

To view our wish list on a blog post, click the link below!

<https://www.charityalyse.com/blog/teamfreshqueens-pitch-wars-wishlist>



Hi friends!

We're Charity and Cimone, a.k.a. #TeamFreshQueens (It's a play on Fresh Prince of Belair. We're 90's kids, whattdaya say?) Before we get started with our wish list, we want to tell you a bit about Pitch Wars and introduce ourselves.

What is Pitch Wars?

Great question! We know just how to answer it! Pitch Wars is a mentoring program where published/agented authors, editors, or industry interns choose one writer each to spend three months with revising their manuscript. It ends in February with an Agent Showcase, where agents can read a pitch/first page and can request to read more! How amazing is that?! We are honored to be featured with so many amazing mentors. The writing community has been such a safe space for us to grow in, we are blessed to give back in this way.

We are SO VERY excited to be co-mentors in PitchWars 2021 and can't wait to read all of your submissions!! Before we get started with our wish list, we want to tell you a little bit about ourselves and our writing journeys!





Charity: Hi!! *waves exuberantly* I'm Charity! It's so great to meet you! I've been writing since I was five years old. I used to use the ENTIRETY of my kindergarten recess to rewrite my favorite fairy tales Black. (Yes, you heard that right.) In my stories, Repunzel had box braids, Sleeping Beauty was Sleeping Beyoncé, and the Princes' in all of these tales had varying hairstyles from fades to dreadlocks. My teacher didn't take too kindly to these stories and assured me that I'd never be a writer because NO ONE would ever be interested in stories

like these. I'm proud to say that after 20 years, I never gave up! I'll be publishing my debut novel, *OTHER SIDE OF THE TRACKS* with Simonteen in Fall of 2022. You can find a bit more about it and add it to Goodreads [here!](#)

Listen friends, I totally understand what it's like to be buried under rejection after rejection. Before getting my book deal, I received 200+ query rejections for my manuscript. There were times that I wanted to give up. Times that I was drowning in my tears under my covers with my kindergarten teacher's words echoing through my brain. I couldn't even walk in a bookstore for the longest time without breaking out into tears. I knew my novel needed to be published, but the rejections piling within my email box weren't showing that would ever happen. My mom thankfully kept encouraging me to believe in my novel, and I'm grateful she did. You may find yourself in this same place right now. Pitch Wars may be the final chance you're giving that manuscript. My first piece of advice is this: PLEASE be gentle with yourself. You finished a manuscript, and that's A LOT already. I am so PROUD of you! You should be too! Next, you are SO brave for advocating and fighting for your manuscript to be the best it can be. Listen! We both understand the struggle. Being a writer is downright HARD. Thankfully, even through all of the hardships that come with writing, we've found a safe haven tucked deep within the folds of community. Being able to encourage the writing community has been a dream come true. Since getting my book deal, I've had the pleasure of hosting an IG Live show on my Instagram called Don't Quit Your Daydream, where traditionally published authors encourage writers never to give up on their dreams. Having this opportunity to find and encourage a mentee closely, is another dream come true! Rest assured, Cimone and I are here for you! We're here to offer you encouragement, hype you up, and help you turn that manuscript into the best it can be! We can't wait to read your submissions!



Cimone: Hi! I've been writing novels for 5 years and freelance editing for almost as long. Helping another writer improve their craft is one of the most rewarding feelings in the world for me. I'm also a grade A fan and have put every adult in my immediate family on This Is Us. (Not literally on the show. I mean, I've turned them all into fans.) If I love something, I shout about it. I'm excited to find a mentee whose manuscript I can hype up for years to come. If

you're reading this and thinking of submitting to us, and you've written a book, I'm already so proud of you! By submitting to us, you're giving us a gift, and we appreciate it.

Without further ado....on to our wish list!



Overarching Wants!

We're primarily looking for YA/NA Contemporary novels.

Cimone, in the spirit of making fetch happen, really wants publishing to subdivide YA Contemporary into categories named after breakfast foods, so we're calling them: Eggs (serious Contemporary), Pancakes (light and fluffy Contemporary), Bacon (humorous Contemporary with serious themes), and Grits (dark, gritty Contemporary). We're also seeking Magical Realism and Fabulism, a.k.a. Contemporary with magical elements. (We're tentatively calling that coffee cake.)

Here's What We're Looking For:

Age category: YA or New Adult, but we're **not** seeking manuscripts set in college. We'd like to see New Adult where the characters do something other than college, like enter the workforce, or follow their dreams! **(We may suggest you switch your NA to YA depending upon the story, so keep that in mind.)**

Setting: Realistic. We are accepting Contemporary but not Historical Fiction; we're okay with the middle ground sometimes called Nostalgic Fiction. For this purpose, the mid-nineties are as far back as we're willing to go.

