

THE WRITERS BLOCK

2019



THE WRITERS' BLOCK

THE ADA LONG CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP ANTHOLOGY 2019

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Special thanks to the UAB Student Media office for assisting with the production of this issue and to UAB Printing and Mailing Services for their support with the printing.

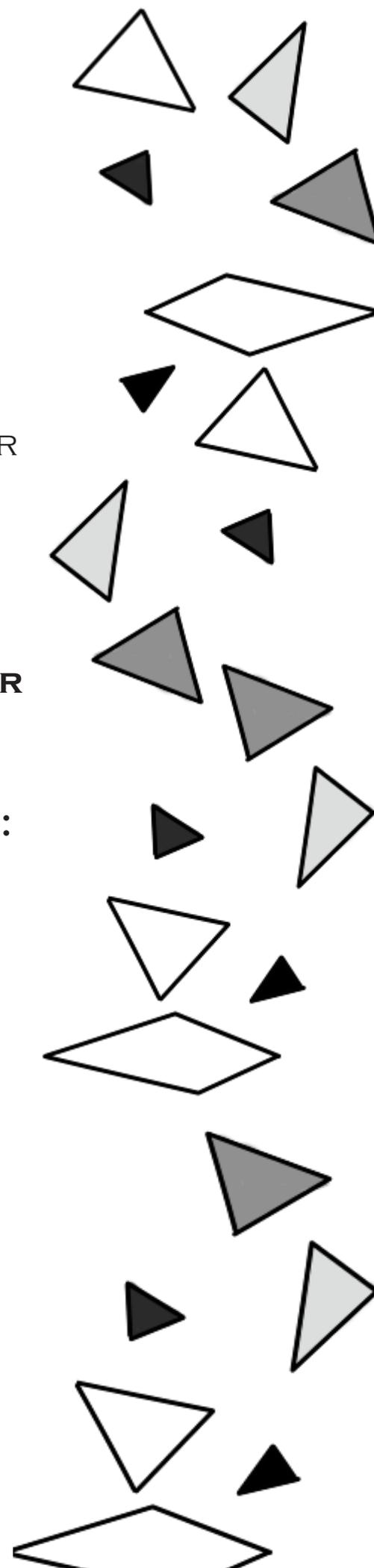
Colophon

The Writers' Block is a publication of the Ada Long Creative Writing Workshop at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The Writers' Block is printed by UAB Printing and Mailing Services in a quantity of 300 per issue. The editorial process in forming this issue was performed using Adobe In-Design CC running on a Dell PC with a Windows 10 operating system. Fonts used are Copperplate Gothic Bold, Copperplate Gothic Light and Bookman Old Style.

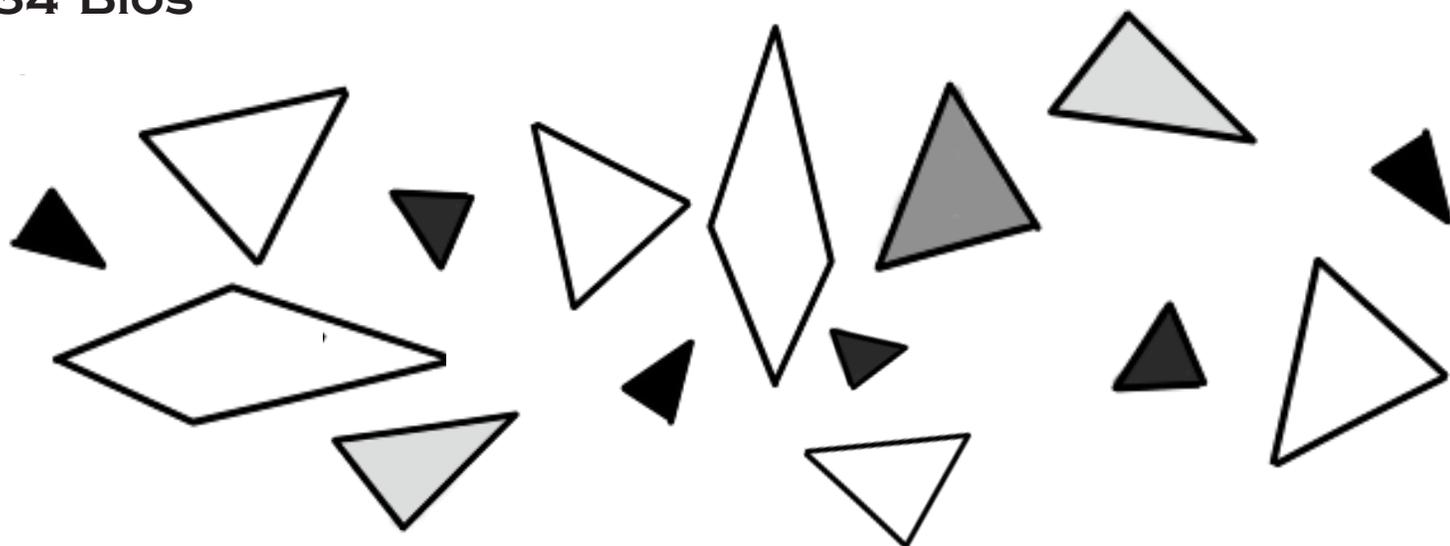
Front cover: "Shattered" by Dalalah Jones.

