

Briar Grace–Smith – The Concept of Freedom

Fifty years from now, when the SPCA has been mowed down and replaced with apartments, the well-off and child-less tenants who'll inhabit the place, will still be smelling kitty litter, thought Trinity.

She mopped up piss, filled bowls with water and enfolded yet another crying puppy in her arms.

It was well past closing but she was still here, waiting till the coast was clear. Till she could hear the splash and clack of Lill's gumboots as she made her way across the desert of soaked concrete.

After she heard the clatter of the door and she was sure she was alone, Trinity made her way up the hall, slick with the snail trail of her constant mopping, to reception where shelves bustled with toys: pig skin bones, rattles, ropes and pooch tubes.

There she took an oversized brass key and made her way past the aquarium of cats, ever restless and suspicious, and the pens of tumbling puppies.

She went through double doors, to the outside – the compound known as 'death row'.

To the dog.

The cage was made out of dense wire that curled and wrapped in a thick prison weave. Most people were scared of the dog, but not Trinity.

She put her key through the lock and with a practiced twist of her wrist and went inside. He didn't gargle deeply or bark or snap at her arm. The dog had grown used to her. He needed her.

Trinity didn't believe in death row. All animals, especially dogs, were innocent. It was people not animals who were evil.

The dog, now nudging that tender and ticklish place under Trinity's ribs was proof of this. She took a deep breath, clipped the lead onto his collar and left.

Marty was 'sposed to be having lunch in the mall today. It should 've been his first date with Paul or the Vodka Prince (as Marty secretly called him because of Paul's Russian type looks).

After going to the bar and eyeing him up every night for a week he finally asked him out. Paul had pushed down on the tap and let Macs Summer Ale flow, a huka falls like torrent into the jug. Marty had leaned over the bar and asked him.

For a terrible second Marty thought Paul was gonna decline and in anticipation he mentally traced an exit past the bar, through the throngs of dancers and out into the shadows. But instead Paul replied 'Lunch would be cool'.

Marty walked home that night with his size ten feet floating a metre above the footpath. He'd planned to take Paul, the Vodka Prince, for a lunch in Cuba mall. He liked the it there, the way life seemed to echo and creep out of door ways and through the cracks in bricks.

Yes, Cuba Mall seemed to live in a state of perpetual happiness.

But the thing Marty liked most about the mall was the way, people, especially a particular group of guys, looked you up and down when you ambled past, their abs concrete blocks under tight Huffer tees. It was Marty's dream to walk past the guys with Paul on his arm. It was Marty's dream to belong.

But in just a few short hours the witch waved a wand and his life changed.

The vodka prince had been turned into a frog and the fairy tale that once was cuba mall was now and forever a sinister place. The bucket fountain spilt blood instead of water and the Wellington southerly ripped at the faces of raw skinned passers by with all the force of Pouakai, the giant eagle.

Marty took a swing at his image reflected in the Les Mills mirror. He tried to focus on the words that yelled down at him, red and green from the gyms banner high above. **AMBITION VITALITY GRIT FORCE.** He wanted to get lost in the testosterone driven, looks

obsessed world of this place. He wanted to forget the girl in the park and her Jesus-like blue gaze and the way it'd kept holding him even when the life had left her.

Marty had always prided himself on his ability to stay strong in the hardest of situations. When his father passed on, he'd been the one who had organised the funeral and the wake that followed. His old lady referred to him as 'the family glue'.

But now he could feel it coming, the emotion, driving up from gut to heart to eyes. There in the mirror, lurking in the places misted over with the steam of his sweat he could make out the animal. There he was, Marty, kicking and punching, beating the shit out of the dog. And there was the girl curled up like a tiki and him, Marty cradling her as steam curled from the blood that just kept pouring. 'I'm okay now' she'd breathed wetly in his ear. 'Don't hurt the dog'.

Marty took a final swing at his reflection in the mirror and with a well-aimed fist finally made impact. Breaking bones. 'Take that you fucker' he said to himself as the glass cobwebbed around his face and his emotions ruptured like ripe seed pods all over the polished wooden floor of the gym.

Trinity had sat on the train, sandwiched against the window by a suit wearing Mormon, a brochure titled 'The Restoration of the Gospel of Jesus Christ' clasped in her hands. For some reason the picture on the cover of Christ on a cross made her think of her Mum.

She'd rung that morning, her voice high pitched and shaky as she begged Trinity, her only child, to come home.

'It's funny' Trinity thought. 'How she can hate me but still not be able to let me go. Politicians are good at that. Wanting the things they hate. Hating the things they have'. The last time Trinity had seen her mother was at the cop shop.

Trinity had been arrested for breaking into a battery farm and releasing the two thousand ravaged hens that were being held captive within its corrugated iron walls.

Her mother, then just a wanna be MP had been sent for. The headlines the next morning had read 'Local Politician has criminal connections'. Hysterical with shame, Trinity's mother, Jen, had thrown her out. Told her daughter, spittle flying, that she never never wanted to see her or her Vegan friends again. As it turned out Trinity's pro-chicken action won her mother the election that year. Battery farms it seemed, were no longer in

vogue. Thanks to her daughter, Jen now trod the grey carpeted halls of the bee hive in comfortable mules, her hair framing her face in a Helen-like bob.

Trinity had given the stolen hens to a friend, Damien who lived on a farm. Suddenly able to flap weak wings and run the birds stopped laying and became murderous. Chasing, pecking and ripping at each others bald flesh with clipped beaks until Damien was forced to ring their sadistic necks. 'Things that have been in tiny spaces think tiny thoughts'. He'd told Trinity afterwards as she cried into his hand-knitted jersey.

' You have to understand, that the thought of infinity makes tiny brains go crazy'.

THE END.