Heat level: We're okay with books that contain sex, but we'd prefer fade-to-black or "closed door" sex scenes.

Swearing: Swearing is fine.

We are also open to stories w/ religious themes and crises of faith: (We are both Christians and that's the faith we understand the best, but we are open to books about other religions as well! They are so powerful!) A good example of a book like this is, *INTERMENT* by Samira Ahmed.

The Black experience: We would love to see stories that show the full spectrum of the Black experience! This is not the only type of story we're open to, by any means; we just wanted to note that it's something we'd really like across all subgenres.

Diversity: We LOVE diversity!!!

Character motivation must be clear. If you as the writer do not understand your character's "why", the reader will not understand. We love character-driven stories, but their motivation has to be clear by the middle of the manuscript.



We LOVE a well-written and well-thought-out Serious Contemporary story! We both grew up reading stories and watching shows that shed a light on the dark parts of young adult reality, that lighter stories tend not focus on. Have you ever listened to a song that made your little teenage heart feel both seen and known all at the same time? We've all marveled at the artist's ability to move us in the course of 4 minutes. Like Taylor Swift and Tupac! These songs aren't afraid to talk about what it's like to experience heartbreak, lost friendships, the highs and lows of relationships, inner-city living, and feeling lost.

We want those songs in manuscript form.

Give us ALL the **#feels!**

We want to read stories that feel like a soapy/dramatic episode of *Degrassi* (from the early 2000's...you watched it right?) Or highly commercial serious Contemporary like "Gossip Girl" that touches on subjects such as classism within highschool settings and well, the rest of the world! Give us stories where characters help us realize that it's, "okay not to be okay." That it's okay to struggle and overcome slowly, we're patient. We love character-driven stories, so even if the setting doesn't change, like the book "Stolen" by Lucy Christopher, or like the movie *The Breakfast Club*, we don't mind! We'd be

alright staying in the same place, as long as we get to know your realistic characters and see their growth.

We want to see subjects tackled such as perfectionism, societal expectations, domestic violence within teen relationships, overcoming, and most importantly, growth!! Again, stories that aren't afraid to be REAL. Characters who have been FLESHED out and do not read the same with their own distinct voices and personalities ready to tell us stories that will tug on our heartstrings, and leave us drowning in a pile of our tears and tissues by the end.

Our favorite Serious Contemporary books include the QUEEN Sarah Dessen's "The Truth About Forever" and "This Lullaby".

We also like the entire Gossip Girl series, "If You Come Softly" by Jacqueline Woodson, "The Black Kids" by Christina Hammonds Reed, "Stay" by Deb Caletti, and "My Life in Black and White" by Natasha Friend.

Note: **Please do not send us Serious Contemporary that has themes of suicide, death by cancer or another illness, on or off the page rape and sexual assault.**



Light Contemporary (Pancakes and Bacon):

We want all the bubbly feels that Light Contemporary can bring us. If you wrote a story that made you happy and smiling while writing it, we want to read it too! We want to join the happiness and smiles! Give us Light Contemporary with romance that will make us swoooooon, like *Happily Ever After's* by Elise Bryant. Friendship stories like *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*. We want summer road trip stories, and just entering a new school stories. Give us all the awkward narratives about prom, musical theatre, camps, and taking up summer jobs after plans fall apart like *Unexpected Everything* by Morgan Matson. Show us stories centered around friendship and family bonds, wedding planning, bonds between characters and animals, and food! A person can NEVER read too many stories that can make you gain a whole appetite right after eating.

We want to read stories that will make us feel giddy! Like we're floating on cloud 9 for days after just because it's so cute, light, and fluffy! Again, as always, we are open to reading anything, but would LOVE to see a diverse take on traditional Light Contemporary. Give us POC leads. Specifically, we'd love to see stories that don't just feature Black leads, but stories that understand Black Culture. We want to see Blackness embraced down to the little details, like Black hair appreciation! We want to see the joys that come with being Black. Don't be shy about writing about the pains too, because that's the entire Black experience; pain and joy that marks our strength. We LOVE to see it. Black Love. Black Love. Black Love. WE WANT TO SEE BLACK LOVE! Think *Love and Basketball*! Other Light Contemporary books, authors, and television shows that we enjoy are:

Gilmore Girls

The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants

Morgan Matson

Elise Bryant

Liara Timani



Dark Contemporary (Grits)

