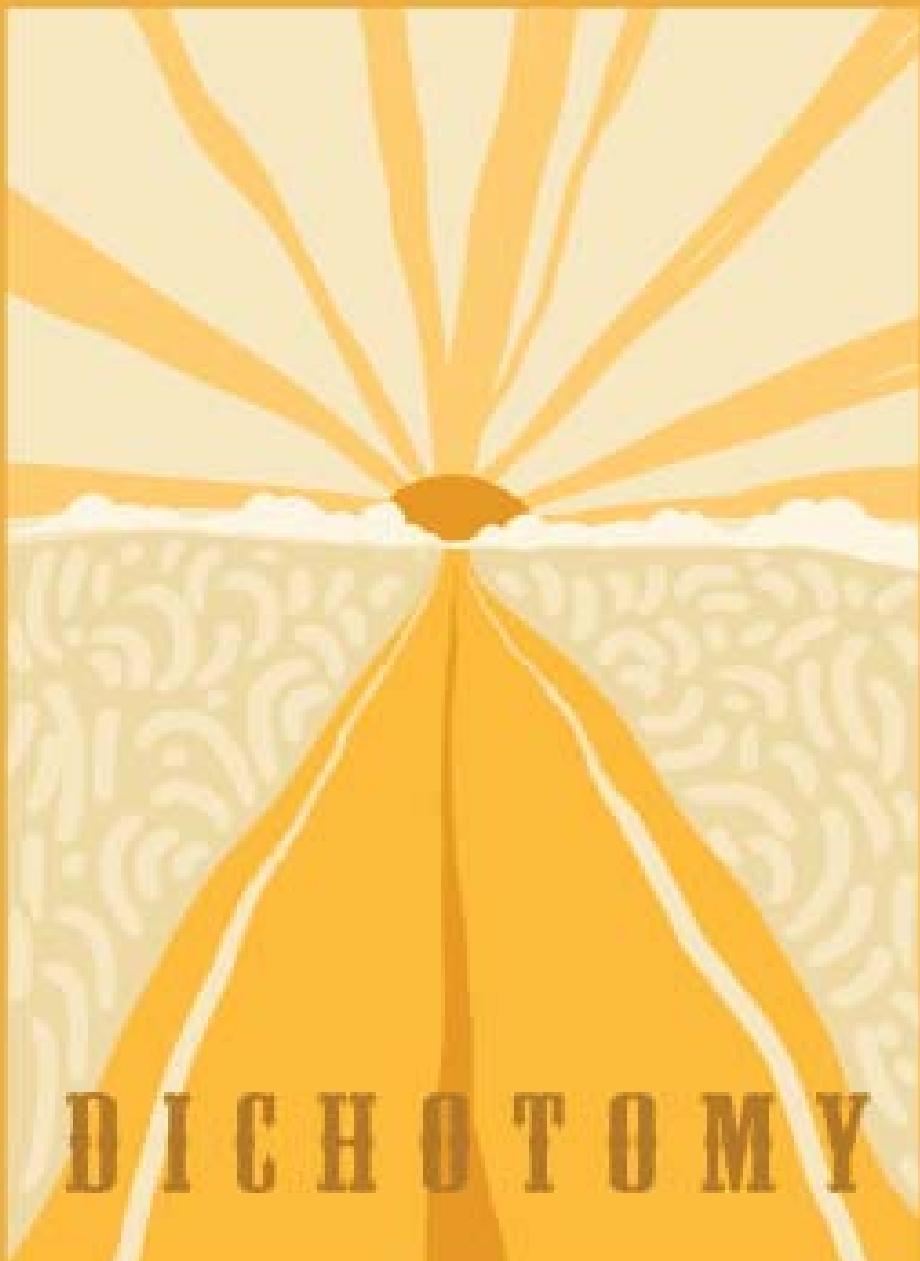


UNKNOWN



D I C H O T O M Y

POOLESVILLE HIGH SCHOOL
LITERARY MAGAZINE
2017

**“Reality is merely an illusion,
albeit a very persistent one.”**

- Albert Einstein

Poolesville High School
17501 West Willard Rd.
Poolesville, MD 20837
240-740-2400

falcons.literarymag@gmail.com
Cover Art: Sam Arabia

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Staff List

Flo Ning*	Editor-in-Chief
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*Manuscript Editors

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A Second Chance

By Bryan Foo

Sitting, sitting, sitting. It was all I did, each day, when the doorbell rang. I opened the door to find a small bag sitting at the doorstep. The street was empty, with not so much as a glimpse of another person. I cautiously opened the bag. Inside was a wrapped loaf of bread, a few bottles of water, and a few apples. A single piece of paper lay at the bottom of the bag, underneath the food.

