

## Liz Burchell - Slave For A Day, Continuation from Starter from Trish

Connie had barely made it off the stage, clutching the envelope containing details of the Mystery Prize she had won in the charity raffle, when Fred appeared at her side, his smile already brittle with disgust, "Give it back" he snarled, "tell them to do another draw, this whole thing is absurd." He reached for the envelope but she pulled it back first. Connie was shocked at Fred's sudden angry attitude towards her. Yes they had rowed about going to the Rotary Charity night. Fred had not wanted to go, happy to donate to the cause but hating all the socialising and the necessity of dressing correctly. Connie had won the row because she was the one whose manner could be called bossy, almost dictatorial in the marriage and Fred always did what she told him to do with little resistance

However, lately Connie noticed that Fred had aged quickly and seemed to her a sad sight with his baggy trousers and shapeless cardigan, plus general lack of interest in anything except his golf weekends away with his similarly dull friends. But this Fred was different, he was angry, the emotion apparently triggered by an unusual reaction to the raffle prize Connie had won.

For months now he had hardly looked at her unless it was across a breakfast table or through the glow of his mobile phone at night. No touch, no warmth, no sign he still saw the woman standing beside him. Connie pondered these thoughts briefly but wasn't really interested, as long ago she had lost interest in Fred's feelings for her and now simply found him unattractive.

At 57, Connie was painfully aware she was still alive. Underneath her beautiful dress and lovely hair she knew she was still capable of wanting things she no longer allowed herself to name out loud. The young man standing there, vibrant, unfairly handsome, with steady eyes that looked at her more intensely in 30 seconds than her husband had in the last year.

"No" she said, "I am keeping him, he is my prize."

Fred looked at her as if she was speaking a foreign language. His jaw tightened as he spoke, "This is not funny Connie." She smiled and said "I'm not laughing."

Fred glanced at the stage and noticed the young man had put on a long coat covering his half naked body and was speaking with an organiser. Even from a distance Fred noticed he carried himself with an unsettling composure, completely untouched by any awkwardness surrounding him. Women were

openly admiring him but he remained unaware or uninterested. Fred gave a short disbelieving laugh saying "Is this your midlife fantasy Connie because you are embarrassing yourself and chasing a boy young enough to be"..... "Careful" Connie interrupted softly. She felt something changing, quietly shifting beneath her skin, like ice beginning to crack after a long winter. For the first time Fred felt uncertain. True, she had always been in charge during their marriage and he had accepted that fact just wanting a quiet life, as he approached his 60th birthday. But this Connie was different, calm, almost dreamy, as if she had experienced some kind of romantic revelation.

The next moment a calm voice spoke beside them, "Mrs Vale" both turned. The young man had silently approached them and Connie hadn't noticed him until he was standing there. Up close, he seemed to Connie even more distracting. Dark hair falling carelessly across his forehead, sharp features and eyes, that seemed to observe everything at once. His gaze settled on Connie. "I was told you like to leave early," he said. Fred answered aggressively, "My wife won't be taking part in all this." The young man's gaze moved reluctantly to Fred, "And yet" he replied softly, "she hasn't said that herself."

A dangerous silence followed and Connie felt her pulse quicken unexpectedly. The young man looked back at her. He was patiently holding her coat in his outstretched hand, "Your decision Mrs Vale."

Connie looked up at him and he spoke again, "My name is Marcus, in case you were wondering what to call your prize." She gazed into his steady eyes and their restrained confidence and it seemed to Connie in that moment, as if this young man who called himself Marcus, sensed the night was about to become something neither of them had ever imagined. Whatever that was, Connie knew she was ready and calmly took her coat from him and together, without a backward glance, they walked out holding hands, into the night.

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