

*Ode After the Gel Manicure*

I've taken up nurturing you, taken up taking the time to grow you. Before this, anxiety red and bloody, bold callus on the right ring finger where the pen rubs against its lover. When I stopped picking, I imagined you Orchid Purple, Autumn Sky, Baby Blush.

Now, I spend hours with you and your colors. I can rainbow you if I want. In any lighting, you look magical. You are the ritual of all the women I've loved and envied — you, the coveted scratcher of a naked back.

When you're long like this, I can feel skin as softness, a contrast to keratin. It must be relief to be under you. Stubbed for years and years, finally free from my fingers, you give me a beautiful habit —

I take care to care for you. You and your crescent moons on my idle thigh. You canvas, you brand-sparkling-new femme flaggers, all our polished afternoons.