

Chains

By

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1 INT: LIVING ROOM. NIGHT

Faded, cluttered living room in a modest house. A eight year old girl, JOANNE, in school uniform lies on the ground, illuminated by the light of the television, surrounded by colouring pencils and paper. A couple lie on the sofa, the BOYFRIEND (27) glued to the screen, the woman, Joanne's MUM (32) nuzzling the BOYFRIEND trying to get his attention.

The girl's face is pure concentration, furrowing her brow and pursing her lips as she draws.

JOANNE:

You know those hypnotologists,  
they can make you do anything  
they want. Just by looking at  
you, really, really hard.

We move across the page she is working on. A beaming stick figure stands beside a rectangular box.

JOANNE:

My Granda said all that mind  
control stuff is just  
bollocks. He'd say people will do  
anything if they're told it  
enough times. Not me though.

Her hands shade and add detail. She wraps the figure in ropes and chains, then adds a huge lock at the centre of it's chest.

JOANNE:

Escapism, getting out of chains  
and locks, boxes, that's really  
tough. That's serious magic.

She adds plaits to the figure, pauses, then adds curly, fluttery eyelashes. She sits up excited with her masterpiece, blocking the view of the television screen. We hear the BOYFRIEND groan in annoyance.

MUM OFF SCREEN:

(impatiently)

Christ sake Joanne, we're  
watching that.

JOANNE sinks down to the floor again, folds her picture up, pushes it into her pocket and half-heartedly turns her attention to the screen.

2 INT: JOANNE'S BEDROOM. NIGHT

A collection of soft toys is lined up at the end of the bed. Joanne arranges them so their glassy, lifeless eyes

point in the same direction.

JOANNE:  
 (quietly in the direction of  
 the toys)  
 Prepare to be amazed.

JOANNE sits in front of the toys in her pyjamas. She ties the arms of a cardigan together in a loose knot. She pulls the cardigan over her head, putting it on backwards to form a makeshift woollen straightjacket. She turns her back on her audience, shows them the knot tied "securely" at the back then starts thrashing around trying to break her arms free. Her attempts stretch the knot tighter.

The bedroom door opens. JOANNE dives under the covers and closes her eyes. Her MUM opens the door, the BOYFRIEND passes by in the corridor behind her, brushing his hand across her waist.

MUM:  
 No more messing about. And no  
 wandering about tonight! Right?

Joanne nods silently, eyes shut. The light goes out and the door shuts. JOANNE lies quietly watching the door. We hear her MUM giggling flirtatiously and the BOYFRIEND whispering in hushed tones.

Joanne restarts her struggling. Pulling the knot free, she sits up, throwing her hands in the air in triumph.

JOANNE  
 (quietly in the direction of  
 the toys)  
 Ta-da

She jumps up and down on her bed, fists in the air.

3 INT. BEDROOM. MORNING.

JOANNE dressed for school, lovingly lays out several pairs of scissors, old nails, bobby pins, three stanley knife double edged blades and a broken screwdriver on her bed. She surveys them for a moment before packing them into a large pencil case. She pushes this and some books into her schoolbag.

JOANNE VO:  
 I watched a programme about  
 Houdini. He was the first one to  
 do it, properly like, not just  
 messin' about.

Content she has everything she exits the bedroom and goes out into the corridor. Used towels and clothes cover the corridor floor.

JOANNE VO:  
He wasn't very tall but he could  
get out of anything.

The door to her MUM's bedroom is open, her and the  
boyfriend lie asleep in the messy bedroom, the bed clothes  
barely covering them. Joanne picks the clothes up at the  
opening of the doorway and slowly closes her MUM's bedroom  
door.

JOANNE VO:  
Ropes, chains, fires...anything.

4 EXT. STREET. DAY.

JOANNE closes the front door of her house and walks out  
into a sleepy housing estate.

JOANNE VO:  
The thing is it's not really  
magic, like spells and stuff.

She walks along the edge of a row of houses. Her eyes scan  
the ground as she walks.

JOANNE VO:  
You need tools.

She kicks over a piece of broken glass and discards it.

JOANNE VO:  
Houdini did like training and  
learnt loads of tricks.

She spies a length of wire on the ground. She lifts it up  
and examines it.

