

## **The Painting in the Mirror**

By Logan Moran – Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School

As I step into the powder room adjacent to my attic bedroom, I take in my surroundings. The afternoon light streams through the stained glass window, dappling the walls with color. The messy array of pastes, sprays, and brushes are strewn across the surfaces, each exactly where I left them. I turn on the faucet, waiting for the water to warm. As it washes over my face, I feel refreshed, and when I'm done, I reach for my towel to carefully pat my face dry. I stand up, and when the towel drops, I catch a glimpse of the painting in the mirror.

Some days it's a Picasso, and I see not a unified person but rather a combination of different features, both feminine and masculine.

I see the wide "cow eyes," as my sister used to call them when she wanted to put me down. Attached to those are the long and dark eyelashes that my ophthalmologist used to say she was jealous of. I poke and prod at my cheeks as I try to figure out where fat ends and bone begins. They are rounder than I'd like—a still lingering reminder of my childhood and the first part of my adolescence, when estrogen ran through my veins.

The testosterone brought with it the thick eyebrows of my mother's side and the sharper nose of my father's side. I see the Adam's apple which accompanied the long-awaited voice drop. I see what could be the beginnings of a beard.

If I stare long enough, my features start to distort. I see what I hope to be my future, and I see the girl I used to be. I can see everything except the real face that stares back at me. I know these features create a coherent face, one that's perceived by others just as I perceive theirs, but on Picasso days I can't imagine it. Try though I may, I can't combine these features into a

person. They exist individually, reminding me of the progress I've made and the things I will never be able to paint over.

The pain has eased, as the testosterone replaced the estrogen. Now most days are Van Gogh days—aesthetically pleasing but never perfectly smooth.

Painter and painted, with each injection and exercise I make contact with the canvas once again, but the paint is not without its flaws. The acne that plagued my face for two years has left scars. A side effect and therefore a constant reminder of my transition. I didn't have to take the testosterone. I was choosing to do this to myself. Still, it was the right decision.

Each brush stroke builds upon the previous layer until the canvas is transformed. Each stroke will never be as smooth and the feeling never as warm as a Rembrandt or Vermeer. Nevertheless I continue to paint, content with the beauty found in imperfection.