

# Rainbow

by Matt Potter

“He walked in and slid the photograph across my desk,” I said, putting the photo back into my handbag. “Which was really nice of Caspar, I thought.”

Shona looked off to the left as we got off the bus, when she knew we had to walk right. A bitter wind blew up Turmstraße, and I was glad of our hats and scarves.

“Are you bored already, Shona?”

“No,” she said. “Just a little incredulous that you let this Caspar guy — who you've never met before — into your apartment. Even if he does live in Moabit, too.”

We waited until the pedestrian light turned green and crossed Turmstraße with everyone else.

Shona snorted. “Though knowing you, I guess it's not that strange.”

We walked through the front door of *DM* and immediately slipped off our coats, scarves and hats. We both knew we would be there in the Drogeriemarkt — or health, home and beauty store — a while.

“I just thought it was really nice that he dropped it off,” I said, bunching my coat over my arm. “He must really want me to work there.”

“Or knows how desperate you are for money,” Shona said, winding her scarf around her handbag.

“Every foreigner's desperate for money in Berlin.”

“True,” Shona said.

Like a heat-seeking missile, I turned into the aisle I wanted: so many brands, so many colours, so many prices and opportunities and instructions to follow. A smile spread across my face.

“But you're not even a lesbian, Katie,” said Shona, eyebrows raised. “You don't even like men that much either.”

“I know,” I said, running my hand along the boxes of hair dyes. “He said he liked my aura.”

“What he liked was your tits,” Shona snorted. “You know, most women here wear a bra for warmth.”

The hair dye packets were so bright and enticing, I wanted to take them all home, each offering a life-transforming dream, a beauty to chase after, a yearning for betterment at a price anyone could afford. I picked a copper highlights packet off the shelf and began reading the blurb.

“Well, I haven't got forever,” Shona said, combing out her honeyed bob with her fingers. “I have to eat eventually, some century.”

Then I picked an auburn gloss and a deep chestnut off the shelf too. “It's so hard deciding how I can personally interpret the photo he gave me.”

Copper highlights? Auburn gloss? Deep chestnut? Copper highlights? Auburn gloss? Deep chestnut? I'd had every colour you could imagine at different stages in my life, but none had ever really suited me like the ash blonde I'd been now for eighteen months.

“I can't believe there's an official look you have to present when you're the Friday night door bitch at *The Bearded Clam*, for God's sake,” Shona snapped. “Just choose something butch!”

I wedged the dyes under my arm and pulled the photo out of my handbag again. It was a black and white grainy bubblejet print.

“Where is this club, anyway?”

“In Schöneberg, Eisenacher Straße,” I said. “Maybe he wants me to have the same *cut*.” Not only am I blonde with shoulder-length hair but I'm also petite, and the woman in the photo had a dark crew cut with spikes at the crown and a hefty frame. “Maybe he gave me the wrong photo.”

“Just dyke it up a bit,” Shona said, looking through me. “Make a decision, buy the dye and let's get out of here.”

But it would never be that simple. Shona sees things in black and white and I like to look for the rainbow in everything. Which is interesting, because our takes as English-language foreigners living in Berlin — and Germany — are very different: she likes its structure and innate orderliness, and I love the rent-a-hippies.

“I want to look sexy but not like I'm too available,” I said. “Is that possible with a style like this?”

“What I really want to know is, why is a straight guy called Caspar opening a lesbian leather bar in Berlin anyway?” Shona asked. “Schöneberg must really be going to the dogs.” She laughed — perhaps at her own joke? — then raised her eyes to the ceiling. She stomped off down the aisle and turned left.

“He said he's diversifying his assets,” I said, louder, so she could hear me. “I think the lesbian leather market's the next big thing.” I had no idea where she was going. Or really, what I was even saying.

I searched the photo for inspiration. I could go dark if I had to — I'd done it before — but really, that short short cut? My longish face and thin jaw — my brothers called me *Nosebag* — made finding a flattering hair-do a challenge.

Shona walked down the aisle towards me again, twirling something black. She stretched its rubbery form between her hands and let it twang back into shape.

“Hold still,” she ordered, and stretching it wide, wide enough for me to think it might burst, she placed it over and around my head, snapping it snugly round my crown and ears. “It's not leather, but rubber has a whole scene attached to it too ... so I hear.”

“What is it?” I said.

“A bathing cap. You wear it when you go swimming. My grandmother used to wear one. Though hers always had flowers and other crap on it.”

We scuttled around to the sunglasses so I could see what I looked like in a mirror. Predictably, a shop assistant — blue tunic and hair pulled back — scowled at us, so I took the cap off.

“He must be pretty definite about the hairstyle,” I said. “Otherwise he wouldn't have delivered the picture to me.”

Shona let out an exhausted sigh. “What are you going to do if he doesn't like you? You'll have ruined your hair for a job that went nowhere. I mean, you look less like a lesbian than I do.”

“What does a lesbian look like?” I asked.

I glanced over at the shop assistant but she was not moving away. I wanted to see what the cap looked like on my head again, but didn't dare earn her Berliner glare.

"Oh for God's sake, I'll buy it," Shona said, ripping it from my grasp.

It was the one time there was no one queuing at the Kasse — unheard of in Berlin — and within seconds Shona had paid for the black rubber bathing cap and stuffed it in my handbag, rustling against the bubblejet print of the sample hair-do.

So, I had a rubber bathing cap I knew I could not wear, not even as trainee Friday night door bitch at a lesbian leather bar, and I still had no idea about what to do for the hair style.

"I really need to eat something," Shona said, as we stood a minute later on blustery Turmstraße, rugged up again in our winter woollens. "So I'll see you later."

She Euro-kissed me on each cheek and I dipped into my handbag.

"Then you should take this," I said, handing her the black bathing cap. "*You* should go for the job."

Shona stepped back, half-surprise on her face. But only half.

"And you should have this too," I said, giving her the photo. "You'd make a much better door bitch than me."

"Oh," Shona said. "Thanks." She stuffed the bathing cap and the photo in her handbag, convincingly, perhaps afraid I might change my mind. "I wasn't really ..." she trailed off, for once unsure what to say.

"You'd look good in that haircut too."

"Talk soon?" she said, half question, half statement, backing away.

"Sure," I replied.

She waved goodbye and hurried down Turmstraße.

I turned in the other direction and crossed Beusselstraße for the quick walk home. I knew Shona was planning to usurp me for the job anyway, I just wanted to avoid any unpleasantness. I don't have many friends in Berlin, and while Shona would probably call me a mad, hippy-dippy non-bra-wearing rainbow freak, her friendship was more important to me than a once-a-week job.

