

EXTRACT: TESS JARAY

Colour was never something she thought about as meaningful. As significant. But she took it where she could get it. One morning, as a treat she took herself off for a rare pedicure. The boys and the girls at her local place all had a wonderfully soft and delicate touch. It was as though they were the only people in the world with that level of sensitivity. Once she had had a pedicure done by someone without that certainty and tenderness of touch and it was so painful she would have given away her mother's deepest secrets if she had been asked. She felt herself wallowing in indulgence and the slight distance from that feeling brought it home all the stronger. She relaxed. She started to nod off. She started to daydream she was lying back in a boat, a rod over the side, a gentle breeze over her toes. She opened her eyes as a man came in. It seemed unusual. The clients were mostly young women who came in for the latest in nail painting. There were pictures of the various choices in the window, one more inventive than the next. He was in late middle age, and looked a bit rough at the edges, with a large moustache. His greying hair was long at the back, done up in a plait which was studded with coloured buttons. He looked grizzled, a little scruffy. He looked like Seymour Cassel in *Minnie and Moskowitz*. She was intrigued. What was he here for? Not a manicure, surely? Perhaps he had a bad back and couldn't bend down to cut his toenails? No. He stood for a long time examining the bottles of brightly coloured nail varnish laid out on a shelf. What was he doing? He took down several bottles and sat down in front of the manicurist but a chair obscured the view and she couldn't see what he was doing; could just hear him speak to the girl, who was starting to work on him – his hands, not his feet. She heard him speak but could not hear what he said. Finally, her nails were finished. She had to pass behind the man to pay and leave and glancing down at his hand she saw two beautiful, brilliant, luminescent rainbows: two nails finished, with eight more to come. It seemed an astounding thing.