



## The 10,000 Things That Hide within Plain Sight

Everything around us is interesting—if we take the time to look closely. Let's start with the lightbulb. This everyday item has its own special poetry and delightful qualities: the delicacy of its touch, the fine strength of its filaments, the pear-shaped glass that holds the glow, its literal and figurative "lightness," and so forth. Each lightbulb is a truly wonderful thing, performing its task in the world and fulfilling our wish to bring light into the darkness. We can also consider the invention of the lightbulb, the manufacture, shipping, and marketing of lightbulbs; and their worth, purpose, care, and replacement.

If you had to make your own lightbulbs, how would you do it? By considering such a question, you realize the complexity of these "mundane" objects. What about pencils and toothpaste tubes and toasters? What if you had to make these things yourself? What would you do then? Would you lead a simpler life?

It seems to me that the least we can do, after taking a close look at the many things we've brought into our homes, is to show them our gratitude, much as we might thank our friends. So when you exchange the batteries in your flashlight, take a moment before throwing out the old ones to

consider what they have brought to you, the things they have illuminated, the accidents they have prevented, and the items they have helped you find. You can give them one moment of respect, one moment of thanks, one moment of thought.

If you're like most people, you probably have a fairly large amount of "stuff" stored in your home, and a lot of it is rather small and innocuous: candles, pot holders, scissors, clocks, smoke detectors, telephones, and other handy merchandise that helps you run your household. Much of this collection is likely taken for granted, and it is only when something becomes inoperative that you give it any attention at all. Yet these things constitute a kind of support group for you. They offer you safety, convenience, and mobility in a multitude of ways, and many provide other kinds of solace as well.

Each thing in your home—indeed each thing in this world—exists, due to cause and effects, in its own natural way. The candle exists because of darkness. The blanket exists because of the cold. And the spider exists because of the long line of spiders that existed and replicated before it. When left alone, things naturally return to their own wild state. When you leave the woodshed unattended and uncared for, the termites arrive in great numbers, the mice become more assertive, and weeds thrive between the cracks in the floorboards. Each thing finds its perfect opportunity for existence and arrives right on schedule. Wildness has its own wisdom, and there is no denying its resilience and determination.

We have considered where the objects in our lives come from and how we can organize them. But how do we account for our sense of order? Why do we arrange the silverware in its little drawer just so? Why are designers so attracted to straight lines and square corners? And why does the chaos of the back closet contradict all visible evidence of neatness and order elsewhere in the house?