

## **Turtles**

By Hana Sor – Montgomery Blair High School

She had never really done anything memorable. She had never seen a play that made her cry, had never given herself a haircut she later regretted, gone to the zoo, fallen in love, worn something risque. She had never traveled to another country. She had never experimented with what she liked, never been kissed, never felt pleasure nor heartache.

As she walked, she passed by mannequins waving in form-fitting wedding gowns and bustiers that made them look like pinup dolls. She saw herself in the reflection. She was wearing a white strapless dress with a veil covered in embroidered flowers, and under, a face of unshed tears and the purest of joy. She saw a lithe body, no remnants of her boyish hands to be seen. She was taller, her hair cascaded in rivulets down her shoulders, dripping onto the lace of her dress.

She blinked, the dress returning to its place. A clerk caught her looking, and, ashamed, she turned around, back onto the sidewalk.

Isabella felt herself getting lightheaded, and her hospital gown blew this way and that. She sat down on a bench that looked across the neighborhood she had always lived in. The same man sold newspapers beside the corn nut stand, and the same group of Old people walked hand in hand to their yoga classes. The sky was dotted with clouds, and a bluebird perched herself on a lamppost.

She felt a figure plop down next to her on the bench, and when she slowly looked to her left, a small girl, no more than six years old, wearing a baby pink shift dress with a ribbon in her hair, was opening a box, a box she knew all too well. They were Turtles.

She had a small smile on her face, her short brown hair tangled from playing, and she carefully pulled the chocolates out of their encasing. The little girl looked up at her, a thoughtful gaze coasting across her eyes. She stretched out her short arm, a Turtle on top of her palm, gesturing to Isabella. “Wanth one?”, she asked, her mouth full with sticky caramel. Isabella stared down at the chocolate. It had the deep rich color of Jorge Ramons eyes, and the little girl had a sweet tooth. She smiled at the girl, taking the chocolate carefully from her grasp. “They’re my favorite.”, Isabella said, opening her mouth to take a bite. Her eyes closed.

The next morning, Isabella was back in her bed, unmoving. Marjorie was in the bathroom calling her nephew, and the trees blew all the same outside. Nurses frantically checked her diagnostics, and time slowed down. Isabella was drifting away, to a place with chocolates and love and little girls who would offer her sweets from their small hands. She couldn’t hear the nurses, all she could do was look down at her hands and wait. She thought about her parents. She thought about Jorge Ramon, and about the little girl with the pink shift dress. And even now, sitting limp on this hospital bed, she thought of Turtles. A nurse waved in her face, then resumed her work with her heart monitor. She closed her eyes. And then suddenly, hidden in her molar, almost imperceptible, she found a piece of caramel stuck to her teeth.