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SECTION INTRO: Facade

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FACADE

When you look in the mirror, who do you see? Is it who you are or who you seem to be? There's something about those moments of uncertainty that remind you to wipe that foggy mirror in the warm and humid bathroom. They tell you exactly who you are when all the lights are off and the room is empty. They are a subtle reminder of all the mysteries in this fateful universe: those that lie beneath the pretty faces and picture-perfect smiles; those that uncover every coveted aspiration; and those that lead to the realization that everything that glitters isn't always gold.

But that's only part of it. Because until

you wipe that mirror, you don't realize that the haze and smoke have clouded your vision. You're so used to it that you forget it's even there. And the truth is, we're all staring at a clouded mirror—trying to see through it and doing our best to make sense of who we are and who we want to be. Day in and day out, we put on the perfect face or mask, often creating a warped perception of ourselves. The mask of assimilation. The mask of some imaginary man's standard that fits so well that we forget it's there. We fail to realize that we're peering at ourselves through a reflection we can't see.

Most times, life's easier this way. Since

Layout by Aaqilah Wright. Photograph by Nina Bridges.

our paths have been paved for us, it's best to put on our favorite sneakers that will help us walk the long mile. Even if those sneakers are a representation of the shackles that chain our feet, we still wear them. But at what cost? Validation? Being the hottest on the block? Erasure of cultural impact and history? Who's to say?

In the end, what matters most? Is it the secrets and mysteries behind that smile, the mask that is that smile, or every other outer attribute that validates our false realities? Let's face it, regardless of who we are or the mask we wear to conceal that very being, it doesn't change the fact that people will always view us

from their perspective. They will make us up to be the person they think we should be, even if it's not who we are.

So maybe the facade is necessary for the preservation of self because we know who we really are underneath. Or is that more of a reason to take it off? Because who we are is permanent and a part of us like a scar. But if you choose not to take off the mask, at least wipe down the mirror.

We hope you enjoy the five stories in this section that illuminate our efforts to confront the truth each day.

—Aaqilah Wright, Brandon Belton, and Andrew Wallman