We do not shy away from books that tackle tough themes. Give us books that are raw, real, and make us feel something, even if they make us uncomfortable in a good way. Give us books that show the harsher realities of life in a compelling way. We're open to books that will make us think without telling us **what** to think, and sometimes that means books that have an air of moral grayness. One of us considers the Shawshank Redemption to be a favorite movie, and there's a quote in the movie about someone crawling through a river of crap (to paraphrase) and coming out clean. This is the type of thing we'd like to see in a dark Contemporary novel—a character who goes through adversity and survives. The ending doesn't have to be happy; there's a broad range of ending types that might work well for these kinds of books, and we're open to many kinds, but one we particularly like is a not-perfectly-happy-but-somewhat-hopeful ending that feels earned. Think "Heroine" by Mindy McGinnis or "Challenger Deep" by Neal Shusterman. (More on "Challenger Deep" in the next section.)

Also, concerning books like “Heroine”: “Heroine” is an issue book. We are **absolutely fine with issue books**, but what makes “Heroine” so compelling is the well-developed main character. “Heroine” is not a book about an addiction affecting a faceless main character. It’s a book about a character with wants and needs and dreams; following this character as she struggles with an addiction is heartbreaking and affecting, so please do give us issue books where the character stands out more than the issue.

While we do love gritty books, we are **not** seeking Thrillers. In our minds, the difference between a Thriller and a grits book is the suspension of disbelief. Contemporary Thrillers are realistic, but their story logic is the tiniest bit above the ground; in essence, this makes deaths in the story less sad. If death or other major crimes in your story are less tragedies and more “oh, snap” plot devices, this is not going to be for us. No shade to those stories! Thrillers are great, but we are not looking to mentor them. We are okay with books that contain death (as long as it isn’t from illness).

Also, please keep in mind that we are not seeking books about cancer, terminal illness, suicide, or sexual assault. We want to make it clear that those stories are valid and needed. Much respect to you if you have written about those topics. They’re just not what we’re looking to mentor right now.



Fabulism and Magical Realism

Of the things we are looking for, this is the hardest to describe. We're looking for things that seamlessly mix a bit of magic with an otherwise realistic contemporary setting. Since Cimone loves food metaphors, we'll say we're looking for a coffee cake, where reality is the cake, and the magic is a cinnamon swirl. In other words, the magic must be integrated into the reality in a way that does not change the shape of reality or make it unrecognizable. Sometimes, this means the reader doesn't know if the magic is real, and it often means the magic represents an aspect of real life. Some examples of this are books like *Challenger Deep* by Neal Shusterman, in which the magic represents the main character's struggle with mental illness, and *I Crawl Through It* by A.S. King, in which magic is used to represent things like trauma, depression, and dishonesty. Included in this, we are open to Magical Realism.



WHAT WE DON'T WANT/ WHAT WE'RE NOT SEEKING:

Stories about cancer or terminal illness

Themes of sexual assault/rape

Stories set in college

Suicide

No detailed sex scenes (**fade to black only**)

Stories centered around juvenile detention centers

OUR EDITING PROCESS



After we've read through the submissions and agree on a manuscript that speaks to both of us, we'll compare notes amongst ourselves on things we think will strengthen your work.

We'll compile an edit letter with big picture feedback and send it to our mentee. Afterward, we'll give our mentee some time to look over the edit letter and write down some questions for us!

Next, we'll want to have a Zoom chat about said questions and edits. We'll give our mentee some time to work on the edits we talked about and move on from there. We know there will be a TON of back and forth communication in this process. After big picture edits are completed, we'll do a round of line edits.

We'll ALWAYS have our email inboxes open for questions and we'll make time for Zoom chats for our mentee. We are here for YOU! We believe in your manuscript, so please know that it won't be put on the back burner. We'll make time for it.

We'll also work together on developing a concise query letter and pitch for your manuscript!

PLEASE NOTE: Ultimately, your story is yours. It's your book baby and you have an attachment to it that stretches far past the love we'll have for it. You have worked hours on this book, cried over it, and developed a great connection with it. If we suggest a change, and you're **not** comfortable with it, we can discuss it together, but the final decision will be up to you! Don't be afraid to advocate for your book and tell us if any of you aren't comfortable with any suggestions we have. But remember, this is Pitch Wars. We understand your connection with your novel, but the editing process can be a bit tough. Trust us!

We understand the pain of parting with things in our manuscripts that we LOVE. But be willing to hear us out and work with us! You never know how cutting some things can really strengthen your story. Again, we'll discuss all of this depth when the time comes!

[Head back to the Pitch Wars post to see the complete list of mentors!](#)