up into his hairline in interest and surprise. "Oh, uh, sure," he stammered with another nod. He jerked his head in the direction of the barn. "You still want that lemonade first though?"

Clark thought it over for a minute. "Yeah, okay."

Jonathan winked at him. "Good call. Wait for me in the barn and I'll get the drinks. That way, your mother won't suspect a thing," he joked, his voice a confidential whisper.

But Clark wasn't in a joking mood. "Yeah, sure, Dad," he said obediently.

He headed for the barn without another word. The old wooden sanctuary was almost as stifling as it was out in the sun. Worse, because the air inside was still and dead, though a few drafts allowed a tiny sliver of breeze to sneak in here and there. Better, because at least the roof kept them out of the sun's vengeful gaze for a little while. Clark sat down on a big bale of hay destined to be delivered to the Jenkins' horse farm and waited, swinging his feet idly to pass the time. But he didn't need to wait long. Within five minutes, his father appeared with two teal colored plastic cups, and a pitcher of fresh lemonade so cold Clark could see the condensation that had formed all over the glass jug. A healthy amount of ice cubes clinked and jostled with each step Jonathan took. His father set everything down on his work bench, poured the drinks, then sat down on a bale of hay facing Clark. He held out one of the cups and Clark took it gratefully, cradling the cool plastic with two hands.

"So, what's on your mind, son?" Jonathan asked, taking a sip of the lemonade.

"Well..." Clark said, dragging the word out a bit longer than was necessary. "It's kind of personal, Dad," he warned, looking down at the floor, which was covered in wayward strands of hay that had fallen from the bales.

"Clark, you know you can tell me anything," Jonathan reassured him. "What's on your mind?"

"I've, uh...see the thing is..." Clark stammered. He took a large gulp of the fresh lemonade. It was so cold it stung his dry, hot throat. "Strange things are happening to me," he said, as he finally settled on the phrasing.

"Strange things?" Was Clark imagining it, or had his father's sunburnt face gone even redder? "Are you...sure?"

"There's no doubt about it," Clark confessed with a heavy sigh. "To be honest, it's kind of...scaring me a little."

Jonathan cleared his throat and put his drink to one side. He squared his shoulders and looked Clark in the eyes. "Well, son, it's not to be totally unexpected. You're twelve now, after all," Jonathan began carefully.

"You're saying this is...*normal*?" Clark asked, arching an eyebrow in disbelief.

Jonathan nodded. "Mmm-hmm," he hummed. "Every boy starts to change as he enters his teenage years. You might be a

little younger than most of your peers, but you'll see, all of them will go through the same kinds of strange changes."

"I don't think so," Clark protested mildly.

But Jonathan didn't hear him over the speech he appeared to be preparing in his head. "It's a sign that you're becoming a man. And not just *any* man, but the best man I've ever seen," Jonathan said, puffing out his chest in pride.

A man!?

Clark felt confused but proud too. No longer would he be considered a "mere" kid. No, he would be a man! He would make his mark on the world!

"So, I shouldn't worry about what's been happening?" he tentatively asked.

"The changes are normal," Jonathan reaffirmed. "And what's been going on is probably just the tip of the iceberg."

That sent a jolt of fear down Clark's spine and he suddenly felt cold all over. "Really?" he asked, disheartened, like someone had physically pulled a plug in him and deflated all the air out of him.

"I'm sorry," Jonathan offered sincerely.

"How can it get any weirder than it already is?" Clark wondered aloud.

"Well," his father answered, rubbing his chin in thought. "As your body matures, you'll experience a lot of changes. Your voice will crack and get deeper. That can get pretty embarrassing, I won't lie to you. You may develop acne on your face. Why, when I was fifteen, I had more zits and craters in my face than the moon," he reminisced with an amused shake of his head. "Your body will grow and your shape will change. You'll develop...urges,"

Jonathan carefully hedged, clearly not wanting to embarrass Clark.

"Urges? You mean, in response to how my body is changing?" Clark asked as his cheeks blossomed with fresh heat that had nothing to do with the stifling air in the barn.

As soon as he said it, Clark regretted it. Just the way he said it alerted Jonathan to the fact that he hadn't told Clark anything new. Clark saw the truth of that as his father's face changed to a slightly uncomfortable look.

"Well, not to put *too* fine a point on it...yes," Jonathan allowed with a vague gesture of his hand.

"I've, uh..." Clark stuttered.

Jonathan held up a hand like a crossing guard calling traffic to a halt. "You don't need to explain anything," he hastily told his son.

"Well, it's just...how am I supposed to know what I can do, if I don't cave to the urges?" Clark blurted out before covering his mouth with his hands. Even his ears were burning from his blush now.