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THE CRAWFATHER

MAX CORYELL

Crusty old crayfish,
Sipping shot glasses
Of river port poured
From the cellar
Of bottles under a stone.

Riffled current curtains
Over the skylight
Of your flooded crawlspace.
Old eyes stare out at wisps
Of flying fire in the twilight.

Gnarled, arthritic claws
Scratch the tally mark
Of another eon.

No family photographs remain
Gone to the slow fade
Of paper in your musty attic.

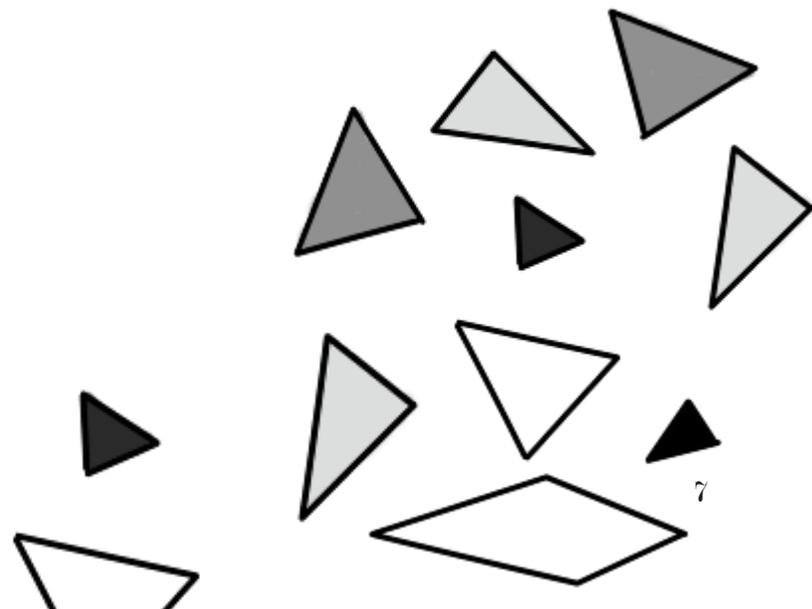
Water on a tin roof
Plays a half-forgotten melody
With a southern night.



BEAUTIFUL BLACK BABY BOY

DALAH JONES

My beautiful black baby boy
With your sun kissed skin
Glowing eyes and afro hair
Your mind and body strong
And your willpower has flare
Do not sway
From society's mistreatment to shame you
And to say you're a mistake
Do not listen to the lies
From the mouth of a snake
Raise your head high
For your crown should never fall
Be proud of you
Skin and all
And no matter how many times you feel
Lost, defeated or discouraged
For you will always be
My beautiful black baby boy



BEATRICE

JAMIAH STROUD

Beatrice, you have been put through hell but you still continue to thrive.

You are a house, my house. To you I welcome any person of my choosing.

You Beatrice, you are the place many come for warmth and intimacy.

My house, you have been broken into and abused. You have been treated like an oven inside things
have been placed and snatched away before being fully done.

Your lawn is kept trimmed, causing man people to view.

You choose the ones our faucet leaks for. You erect no boundaries between you and the ones you
connect with.

Slamming your doors shut when feeling bombarded, you and only you make the rules.

Beatrice, you are a dark, warm bag of desire, always reminding me of you presence.

You are the world's place of origin. From out of you we came.

Sun up to sun down, you work hard to keep my house clean.