JOANNE VO:  
He had ropes, knives and skeleton  
keys. Wee screwdrivers.

She takes a small lock out of her schoolbag and tries to  
pick the lock with the end of the wire. Though unsuccessful  
she smiles and places the wire in her schoolbag. Inside the  
bag we see the lock, a sharp knife, the pencil case, books  
and a ball of string.

5 INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR/CLEANING ROOM CUPBOARD. DAY.

The lunch bell rings. Two little girls stand huddled  
around a door, staring at their watches.

GIRLS:  
(Shouting loudly)  
....5, 4, 3,

A TEACHER walks down the corridor towards them. Oblivious,

the girls stand with their backs to her and continue their countdown. The TEACHER waits for them to react. When they don't, she pushes past them and opens the door.

TEACHER:  
(exasperated)  
Not again!

We glide over bumper size packets of toilet rolls, a mop and bucket and cartons of cleaning products until we see JOANNE's tiny figure bound to a chair. She hangs her head in frustration as the TEACHER looks in.

6 INT. SCHOOL CORRIDOR OUTSIDE HEADMISTRESS'S OFFICE. DAY.

JOANNE and one of the girls who were timing her sit silently outside a closed door.

JOANNE VO:  
If I ever met him, if I had, like  
a time machine or something, I  
wouldn't bother asking him why he  
did it.

The other girl sits still looking nervous and scared, JOANNE wriggles in her chair concentrating intensely. The door opens and the second girl from earlier exits red faced. She gives JOANNE a dirty look.

JOANNE stops wriggling and sticks her tongue out in retaliation.

HEADMISTRESS'S VOICE  
(stern from inside office)  
Joanne!

JOANNE's look of concentration turns to panic. We see that her left shoelace is missing and had been used to tie her hands behind her back. Her little fingers wiggle unable to reach the knot that has her trapped.

The girl beside her rolls her eyes and starts untying the knot.

7 EXT. STREET. DAY

JOANNE walks back through the housing estate. She kicks a stone in front of her.

Joanne's pace slows down as she approaches the front door of one of the houses. Other children play in the street. Joanne looks over to them trying to catch their attention but do not see her.

She pulls the length of wire from her pocket and tries to pick the lock.

JOANNE:

Nah, if I got to meet him, I'd show him my tricks and ask him to teach me some cool stuff.

Unsuccessful she sighs, takes a small set of keys out of her pocket and opens the door.

8 INT. CORRIDOR. DAY

JOANNE VO:  
Like show me The Vanishing Elephant and how to get out of handcuffs.

The front door leads into a cluttered hallway. From the hallway we can see Joanne's MUM on the telephone, arguing frantically. JOANNE stands in the corridor and stares at her MUM. Her MUM turns in JOANNE's direction briefly, then quickly slams the kitchen door.

JOANNE continues to stare at the door for a moment before quietly running up the stairs.

JOANNE VO:  
Everyone would be dead impressed.

9 EXT. BACKYARD. NIGHT

JOANNE stands in her pyjamas in the backyard beside a disused open chest freezer wearing her makeshift woollen straight-jacket with her hands poking out the bottom. She has fashioned the rope across her body like the chains in her drawing. The tiny lock dangles ineffectively off the string in the middle of her chest.

A leaky water hose runs into the freezer. The sound of water filling the freezer can be heard. A child's alarm clock sits outside on the ledge of the kitchen window frame.

JOANNE pulls an old household step over to the side of the freezer and stands on it. She looks into the freezer and grimaces. The freezer is almost full of dirty water. She goes to climb in as her MUM rushes out off the kitchen, grabs JOANNE by the shoulders and pulls her off the step.

MUM:  
(manic)  
Joanne, did you put my cream top in the wash? He's going to be here any minute.

Joanne's MUM pushes her towards the kitchen door.

MUM:  
That your good school jumper? Don't think I am buying another one. Get that crap off and give

me a hand.

They enter into the kitchen. Joanne's MUM shuts the door tight behind them. We watch them through the window as JOANNE slowly takes off the jumper and her MUM moves frantically around the kitchen.

JOANNE VO:

Yeah, he would tell me it takes loads of training. Can't expect it to happen overnight.