Hey, stranger. You probably don't remember me, but a few days ago, you managed to steal a hundred-dollar bill from my wallet. I managed to track you down to this house. Now, I understand that many people have their problems in life, so I decided to leave you some food, along with the promise of more every week, on the premise that you'll stop stealing from others like me.

I stepped back inside my small house and shut the door. Astounded by what had just happened, I quickly dropped the food in the kitchen and ran to my study. Rummaging through drawers, I found five twenties and stuffed them into an envelope. I then went to my desk, grabbed a pen, and scribbled a short note on a piece of scrap paper.

*To the one who generously left me food,
Thank you for the bread and water. I apologize for stealing from you, but you must understand, I
need to live. Here is your money back. Thank you very much, stranger.*

That night, I placed the envelope, along with the note, at the front door. Smiling a genuinely warm smile for the first time in months, I went to sleep content. The next day, the envelope was still there, but the note was gone, and replaced by another.

*I appreciate the gesture, but I have enough money. Keep the hundred dollars. I will be back early
next Saturday morning.*

For the next year, this continued. I stopped my thieving habits and received food from the stranger every few days. During this time, we kept up a steady note exchange, striking up conversations about the stranger's life. He had a wife and two children. Although both he and his wife made lots of money, they donated most of it to charities. Multiple times, the stranger asked me to meet him, face-to-face. Every time, I refused, saying that, after all he had done to help me, there was simply no way I could face him. The food kept coming.

Then, 365 days after the first bag of food had been left at my doorstep, I opened the door to discover a cake sitting on the ground. The note beside it read:

I know this isn't your real birthday, but it is exactly one year after the first time I gave you a gift. I do not know your face, or even your name, but please know that I consider you a friend. Also, you know, we have our bad times, but what makes a person truly strong is for them to come out of it. Friend, won't you consider rejoining society and finding a job?

It was two weeks before I happily wrote back.

Thank you, friend, for all you have done for me in the past year. Today, I finally found myself a job, small, not high-paying, but with the possibility of promotions. Because of you, I finally have an honest job. Once more, thank you. You have given me a new chance at life.



Photo: Emma Bentz

I found a note the very next day, as I was leaving for work.

I will be moving out of the area soon. We may not be able to communicate like this much longer. Let's meet, face-to-face, next Sunday, and we can talk about this new job of yours. I will be at the coffee shop two blocks away from nine to ten in the morning.

I left no reply, but on Sunday morning, I dressed myself in my best clothes and headed outside to the coffee shop. It was a nice spring day, with a light breeze. The ground was damp, the air moist, from a light rain the day before. Everything felt like spring. I thought, a perfect day for the season of beginnings. My mind went back to a year ago, and what I did when I went outside.

On days like this, I would've been looking for targets to pickpocket. I silently uttered another profound thank you to the stranger I was about to meet. If not for him, I would almost certainly still be living my life of dishonesty.

The coffee shop was in sight now. I would get there within a minute. My thoughts kept going back to my former life. Remembering what I had learned about the man through our notes, I felt even worse about myself. Here was a man who only gave and gave. Compared to him, I, who used to only take and take, was an utter failure of life.

I was almost in front of the coffee shop when I stopped. I couldn't do this. I couldn't bear facing the man who had given me a second chance at life, not when I had so badly wasted my first. With a small, sad smile on my face, I turned around and silently walked back home. That night, I left a single word outside my door.

Sorry.

Days passed. Then weeks. The note was never taken. It sat there, in front of my door, until one day, a gust of strong wind blew it away. The stranger never contacted me again. To this day, I wonder what became of him. I may never meet this man, but until the end of my days, I will never forget this man to whom I owe my life.

House Like Bukowski

By Pauline Mnev

It was a house out of a Bukowski poem.
Foreclosure,
smooth stone walls hidden behind
the trees swallowing the presence,
overgrown.