Without you, there is no me. Thank you, Beatrice, for making me whole.



CAHABA

CHRISTOPHER WOODRY

A river gently rolling by,
The water etching the rocks on the ground,

Carving the face of a nymph on the gravel,
Baptizing us into the world of the forest.

Finger sized fish flying by.
Stealthily hiding themselves like the mystery of nature.

Various insects darting this way and that,
Partaking of earthly desires.

Nothing and everything changes
When you step in a river.



JUNGLE FEVER

VICTORIA SPEAR

“Our two races will never separate the bellowing love we have for one another. For the enclosed minds of the weak make us live in fear of the disapproval and stone thrown our way with blinding rage. This can’t and will not last for long, for the colorful future so bright will outshine the darkest hours we have faced.”

The African American male lifted his Caucasian lovers’ face and placed one final kiss goodbye on her lips. Warm wet tears that emitted from her green orbs streamed down her face for her forbidden love and child she bore. The laws of fear broke this family apart.

“And when I drift off into the deep fallen abyss I will be dreaming of you and the beautiful future we would’ve had together.”



A CHILD FALLING IN LOVE

DEVYN COAR

My heart performing somersaults and cartwheels,
Unconscious knuckle popping once, twice, and again,
The stars looking over me and praying,
Around me colors brightening, smiling at me,
His eyes glinting, promising danger,
A song of the angels distracting me,
And everything, everywhere changing and shifting.

A MIDDLE SCHOOL SOUP

ANITA CADE

When the rustling voices of girls linger in your ears, add the diced onions.

When tears stain your Plaid skirt, add the chicken broth.

When ‘friends’ walk in and keep the rustling going, spilling your secrets in the lap of your enemies, add the carrots.

When drama spreads like a forest fire, add the celery and sprinkle some garlic.

When an unworthy male tries to smack your assonance with his hand and a smirk that reminds you of your uncle’s, add the tomatoes.

When you get an A on your final, add the bay leaves, thyme and pepper.

When you finally have the guts to talk to your crush, add the salt.

When that crush breaks your heart, remember to add the olive oil.

When the racist white kid says to the Latina girls sitting next to you “this is America, we speak English here”

And the girls look him in the eye and speak more Spanish just to get on his nerves, add the thinly sliced mushrooms.

When your “best friend” tells you it shouldn’t offend you, look her deep in the eyes and say nothing-

Just stare at her and add the chicken.

When your science teacher calls you worthless and everyone in the class laughs smile at her and keep trying.

When you start to feel worthless, alone and lost, cry and add the Oregano.

When it’s the last day of school stir everything together.

When you walk across the graduation stage, pour some of the soup into a bowl.

Share it with your classmates.

When they all leave for their separate lives,

Grab yourself a pack of crackers and hang on to it for next year.

OLE' SOUTHERN GUMBO

TORI ELLIS

Ole' Southern Gumbo

Thrown together to broil,
Scraping the empty bottom
With dirty hands.

Salvation for the soul,
Old southern gumbo,
Of rehabilitation.

How shall it cook?
Let the pot warm on broken homes,
On the roof of the careless jumper,
On a basement set ablaze.
Let the gumbo broil on memories of the lost,
On splintered door hinges,
On walls that still echo.
Let it simmer on reflection, regret,
Disappointment in mothers,
Disappointment of mothers.
Let it simmer,
Until the steam reflects the ghostly faces around us.

What will it taste like?
Like the salty, yearning tears of mothers as they watch their children grow up with
grandma and grandpa.
Like the salty, bitter sweat beading off their foreheads as they wail through the night,
Yearning, shaking.
Like the spices crackling in lungs,
Add more, more spice,
Tongues crave here.

Where will we sit to eat?
In the barb-wired smoke-yard with the new girls,
Where demons roam unmasked and unafraid.
In medical, where they wait agitated and smoky-eyed for more methadone.
In the empty bed of the neighbor who overdosed in the night,
In the empty eyes of the unfamiliar child in my arms that stares at the sirens,
Confused.

We pray over this meal for the girls that never made it,
Forcing the gumbo disdainfully,
Then lapping it up gratefully,
Until lips feign no more.

SOUP OF GARDENDALE HIGH SCHOOL

ZOE MCCREAR

We're all so different
yet so similar,
divided like equality.

Broken lights, freezing air,
the smoke from the juuls hitting bathroom stalls
will make the soup pop.

