

## Nail Polish

I have thirty seven different bottles of nail polish. I keep them in a white plastic tray under my bed. Ten of them are varieties of pink, seven are red, and the remaining twenty are every color of the world I don't live in. Now, I pull them out and set them on the dressing table in my room, placing each bottle reverently in a line in front of me. I touch the tops of the bottles. I buy a new color almost every week when I'm at the grocery store. I will stand for several minutes, transfixed by the variety of colors and purchase one, *even though I always wear pink because it is the only color my husband likes*, yet, the other colors whisper possibilities to me.

"Christine, why do you wait till the last minute to do your nails?" My husband, James, asks from his closet. His voice muffled from the distance.

I exhale slowly, and return to my inspection of polishes. I choose the bottle of "Veiled" a light purple that reminds me of my high school years, when my insecurities ate me from the inside out. This was the kind of color that I wore when I met my husband, when I was sixteen with my hair in my eyes, and my heart on my sleeve.

"I was too busy to get to it earlier," I reply as I reject the bottle and slip it back into the line. My husband makes a sort of grunting laugh which says nothing and implies everything. I already know that it insinuates that I don't do enough during the day, as my decision to quit my job and stay home with our five year old son was often a source of contention. A choice that "we" had made together then somehow "I" seemed to always be paying for.

"We are going to be late if you don't get a move on," he calls from behind the door.

My eyes flick to the closet briefly. I purse my lips in irritation. I return to my polish. This time I choose "Sure Thing", a light silver with flecks of confetti. A color that I would have loved when I was sixteen, a color that I would have worn the night I gave in to the pressure of James, who claimed that the only way I could prove I loved him was to have sex with him in his late model 90's mustang.

"Christine, I really wish you would listen to me when I tell you how to fold my pants," James says as he strides from his closet across the bedroom, his crisp Dockers in hand, his brows furled. He tosses his trousers on the bed, and retrieves the ironing board from the nightstand.

"Sorry," I say blankly. I pick up a bottle of polish called "Trapped", a steel gray that seems fitting of this deluge of directives and criticisms of the minutia of my life. I entertain that thought as I watch him unfold the ironing board, his back stiff, his movements precise. He is wearing his grey shirt, red tie and loose boxers, his bare legs looking somewhat comical against the formality of his actions. He turns to retrieve his pants and I see him eye the dress I had selected.

"You aren't going to wear that, are you?" he asks, indicating with a glance the dark blue dress I had laid out on the bed. "It looks like something my Grandma would wear," he mumbles. Then he looks at me pointedly and asks, "Why don't you wear that black dress I like so much?"

I knew the dress he meant. It was skin tight, and slightly too short. A dress I had purchased for our Anniversary, and wore for our evening out. The memories of that evening were slightly hazy from too much champagne. But, I could clearly recall the feeling I had when we arrived home; we had hurriedly thanked the babysitter and rushed her out the door while suppressing giggles. We had made love right there in the kitchen, the dress discarded on the counter top. I had not worn that dress since. I glance at the blue dress through the reflection in the mirror and contemplate changing my mind. I tap my finger on the bottle of polish as I consider. Then, I remember that it was the kind of dress his secretary wore at the last company dinner. The night she leaned in toward him just a little too close and

his smile lasted just a little too long. I remember the feeling in the pit of my stomach, the cold hard feeling of suspicion that my intuition had already confirmed. I replaced the gray polish and pick up “Devious”, a red so deep that it is almost black. A color that I had bought, but didn’t wear, two weeks after, when my husband went on a business trip and my son was at my mother’s. The night that I had decided to go to dinner alone, and I had sat at the bar, staring at the menu but not ordering. I allowed myself to linger on that memory. I conjure the image of the man who had sat down next to me, choosing the bar stool next to mine even though the bar was mostly empty. His shirt was tight, and it had pulled against the defined muscles of his chest. He had struck up a conversation, and I had smiled at him, a wild and desperate confidence building in the depth of my soul. He was handsome and athletic and I couldn’t help but feel a sense of wonder and excitement that he had chosen to sit next to me. He had struck up a conversation, and at first I was reserved, as I stole sideways glances in his direction. But he had kept talking and looking at me, looking at me in such a way that I felt alive and free and young. Stories tumbled from my lips with unapologetic enthusiasm. He had taken them all in so eagerly, encouraging me to continue. We began swapping experiences; our flirtatious word play seemed to me almost cinematic. My conversation was unrestrained, a seductive strength pulsing through my body as I seemed to find all the right words. He had slowly moved closer, a small millimeter of body language that had set my skin on fire.

I set down the bottle of polish. Closing my eyes, I attempt to hold on to that feeling for just a moment more, the feeling of wild possibilities that I would never know, and had not known that night.

James sets down the iron. He efficiently curls the cord and returns the ironing board to the closet. He sits on the bed and tugs on his pants; I watch his movements in the mirror.

“When is the babysitter coming?” he asks, then notices my lack of progress and frowns.

“She should be here anytime,” I reply.

He lets out an exasperated breath of air and runs his hand through his hair. This motion I have seen so many times, I could visualize it in my mind perfectly.

“Christine, just hurry, ok?” he says, struggling to keep the irritation out of his voice.

“I’ll be right down,” I say to his back as he rises from the bed and heads out of the bedroom.

I turn and look at my reflection in the mirror. Noticing the small lines around the corner of my eyes, I sigh, and pick up a bottle of a bottle of “Surrender”, a light pink, my husband’s favorite shade. It was similar to the color that I wore my wedding day, and wore again six months later when my little boy was born.

That memory always floods back so vividly to me. I can remember holding his little hand in my hand, and the feeling of absolute joy that I had when I looked at his little face, his eyes the exact shade as my husband’s. I remember the way, my husband and I had laid in bed, our newborn son between us, marveling at this little person who we had created together.

I put the pink polish down at the front of the dressing table and toss the other bottles back into the white plastic tray. I get up, walk over to the bed and retrieve the blue dress. I put the dress back into my closet, not bothering to hang it. I then select the black dress my husband loves, and shimmy into it. I walk back to the dressing table; I grab the pink polish, and toss it into my purse, deciding that I can put it on in the car. Then, I pick up the plastic tray of nail polish bottles, cross over to the bed and bend down to lift the bed skirt, and I push the tray back under. I let my eyes linger for just a moment on the glint of colors that wink at me from their hiding place. I drop the bed skirt and cross over to the door, and I click off the light.