A hole cut through the basement wall
lead to a dirt tunnel
full of empty cans and shattered bottles.
Dark, wet, and incomplete.

Silence and the smell of mold filled the air.
A chill crept in from the outside, like poison.
The house had broken windows and decks,
but nothing was more broken than its atmosphere.

With grand behavior and a timid reality,
ceilings grand and elevated,
the creaking crooked floors
can't keep up with the elegance.



Photo: Kylie Cowger

Mask Shop

By Sangavi Manickavel

There is a mask shop down the street from my
house,

I find myself visiting it a lot.

The masks come in all shapes and sizes

Some colorful and exciting,

Others bland and boring,

They have something for everyone.

You can be whoever you want with these masks,

Or whoever someone else wishes you were,

You can please everyone with these masks,

With one truly minor side effect,

You may forget who you are.

Who you truly are.

For if you asked me now who I am,
The only answer I could give with any certainty
would be my name.

For the rest,

my loves, my hates, down even to my deepest
desires,

I can no longer say whether these emotions
are my own,
or stolen from those I once so desperately
wished to please.

Loire River || By Kimberly Penn

After I climbed up the rocks,
I sat and began to shiver,
Mesmerized by the endless stream of crystal
Known as the Loire River;
And watching this put me in a trance
That gave me hope, even if it was just a sliver.

I traveled the world
And as I sat and shivered
The most beautiful sight I have ever seen—
Is most certainly the Loire River—
There was nothing more spectacular,
And looking down was the moon, a sliver.

Returning home with a heavy heart,
No longer a need to shiver,
I miss the mesmerizing transparency of
The Loire River;
Photographs are all I have to remember
The memories left, only a sliver,
I cannot feel the wind,
No longer a need to shiver.

The season starts to change,
And the winter air makes me shiver,
I am warmed by the thought of
Returning once again to see the magnificent Loire River
And I prepare for the day when I can climb those rocks again,
That dream gives me hope, just the smallest sliver.

Photo: Anjali Kalra





Violent Yellow, Like Tape

A violent yellow, like police tape
Speaking of crimes committed and not yet solved
Among the gentle green of nature
Made no greener by what the sign represents
Walkers pull their dogs' leashes, guiding
Their paws away from the invisible poison
But no one is there for the birds
The squirrels and chipmunks who dash
Unencumbered through the green, oblivious
To the significance of yellow
And no one can protect themselves
From the chemicals wafting through
Noses and mouths, and down through throats
So we focus on the green, the universal
Color of safety
And after three days the yellow is gone
Its ghost remaining to haunt

By Rachel Pepper

Photo: Sam Arabia



The Wall

By Anna Mayer

I'm sitting here, staring at a wall. There is no one here anymore. I wonder if they have forgotten about me. It wouldn't be a surprise. It's been two weeks already, but at that point there had been others. They seem scared of me. I begin to look around. I've studied the wall so many times that I know every crack, every hole and indent caused by people trying to get out. Maybe once I know the wall well enough, I'll find the flaws that will let me out.

There was another wall that I used to study. We all did. We didn't have a choice because there was nothing else to look at. Except, that one didn't tell stories, for there was no depth to it. There was always a sunny image. It was always perfect. This wall that stands in front of me changes. Each person that stands before it tries to break it, each dent and crack holds a story. A few days later there is a knock. That's weird, I think to myself.

"Is someone there?" A meek voice calls out. The knock wasn't at the door. It was next to me, through the walls of another cell. It sounded like a child, no more than 12 years old. What could they be doing with a child in here?

"Yes, I'm here." A heavy sigh escapes out of the other person. "Are you alright? Who are you?"

"I'm Nadia. I thought I was the only one left. I arrived last night, but it was so quiet that I thought I was alone, until I heard breathing."

"It'll be okay, Nadia. I'm Armina. We have each other."

"Thank you." It was a whisper barely audible and I could tell that Nadia was scared.

"Nadia," I start, not sure what to ask, where to start. "Have you ever read a book before?"

"No, but I know what they are. My mom used to hide them all over the house. They always seemed so mysterious to me, like they were objects from a different world." Not quite, I think, but they certainly belonged in a different time. "Could you tell me another story? I want to know more about the world. The real one, behind the Wall." There isn't much to tell Nadia. The world that now lays beyond the Wall is mostly empty. We are told that there is nothing for us over there and that it would be dangerous for us to escape. Here we are safe. I sit with my back against this gray wall, listening for any signs of Nadia. I want to make sure that I am not imagining her.