The soup of supersized redneck trucks
obnoxiously speeding through the lot
looking for hoax weed and underage girls.

The soup of vacant dip jars
used by broken-hearted jocks
imprinting circles on their torn shorts.

The soup slurped by cowboy boots.

What shall we mix it with?

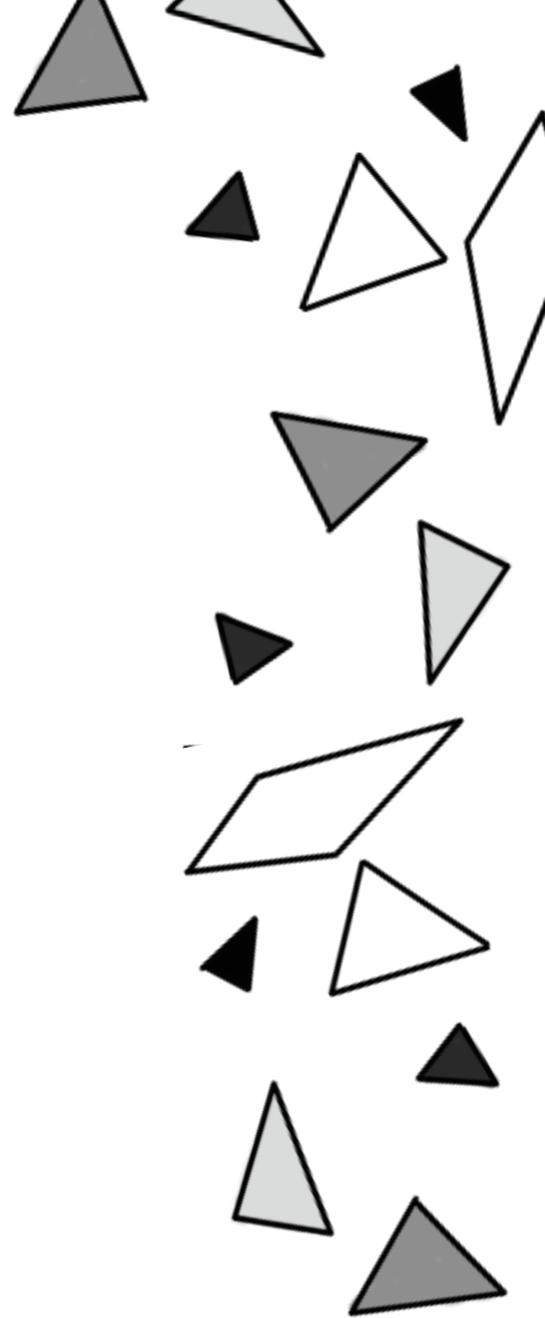
With misused senior parking lot trash.
The hair on floors from fighting girls.
The jackknife used for slicing innocence.
The guitar played in the halls by curly haired Max.
The baseball bats being swung by the varsity boys.

Let's stir until we see every memory come back,
our laughter at serious assemblies
They were loud, they were obnoxious.
They made Mr. Dukes the principal angry
As if he wanted to kill us all.

What will it look like?

Like dancing at the pep rallies.
Like the pregnant girls fighting.
Like the sweet snacks in family and consumer science.
Like the girls gossiping in the hallway.
Like laughter in Coach Glaze's AP history.

No matter what, we all divided into our cliques.
We spit racism, spread gossip, and get high
With just a stare
Into our equal individuality.



TO MY HANDS

Y'ONNA HALE

My hands-

connected are fingers almost
always icy to the touch.

I guess the technical phrase

for the bones you
have encased will be

phalanges.

However, I'd rather stick to the common

call of the things you actually

are.

You twist and turn in a dark chocolate
mop of curls.

The times you're shy to connect
you glisten with sweat

I try so hard to hide.

You enable me to grip and connect

to this sleek rubber pencil grip.

Honey,

you have choices:

not holding on to the sweaty touch

of a man I don't love

but gripping onto him,

a summer breeze mixed

with tough love that breathes

cherry cigarettes.



HISTORICAL MATERIALISM OF THE LIVER

MAX CORYELL

inside me
you labor, unseen and unceasing
a sanitation worker
who issues forth
ignored by the society they serve

engineer of the exclusive club
of lurching organs
predestined to suffer
under a workload of woes

liver
a lurking leviathan
proletariat of my veins
unknown and uncared for
purifying the poison
of the elite

without whom
they would wither

“NEW PERSON, SAME OLD MISTAKES” BY TAME IMPALA

DAVID HESTER

“Feel like a brand new person”

Resonating

I was long away for the moment.

