

PICKING OUT YOUR NAIL POLISH

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It's an ordeal, deciding the color. On your nails right now is a bright orange, garish and shocking, painted months ago for Halloween. You can't go to your grave with nails the color of a deer hunter's hat, that much we've determined. But otherwise, we're stumped. Your sister thinks mauve's best but I say it's too much like dusty, plastic flowers or kitsch country art, the kind with silhouettes of geese and bonneted girls. Lynn arrives with a sack of options, all in shades of pink with names like *Chastity*, *Miami Nice* and *Lovie Dovie*. Of course, your mom's mortified. We hold each bottle up to your hand, swollen and pale as a dead carp's underbelly. Nothing's right. I call a friend and ask what she's got. *Come look*, she says. She's pulled out a small box by the time I arrive, has it setting on the coffee table like a plate of cookies. We pick up each glass bottle, turn it, hold it up to the light, set it down, decide finally on a plain red, color of school book apples and cardinals in winter. Tucked like a heart into my coat's breast pocket, it pulses with the desperate hope we've long since given up.