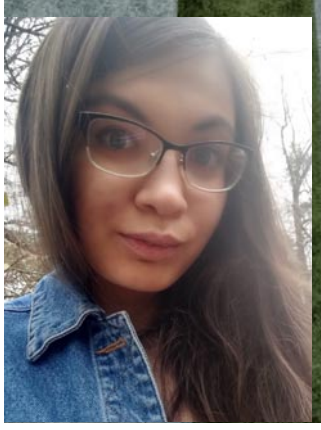
I Tell a Friend

it was nice to be taken care of/ say I dozed off with my hand in the nail tech's/ as she spoke about her sons/ as she shaped my nails almond & painted tiny landscapes/ just on the ring fingers/ I joke that all my fingers are ring fingers/ shimmy my hands to flash/ sterling silver turquoise wampum/ my grandmother purchased several of the rings/ at the PIMC giftshop/ she knew the nurses/ once girls at the Phoenix Indian School/ where my grandmother worked/ after leaving her rez/ after marrying a man with the last name Nuñez/ every December/ she wrestled a large metal tub from the garage/ remnant of the school's cafeteria/ in the tub large enough to be an incubator/ she'd mix masa well by hand/ I'd watch/ when I was born/ a nurse said / *pity an Indian baby so white*/ I chewed my nails to the quick & then tore at the quick/ now self-care/ or my nails cost so much/ I can't afford the ruin/ I joke I am a bird/ attracted to glistening/ am told my rings are *typical Indian*/ I buried a ring in the lining of my grandmother's casket/ adjusted the engagement ring/ on my mother's cold finger/ my nails long almond shaped/ my wrists widening with age/ what I'm trying to say/ is when I look at my hands/ they're not mine



Mary Leauna Christensen

Mary Leauna Christensen, an enrolled member of the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians, received her PhD from the University of Southern Mississippi. Her poetry can be found in the Southern Humanities Review, Denver Quarterly, and the Gettysburg Review, among others. Her nonfiction has appeared in the Common and in Black Warrior Review. She was named a 2022 Indigenous Nations Poets fellow for the inaugural In-Na-Po retreat and was selected as a returning fellow for 2023. Mary Leauna has also been awarded the Fireweed Fellowship for Indigenous women writers under 40 to attend the Storyknife Writers Retreat in Homer, Alaska in 2025.

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