I sat on my cousin’s carpet, leaning against the corner of the wall, present but my mind flying away with the music.

It was a drug with no consequence. It was a skydive without a parachute; except that after dying from impact, there was a surreal salvation, waiting for me in a new life. The holy sins in one’s heart was what Tame Impala’s song embraced.

The easy, psychedelic melody flowing like a purple river, the falsetto vocals breezing its blue winds, the bold, reverbing guitars embracing their heat like the sun with its open arms for the earth, the green hair of trees swaying in slow rhythm like beat’s steady drums and impactful bass, the song was a scene of nature, capturing a fantasy where I was free of my daily insecurities and pressures.

I felt like a brand new person, conquering my dreams as an author and feeling free from the struggle of keeping a moral code. I could be whatever idea or person I desired to be.

I was in a different world, a different conscious. I was long gone for the moment... until it ended.

“MYSELF” BY LAYTON GREENE

KAYA WATKINS

There’s something unbearable, unpredictable, yet heart-warming about “Myself” by Layton Greene. I mean this from the darkest, saddest, ice cold hole in my heart.

Having a problem with controlling my sensitive feelings, that started when his soft lightly colored brown eyes met mine, yet hearing the believable lies that filtered from his soft lips. Sowing his seeds of sorrow, laughter, and love into me. Then to salty-runny tears, soggy wet pillows, and a girl looking in the mirror wondering if she good enough. And “Myself” by Layton Greene is about as nurturing to the heart as a bird loves chirping.

It’s true that sometimes we want to hurt people worse than they hurt us. There are times when you’re so devastated, so distraught that you try to figure out how you’re going to manage. Imagine being able to meet the perfect boy you’ve always waited for. In fact so perfect that you say this must be a dream and not reality, cause in reality there’s no such thing as a perfect boy. Yet, what he does to your heart is indescribable.

So what’s this got to do with Layton Greene? When Layton is in grief, or is in a bad place she writes her troubles in the lyrics for “Myself”. You get so deep in your insecurities that you fall in a place you don’t desire to be in. The chorus sends a cool but alone wave your ears that comfort you but always makes you turn to your deepest downfall. It’s like coasting in a boat on the warm fragile waves and then suddenly hitting a hard rock when you least expect it. Imagine walking on soft, crisp sand then walking on a shell that craves into your foot and pops a blood vessel in your foot that is the vibe you get from “myself” by Layton Greene. Go on right, Layton with your appalling, perplexing self. Sing the soft comforting tune “myself”. And spout it out on me because I’m already wall-to-wall with major depression. But I’m so obtained with your sound of your pleasing voice.

“DANCING IN THE SKY” BY DANI AND LIZZY

JONICA OWEN

There were stories that they would become legends before even knowing it. Their friend passing away made them create a song that changed lives. Sisters Dani and Lizzy lost a dear friend in 2013. Dani videoed herself in front of their computer. The reality is: they never knew their song would not only change their life but many others too. How I first heard this song is I was scrolling through social media and found this video a girl made for my friend and the emotions filled me, as what felt like puddles felt my eyes. When hearing songs with such heart and passion causes a few other artists come to mind. Nathan Feuerstein or known as NF, Demi Lovato, Billie Eilish, and Dean Lewis. Every single one of these people have experienced a certain type of disappointment. NF and Demi had problems with their parents being addicts. Dean Lewis and Billie have self-image issues. All these artists including Dani and Lizzy put so much soul into their music. You can internalize the amount of emotions they strive to make you feel. The effort of these musicians music feels like a life preserver, as you were drowning and it reached out and saves you. This song gives you that breath of fresh air you need before you feel you're submerged under the weight of the world.

I hadn't thought about it before coming across this song, but Dani and Lizzy revealed in a work of art. I didn't care about life as much as I had before my life took a turn. Dani and Lizzy saved a part of me that I didn't know could be restored. I needed that restoring after the start of my freshman year. My best friend, Madison Reed, passed away at the age of 14 in a boating accident. She fell underneath a pontoon boat and drowned. I was there when they found her as she was now, an angel. I felt the gravity hit harder with each step I took towards the ambulances. The weight pulled me down and that's when I first began to sink and slip away from who I was. Five months later my birth mom passed away to cancer. I wear my purple bracelet every day that I sold to give her a proper funeral. As I spoke at both funerals for my now two angels.