It was Jonathan's turn to go bright red again. "Just...keep it private," he finally said after what felt like, to Clark, the longest pause in the history of the world.

"Dad, I'm not an exhibitionist," Clark retorted, horrified at the thought of doing such things before an audience. "I know better than to do that in public."

His father merely nodded. "Good," he told Clark. "And one other thing. These urges...you're too young now to act on them with anyone else, but when you *do*, be safe, okay?"

"Safe? Dad, I haven't been able to get hurt or even sick for a long, long time now," Clark reminded him with a wry smile that was just short of a full grin. Perhaps it would have been, if not for the sensitive, embarrassing subject matter at hand.

Jonathan nodded again. "True. But that doesn't mean *others* can't be. Things can happen that you don't anticipate. Things that can ruin your whole future. You're too young to make those mistakes, Clark. Too young and too smart to throw away your future." He tapped his own head to emphasize his point.

"My future?" Clark asked quizzically, sipping his lemonade.

"Of course," Jonathan reaffirmed. "All it takes is one moment of caution thrown to the wind and..." His voice trailed off as he

shrugged. "If you want my advice, wait until you're married *before* engaging in any mutual, uh, urge sating," Jonathan warned sternly but kindly. "I know I can't forbid you from it, of course, but believe me when I say it'll spare you a world of trouble."

"I don't want to ruin my future," Clark said thoughtfully. "And this isn't the kind of thing I'd want anyone to see." He hesitated. "Unless...I guess if my wife were to be okay with it, I guess I could see sharing this with her."

Jonathan chuckled. "Your future wife will *definitely* want to be a part of this, Clark," he said, reaching over and tousling Clark's unruly hair. "Hmm," he hummed to himself. "I think it's time Mom cut your hair again."

"Yeah," Clark said, running his fingers through his too-long locks. "I was going to see if she could do it after dinner for me."

"I'm sure she'll be happy to. There are a few mated pairs of sparrows in the old sycamore tree. Leave the trimmings out for them so they can use it to line their nests," Jonathan replied with a smile. He sat back and looked at his son with an expression Clark had never quite seen on his face before.

"Look, son, I should apologize," he amended after a thoughtful pause, running a hand through his already graying, sweaty hair. "I've been meaning to have this conversation with you for a long time now." He gestured to things that only he could see in his own mind. "But one thing after another keeps popping up around here. The fence that got knocked down. That bout of near-pneumonia I had over the winter. This blasted drought. All of it. I'm sorry. But, I promise, now that we're broaching the subject, I'll tell you everything you need to know."

"Thanks, Dad," Clark said, embarrassed still but relieved that his father was taking the conversation so seriously.

"I'm just trying to figure out where to start," his father said ruefully, suppressing a nervous chuckle.

"So...you're saying that all men go through this, right?" Clark pressed after a few moments, trying to help his father find an opening. He sat forward a little, his hands together in a nearly prayerful way, tucked between his knees. "Can I ask you something?"

"Of course," Jonathan encouraged brightly. Perhaps he was glad for the angle Clark had provided.

"When did it happen to you?"

"Me?" Jonathan scratched the back of his neck in thought. "I was a little older than you, I guess. Fourteen I think."

"And how did it start?" Clark asked.

"What do you mean?" Jonathan reached for his drink and took several long swallows of the strong yellow liquid.

"I mean, did you start lifting *your* dad's truck first? Or was it the refrigerator? A filing cabinet? What was it?" Clark asked, the words spilling out in a rushed, jumbled heap, his relief evident now that he was finding out that the strange things happening to his body were normal.

Jonathan sputtered, choked, and spit out what little lemonade hadn't gone flying down his throat to invade his lungs. He made a fist and thumped on his own chest, hard, trying to regain his composure.

"Dad? Are you okay?" Clark asked in concern, getting to his feet.

Jonathan held up his hand again, indicating that he needed a moment to recover. Clark stayed rooted in place, watching as his father struggled to regain his composure.

"*What?*" Jonathan wheezed out as soon as he could draw breath enough to talk.

"When your body started to change, and you started getting strong, what did you lift when the urge to test your strength came?" Clark clarified.

"Son, are you saying you've been...*lifting my truck?*"

Jonathan asked dazedly.

"Well...I can't lift the tractor yet. I'm getting there, but I'm

not quite there yet,” Clark replied, brushing it off as not a big deal. “Maybe by the end of the summer. But, honestly, I only just started to life the truck a couple of days ago. But it’s already so much easier than it was when I first started. I was able to do it one-handed today, which is kind of why I freaked out,” he explained.

“So this whole time...these strange things...these urges... *that’s* what you were talking about?” Jonathan asked slowly.

Clark shrugged. “Yeah, Dad. Why, what were *you* talking about?”

THE END