"I'm sorry Nadia, I can't remember much." Though, she asks about the attacks that she has only heard about, so I tell her what I know even though it is all a blur. It may have been half a year, but everything had been destroyed, so everything needed to be rebuilt. Except, they didn't rebuild it the same way. The Authorities told us that if they did that, the same thing could happen again. No one wanted that, so we listened. They seemed to be protecting us. I felt like I was safe in my own home, so I watched the storm and chaos of rebuilding in the protection of my own home and it wasn't until it was too late that I realized there were cracks and everything I had was ruined.

A voice interrupted my thoughts. "Armina, why do we all have scars on our heads." She doesn't know. I didn't realize they were never told. I remember my surgery. I was old enough, but now they are done on babies and I guess they are never told.

"Because," I break off. I wasn't sure what to say. "Because they want to control us. There is a little silver device in all of us, meant to deprive us of our thoughts." I can feel the anger inside of me growing, the rage is growing thick with tears, but I no longer care if anyone hears me talking. They already think I am insane. "There is a device attached to our brains meant to make sure we do not say anything, think anything, that could hurt anyone else. It's always about making sure that everyone else is okay. But what about me? I have things to say, and I don't mean to hurt anyone, but I have things I want people to know."

"Is that why you broke the Wall?"

"Yes." After years of them trying to control my thoughts, I had lost control. I tried to break the Wall. I wanted other people to remember what I remembered. I wanted people to experience what I once experienced. The details of that day aren't clear to me anymore.

"It was very admirable. What you did, I mean. It's also the reason I'm here. I tried to protest at school, but they didn't appreciate that very much. I was really scared, at first. I was all alone, but I feel better now." I smiled to myself as I listened to Nadia speak.

"I have a question for you now, Nadia."

"Anything. What do you want to know?"

"What does your name mean?" It was a weird question, I know.

"Hope. It means hope."

That's what I thought I had read a long time ago. I closed my eyes now, still smiling.

"I feel better, now. Now that I know you. I have hope."



Photo: Coleman Martinis

A close-up photograph of a person's hand reaching towards a wall. The wall is covered in numerous small, realistic-looking eyes of various colors (brown, blue, green) and sizes, some looking directly at the viewer and others slightly off-camera. The lighting is dramatic, with strong shadows and highlights on the hand and the wall.

Perception

By Dahye Kang

They say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder,
But really, one could say that about anything.

Where one person sees dark, another may see light.
Where one person sees evil, another may see good.
Where one person sees despair, another may see hope.

They say that beauty is in the eye of the beholder,
But really, one could say that about anything.

A B C D E

Poem By Anna Mayer

At first it follows behind you but you can out run it,
ignore it.

Then it catches up to you.
Knocking on your door.

Once you answer, it invites itself in,
makes itself at home.

Try as you might,
it is not leaving.

So, you do what you know.
You learn to live again.

With time you find
that maybe your guest isn't so bad,
it keeps you skeptical,

curious,
and most importantly
humble.

L M N O P

Q R S T U

V W X Y Z

A Poem

By Pauline Mnev

We all know what a poem looks like.
The structure of a poem looks like a ladder,
The words building up the lines,
The lines making up the rungs,
The rungs making up the ladder,
The reader making his way down.

Quite a bit of the time,
The words tend to rhyme.
Each line ending in a sound,
The next one brings it back around.

They have absurd awkward alliteration
Forcing us into a terrible tongue twister,
And always adding a bit of trouble,
It's strange silly and sometimes stupid.

Teachers make you analyze them,
Highlight, underline, and circle the words,
Find some meaning in the similes, metaphors, and symbols,
“Look between the lines”
But sometimes there’s nothing there.

They’re about love, life, beauty, and death.
They’re sad, they’re boring, and they’re funny.
They’re meaningful, confusing.
They make you think.

You can write one about absolutely anything.
It can mean something to you or to others,
Or it can mean nothing at all,
Like this one.

