

CHAIN

by Ron Burch

I awake to find a heavy chain shackled around my ankle. I try to remove it but cannot. The length of the chain runs through my apartment, sometimes coiling around itself, but eventually leading out my front door.

I follow the chain out of my apartment, down three flights of stairs, through several streets and into the city park. Through the park I walk, following this chain, through tunnels, down culverts, over small hills, across the community tennis courts, past a group of sun bathers, and on for hours. I finally collapse on a bench from exhaustion -- the chain continues on as far as I can see. I decide to return home, and I make it out of the park just as the sun starts to set.

On the way home, I pass a locksmith's shop which is closing. An old man in a cardigan sweater stands behind the counter. I knock on the door and surprise him. He looks up at me and points to his watch.

I hold up the chain.

He leaves the counter and unlocks the door, inviting me in. The shop smells thick with oil.

"What can I do for you?" the old man asks.

I point to the chain and he sees that it is shackled to my ankle. He grabs the shackle, looking at it and then the chain.

"Can you cut this off?" I ask. The old man stares at me.

"No," he finally replies, shaking his head and ushering me to the door, "it's not yet time."

