

UNFINISHED

by Ron Burch

In his dreams he was building a house. He wasn't sure if it was in the city or in the country. He wasn't sure. He thought, perhaps, it looked like the city but there seemed to be too many trees.

When he awoke, it was early, still dark out, around 5 a.m., the new time he was guessing was the new time his body wanted to wake up. It seemed over the past couple years that his body would choose a new sleep schedule for the man whether he liked it or not. For awhile, he couldn't fall asleep until after 1 a.m., lying in bed watching the television, hoping that he would fall asleep but nothing, and he'd wake up late, sometimes 8 or 9. This lasted for a few years and then he started falling asleep early, around 7 p.m., right after he and his wife had dinner. His nap she would call it. He'd wake up around nine or ten and then would go to bed where sometimes he would sleep and other times he'd be awake until late. It was so bad his wife made him set up a bed in the guest room because she wasn't getting any sleep. He was keeping her up and she needed lots of sleep at least nine hours a night or else she got very cranky and abusive. Lately, he had been getting tired around 9 p.m. and he would go up to bed. His wife had already gone away but he still slept in the guest room. But after he'd get ready to go to bed -- wash his face, brush his teeth -- he would find himself awake again so he'd go to bed and sometimes he'd be asleep by ten, sometimes by midnight, but now he was waking up at five a.m. if he still wasn't asleep.

Then he went to look at another house. It was in poor shape. The wiring was exposed and ran that way throughout the house. Walls were unfinished, exposing the wood two by four frames inside, lacking the particle board that covered up the spaces. There

weren't holes in the walls or anything like that; it was just unfinished or in the process of being unfinished.

A house to buy. He wasn't sure why he was looking at a house to buy since he was in the process, he thought, of building his own house. But he found himself with the owners, a short man who was bald on top but with shaggy black hair on the sides and a neatly trimmed moustache. He wore a suit jacket and dark cuffed cotton pants with black shoes. His wife was very quiet, a small heavysset woman in a blue dress. She barely spoke.

Their house was built on this lot next to commercial/industrial space. The family who owned it seemed very nice. They asked the man to spend some time with them at the house to see if he wanted to buy it. The owner showed the man and his wife how he ran some of the wiring so they could have a clock in the kitchen. The man's mother came over along with his stepfather and they all watched TV with the owners of the house. The stepfather went away. The owners gave his mother her own room which was nice. The man realized though that when he gazed out over the back of the house, it overlooked some type of military base and that naval ships would pull up next to the house, overshadowing it. Also, while walking in the yard which was part of this industrial park, they passed by men in training. They looked like Civil War re-enactors but the soldiers were facing a couple men who were running a large shredder, the kind that landscape crews would run large trees through to chop them up. The men were throwing objects into the shredder, like lights and rifles and large pieces of plastic, and the shredded parts were spat out of the shredder at the soldiers who did their best to avoid getting hit. The man looked at the owner of the house who was leading a tour of the area. The man shrugged as if he didn't understand what was going on. The owners also had a little dog, a Chihuahua, who was very sweet and playful but when she got too rambunctious she would bite so they had to tie a black bandage around her eyes to keep her calm after she tried to bite the man's

mother. The family of owners invited the man and his mother to stay but the man declined. The owner said he had to go back to work, having to commute several miles and he only had a bicycle. He wrote down his name and number on a scrap of paper, hoping that the man would call him to make an offer on the house but the man knew, after seeing the house and all the work that it needed, that he wouldn't be making an offer. But he didn't tell the owner; instead he thanked him for all his gracious hospitality. The man's mother's traveling alarm clock went off near her suitcase and the man quickly shut it off, getting them out of the house.

When the man awoke again, he was alone. He was in his small one bedroom apartment, only 600 square feet, crammed with furniture from a house four times the size but furniture he couldn't bear to part with and since it was just himself, he didn't care that it was all squeezed in there, the furniture so jumbled together that it was hard to walk without having to move a piece of it every time he tried to make his way through.