Even though all of this is surprising, I just wanted to let you know I love y'all and always will. I love you for finding me with your modulated voice. My choice was to stay down south with my birth family and good family friends. I never wanted to come back to my home where I didn't grow up from anyway. Ski lake and her little house though were remembered with the flashing lights of red glaring into my soul. The symbol of loss and their eternal rest.

Moving on and blocking out terms of reality had been my strongest move for the past fifteen years by then. I'd spent using regression right down to the point I stopped wanting to get out of bed as a way of bypassing.

Dani, your consecutive passion was perfect for rethinking, for when the hole in my heart wouldn't leave me alone. Space is what might have cured me, and for me, it was sitting on my floor writing and listening to your work on repeat. A good place every teen goes to hide without questions. They put flowers up by the lake and little house and random people saying "I am sorry for your loss". Your song sent peace over me when it felt as it was only in love with chaos.

Is it peaceful, your motionless calming of a song said, and go back to dancing in the sky where we all belong. When it was reduced to that, I didn't have any alternatives left: all I could do was accept the loss, and the loss was this: the waves don't know anything the sand doesn't.

All of this I had to learn consecutively between August to July of that first year without the lights of my life. It took a lot of mourning and timing to do nothing but stupid mistakes self-medicating. Finally, I got it to “I am I, and you are you, and the old life that we lived so fondly together is untouched, unchanged”. It turns out Harry Scott-Holland was trying to save me from this. Dani, your motionless calming during the song surrounds me humbly now or however, we choose to describe it. Slow warmth coming back to its respectful place in these bitter times.

The point? I never got over anything at all, the lake or the little house and its way of passing as something unbearing.



“PUT YOUR RECORDS ON” BY CORRINE BAILEY RAE

JAZMINE A. CARRASCO

“Just go ahead let your hair down”

Free flowing

Much like setting a caged bird free.

I sat in front of my television as the lyrics filled the black abyss that was once on the screen.

Almost as if there was a personal door that Corrine Bailey Rae opened for departure. The same door that would take you to your own “Narnia”. The exact same environment that seems to be at peace with knowing who you are. Not judging you, but pushing you to be the best person you could possibly be.

The song gently swayed me, to the point where I only pictured the sweet-tuned setting; the clanking background noises of dishes faded away into a light-hearted hum. Captivated by the energy possessed in many lines, I abruptly wanted to let my hair down, and yearned to run through a field of quiet white hibiscus.

As the story reeled to an end, I hurriedly rewinded before the last second; right back to the hopeful beginning. This time, closing my eyes, my mind was now the newly found abyss awaiting to be filled with bright lyrics. The mellow rhythm kept my heart at a steady-like pace, with a slow build up. Suddenly, an impactful thump rippled through the song, unleashing a smile on my face.

With a catchy repetitiveness, I already knew the chorus, so it was not hard for me to sing along.

Every note and key change swiftly plucked the inadequate problems that surfaced me into the stretched cotton candy above, yet each and every problem captured a colored mist. Anger, loneliness, pride, jealousy, sadness, forgetfulness, uncertainty, all in which partake in the colors of the rainbow.

I felt anger in me every time my consciousness told me I wasn't doing enough or that I simply wasn't enough. I felt loneliness whenever I glance around and see no one was around to thrive with me. Almost as if I was the last individual alive in this magical marble orb we live in. I sometimes cannot control my pride due to me disregarding taking accountability for my actions. Jealousy then comes to play hide and seek when I am wishful of things others have that I dream of maintaining.

And regarding sadness, she's just a little friend that comes to visit here and there, but she never stays long. Oh, I almost forgot! I am finally letting go of my problem of forgetfulness too. Due to the fact, I choose to remember what I want, and that's just going to be the way I am. I still struggle with uncertainty. I am a strong believer of being able to have choices, but the decision making part is the insecurity here.

Even though these issues may seem to hold power to some, they do NOT control ME.

This was the release I needed in life, whilst I let go of my seven heart aches, the colorful mist climbs the bare sky. It is quickly splashed against the white hibiscus, giving it a new found vibrant life.

