

# Painted

*by* Sheila Luecht

She enjoyed painting her fingernails. Mostly she preferred the earthy, natural tones. She was not a bubble gum pink kind of girl. In the past she was decidedly au currant. Her style was more burgundy and deep reds, like a Russian lacquer box, her nails held perfect secrets.

Her mood was in her nails. She grew up filing them, making them look perfectly rounded and long. Not too long, just right for her long fingers. They were an extension of her fashion sense. People often believed they were professionally done. They were always so perfect.

At night after work, she would sit and recreate perfection if there was the slightest chip or rough edge. If necessary she would do them all over again. Did it border on a kind of obsession? One might think that it did.

There were no parties, no friends to hang around with. Her town was completely deserted most of the time. People worked in the city and then took refuge in their homes. There were no bars, no taverns, there was no nightlife. It was a dry town. If she went to one of the churches in town, there were people her own age, but that was about the only similarity. That was another world, she had not been a part of that for many, many years.

All day long she worked, she took a train into the city and took a train out early evening. Her parents worked too. One took a train in and one took a train out. One drove to the neighboring state, then drove back. It was all the same. Her siblings were all gone, moved on, married, out on their own. She was the last.

By the time she reached home, dinner would be there in thirty minutes, on the table. Not a lively table, just politeness, and calm. There were no issues of the day that needed discussing, no problems to be solved.

Everyday the problems were left in the other state or in the city, they did not come home to the town. All the young people she

worked with, all the life and chatter, well, they stayed downtown too. When others graduated from college, they moved on. When she graduated, she came home. She tried to work downtown and find her place. Each night she came back. She came back to the sameness, the routine of silence. She just did not make enough money to strike out on her own in the city, her jobs were meant for people with less talent, less ambition, but the recession did not favor a girl with her degree. She was ill prepared for the reality of her choices.

In her mind she remembered all her experiences, her adventures, as if she was remembering another life.

Poached fish, green beans and rice for dinner, once again. Clean up the table, load the dishwasher, start it, watch a few shows and do her nails.

In her mind she heard, "Make perfection easily." With each screaming stroke of the small brush she told herself, "Control that movement, do not make mistakes, do this one thing well. Do this one thing well."

