

Trish H. - Continuation

Fred went into silent sulk mode on the way home in the taxi, turning his face away from Connie and staring out of the window. Connie chattered on about her lucky win, deliberately ignoring Fred's silence and, equally deliberately, enthusing at some length about Marcus' bulging muscles and tanned, youthful skin. She didn't want to hurt Fred but he was being such an idiot that she just couldn't resist winding him up a little. Once home, Fred paid off the taxi, stomped inside and went straight upstairs to bed. By the time Connie had locked up and sorted things for the next morning, then gone upstairs herself, all that could be seen of the petulant Fred was a huddled mound beneath the duvet. "Come on, love," she said, sitting down next to the mound. "You don't need to be jealous of Marcus. He'll only be here for one day." "Cancel him," Fred muttered. "Don't be so silly," Connie replied. Fred gave a loud, disgusted grunt, turned over and nothing further was said by either of them that night.

For the next couple of days an uneasy truce was played out. Fred had decided he needed to keep Connie sweet if he was to be fed, because she was the sole cook in the relationship. During previous rows Connie had gone on domestic strike and Fred, having never even switched on the oven, had had to make do with sandwiches or local takeaways. He decided discretion was definitely the better part of valour when it came to his stomach and so stopped sulking. However, he refused to take any interest in Marcus' forthcoming visit, which Connie had arranged for the end of the week. Connie was sad that Fred felt so threatened. A sensible woman, she could imagine how she would feel if Fred had won the services of an attractive young woman, so she stopped goading him.

The day before Marcus' visit, Fred mysteriously disappeared for a couple of hours. Connie was in the kitchen when she saw him come in through the back gate and hurry straight down to his shed, clutching a plastic bag. Normally she wouldn't have thought anything about it, but something in Fred's manner seemed a bit strange – "furtive" was the word which came into her mind. Fred re-emerged from the shed, bag-less, and came up to the house. He was humming as he hung up his coat. "Where did you get to this morning?" Connie asked nonchalantly. "Just for a walk," Fred replied airily. Connie didn't believe him for one minute. What had he got in that bag? Perhaps he'd changed the habit of a lifetime (or at least the duration of their marriage) and had bought her a present? She was eaten up with curiosity, which wasn't helped when Fred muttered, "Just popping down the shed for an hour," and shot off back down the garden.

She stood at the sink, watching the shed door, for almost half an hour, before deciding she just had to find out what he was doing. Arming herself with a basket of washing as a reason for being out in the garden, she wandered down the path and put her ear to the shed door. She could hear a woman's voice! What was going on? Who did Fred have in

the shed with him? She edged round to the window and could just see Fred's right side. The trouble was, his right side was completely naked! Connie immediately jumped to the conclusion that Fred was getting his own back for her winning Marcus, and was entertaining Janice Thompson and her enormous bosoms in his shed. Fuelled by jealousy she threw the washing basket on the floor and tried to open the shed door, only to find it was locked. "Fred!" Fred!" she shouted, hammering on the door. "What are you doing in there? Who have you got in there? Open this door!" Fred's stricken voice came back, "Nothing. There's no-one here," followed by scuffling noises which sounded very like clothing being hastily put back on. "Don't lie to me, Fred Truscott – you've got a woman in there! Open this door NOW!" The door slowly opened and Fred stood there, looking the perfect picture of guilt but entirely alone and fully, if rather hurriedly, dressed. Connie pushed him aside and looked around the shed but yes, Fred was definitely alone.

"What's the matter?" Fred asked. "I heard a woman's voice," Connie said accusingly, although she was a little less certain than she had been five minutes before. "It was probably the radio, I was listening to Radio 2 on my phone," Fred explained. "But you were naked!" exclaimed Connie, still looking around the shed, as if the proof of Fred's betrayal would suddenly emerge in the form of Janice's cleavage poking out from behind Fred's work bench. "Naked?" repeated Fred, "No, you're seeing things," he said. "Shall I make you a cup of tea or something?" "No, I think I'll just go and lie down for a bit," muttered Connie, shaken. What was wrong with her, she wondered as she tottered unsteadily back up the path and into the house. Fred watched her go, his breathing now returned to normal after hearing Connie hammering on the shed door. Blimey, that had been close, he thought, re-buttoning his cardigan properly.

By teatime Connie was feeling better but still confused – she could have sworn she'd heard a woman's voice but yes, it could have been on the phone if Fred had been listening to the radio. But she would have put money on the fact that Fred had been naked – but why? She dared not think what he might have been doing – no, she must have been wrong, perhaps just a trick of the light through the shed window.

At 9 pm she told Fred she was going up to bed to have an early night before Marcus' visit the next morning. "You go on up, love. I'm sure it will do you good," he replied, solicitously.

Half an hour later, as Connie was lying in bed, still having troubling thoughts about her sanity, the bedroom door suddenly opened and there stood Fred, resplendent in a short leather mini-skirt, with what appeared to be fake tan smeared across his chest. Oh God, was she having another hallucination, she thought in panic. Fred approached the bed, sat down and took Connie's hand in his. "Con, I'm sorry for being such an idiot about Marcus," he said. "I was jealous because he's young and full of muscles and I'm – well, I'm nothing like that," he went on. "So, I decided to give you my version of a Roman

slave – only I look ridiculous, don't I?" he grinned ruefully. "Oh, Fred," gasped Connie, overcome by laughter, love and relief. "Was that what you were up to in the shed?" "Yes, I'd put one of those tutorials on the phone, one where a woman tells you how to put the tanning stuff on. Only, I had just put the tan on my chest when you knocked on the door, so I had to get my clothes back on and it all got smeared. I was going to do my legs and everything. I wanted to be a tanned hunk for you, but I just look a mess," he said sadly, looking down at his blotchy torso. "Fred Truscott, I love you, smeared or not," Connie whispered, kissing him. "You are my hunk, and you don't need to worry about Marcus, he's not coming – I gave the prize away to my sister the day after I won it. I was just winding you up a bit, I'm so sorry. I was going to tell you in the morning, and I've booked us a special lunch at your favourite restaurant." "Oh Con, aren't we a pair of silly buggers?" smiled Fred. "I love you, and I'm sorry if I don't show it enough." "I know you love me, and I love you - now come here, you sexy Roman beast," she smiled in return and pulled him into an embrace. "Flipping heck, I'll have to wear this mini skirt again if it gets you going like this," grinned Fred. "Yes, my love, only next time perhaps leave off your socks and slippers?" Connie giggled.