Highs and Lows

She rises and laughs
Rays of golden light stream in
Time to start the day

Outside on the streets
With her schedule in mind
She moves with purpose

Nothing goes to plan
Mistakes followed by regret
She's disappointed

After a long day
She thinks of her goals and dreams
And becomes content

She sits, looks around
Silver moonlight filters in
Time to go to bed

By Dahye Kang

Photo: Pauline Mnev

Cooking Thoughts of You

**Today I cooked a bowl
Of thoughts about you
It was sweet**

**And it was sour
And it warmed me up
In a way nothing else
Could.**

**By Christina Zhang
Photo: Flo Ning**



I am

By Annabelle Headley

Who am I?

What am I?

On one hand, a first generation American, the daughter of an immigrant.

On the other, an nth generation American.

I am mixed. Multiracial. Métisse. Mulatto.

Black and white.

I, the color of caramel. From a chocolate skinned mother; she, born in the Ivory Coast, married to an ivory man.

I am more than the color of my skin. I am their pasts, their feelings. However, some only see what is skin-deep.

“What are you?” they’ve always asked.

“**Black and white**,” I’ve always answered.

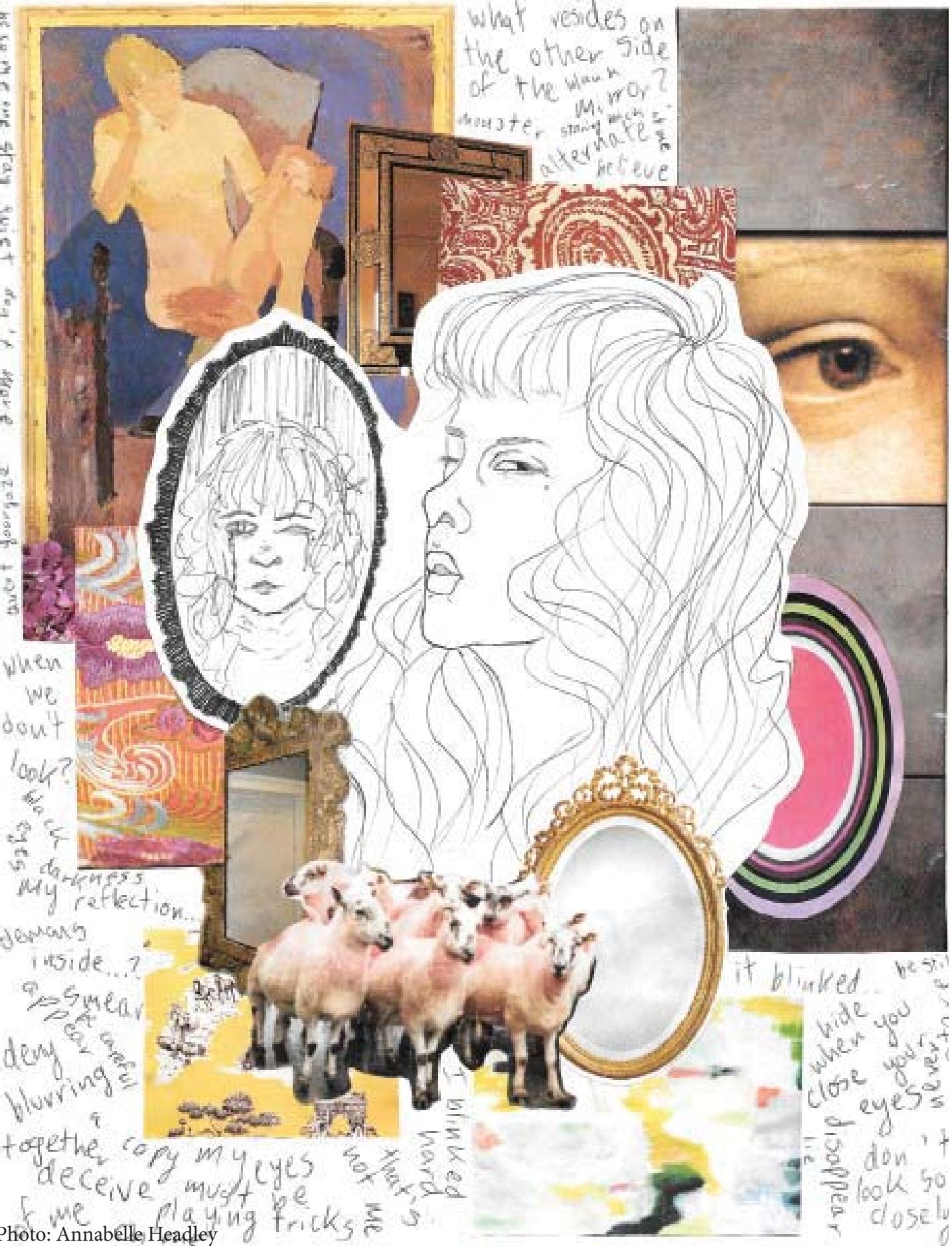
I’ve given them the answer they want. What would happen if I were to say “I’m American”? I assume they would ask, But what are you *really*?”, as if I wasn’t born in this nation’s capital, as if I am not a citizen of the United States of America, as if I am not really an American. Must one be white through and through to be considered an American?

I am proud of the color of my skin and of my cultures. I am integration, I am love, I am a breaking of boundaries. I am something entirely new in my lineage.

While I am proud of my color and where it comes from, I do not wish to be seen for my color alone. A person is not defined by the pigment of their skin. A person is made by what they’ve been dealt and how they overcome those challenges; they are defined by their actions and their words.

A person is more than the color of their skin and the stereotypes that come with it. I am more than those stereotypes and I am more than the color of my skin. **I am myself.**

what resides on
the other side
of the wall?
Mr. or
mister, story teller,
they believe



Love Song

By Pauline Mnev

As I listen to sad love songs I hope that they'll never be about us.
They speak of love that turned to hate, and I am scared to think that one day
You might not be on my side.

One day you will stop telling me goodnight, not because you fell asleep
Right before you had the chance, but because you won't really care.
I won't wait and anticipate your response,
Because it will never come.



The day the admiration we had for each other ends,
Whether with a bang or a sizzle coming to slow end,
it will be over.

Whether it be my fault or yours, or no one's at all,
It's almost inevitable.

Photo: Bridgette Hammett



A Familiar Feeling

there's a feeling I know all too well
 I get it every night
 from one to five A.M.
 my stomach feels like a lead pit
 my shoulders groan
 my eyes burn from the blue light of my screen
 my fingers fidget
 but once they hit the keys
 they stay there for hours, paralyzed
 no matter how much work I have to do,
 I just stare at the cursor
 blinking on and off
 In the end I give up
 after hours of doing nothing
 I sigh, close my eyes,
and continue my perpetual cycle of incompetence

By Pamela Kramer Photo: Samuel Arabia



The final bell rings
I don't hurry out of the cold art room to
those bright yellow buses
I walk idly to a grey room filled with books
and computers
Sitting, studying, dreading those next few
hours.

I go back into that beige locker room
I change, putting on teal and coral shoes
Those that give me balance and bounce
Support my bones, my joints.

I run.

We drive, the sun setting or already dark
I wobble up creaking steps
I eat a meal that's too hot, burning my
tongue

As I finish worksheets and writing.

I shower, rinsing off soreness and grime.
I pack my two bags, place them next to one
another.

I turn off the bright light, crawl blindly into
bed

Pulling covers up to my cold shoulders
Heavy eyes staring at a glowing screen.

I turn it off.

I sleep

Only to wake again, to return to the
beginning.

By Annabelle Headley
Photo: Sangavi Manickavel

Cyclical

I wake up
5:27 a.m..
I shower
Warm water prying open
Squinting, puffy eyes.
I tiptoe back down the hall to my room
Put on the same playlist
Upbeat songs and only minutes left
Rushing me to get dressed.
I hurriedly grab both bags
Slinging one onto my back
The other's black and pink straps gripped
tightly
Crescents being imprinted on my palm.
We drive to the library
Where we wait for those flashing lights
In the blue dark before sunrise.
I climb up those black steps
A polite "good morning" and a slight smile.
I slump down in the first seat
Packed in with a bag on my lap and another
at my side.
Earbuds in, filling my head with soothing,
soft, cool, and rough voices.
I sleep.
We arrive at the old brick building
I am the first one off.
I walk down near empty halls, drop off one
bag in the beige locker room
Glancing in the mirror at my dark eyes, with
plum circles underneath.
I go, laughing, smiling, writing, staying



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**“I believe in everything until it
is disproved.”**

- John Lennon

Poolesville High School
17501 West Willard Rd.
Poolesville, MD 20837

240-740-2400
falcons.literarymag@gmail.com
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