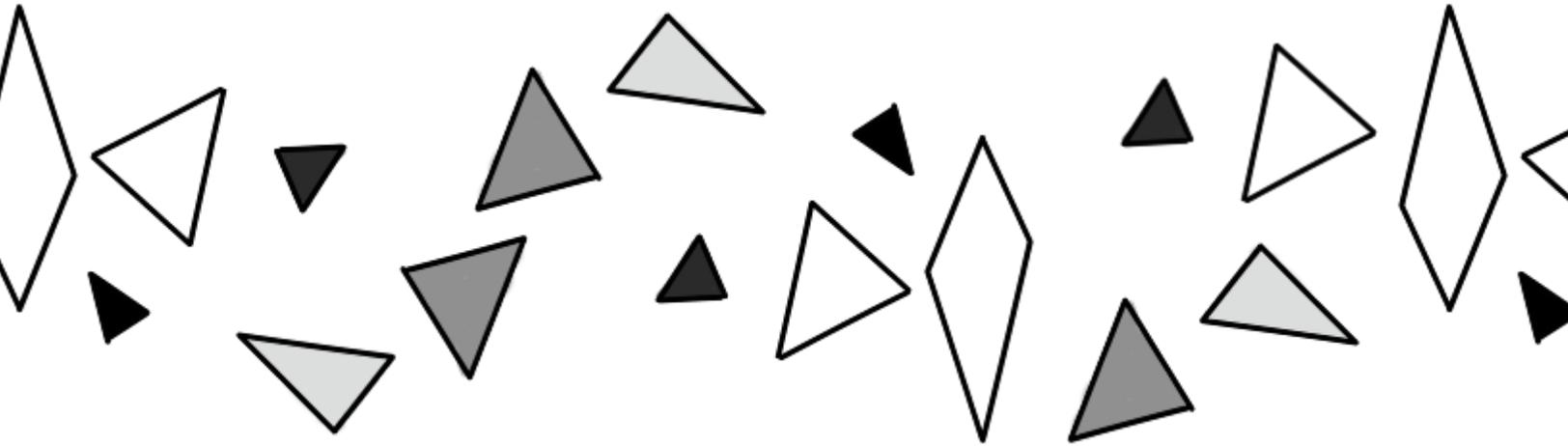
The newly found feeling was - untouchable.

Once again, I replay the ballad because I sure do love to overplay songs. This time I stood

up, and I acted as if I had an audience amongst me. “Put Your Records On” was my personal anthem. “You’re gonna find yourself somewhere, somehow.”

These same lyrics broke my “tranz’ finally, and it allowed me to think for a split-second: that I am going to be alright, just alright.

“We feel afraid, but we’re alright”



“AFRAID” BY THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

KENZIE CHAMBERS-ROBINSON

“It hurts but I won’t fight you, you suck anyways”

Ouch.

It does hurt.

It was late at night, I had accidentally woken up, and this song kept me awake. It just so happened to be playing on my TV; it was some random song that moved me and kept me still all at the same time. The beginning that woke me up was so sudden, but then it slowed down and stayed mellow throughout the whole song. The slowness guided me to melt into the steady drums, the dark lyrics, the subtle guitar, all so captivating. I felt like I was in a trance. It almost brought tears to my eyes as I processed the lyrics in my drowsy state. The song truly made me feel slightly afraid of being sad and alone.

It was a dark and emotional song; sadness, shock, worry, and wonder all blasted through me. There was a slow, rhythmic, lonely thumping, with electricity like an empty house with a singular, dim light. Raw, riveting, and like a rocket taking off.

It brought me to such a sad peace too. While I listened to the song, every negative experience with another human being came back to me; teachers snapping at me, close friends ignoring me, inconsiderate strangers, all of it came back to me, I could do nothing but sit up and close my eyes as I absorbed this depressing delight.

It was immediately added to my collection.

ALCOHOL

AMARIA WOODS

I blame the alcohol. Had it not been for that evil substance, my life would be normal. I would not be sitting in this stupid office telling a complete stranger about my problems. It all happened when I was younger, much younger.

There was a monster in our house. A demon that disguised itself with a mask that fooled us into believing it was an angel. Until that mask was finally removed. Then, it revealed its true colors. It became merciless and wicked. My mother gave me specific instructions; stay in my room and lock the door after school every day. When I asked why I was not allowed outside of my room during the evening time, she told me that was when He came out. She said that he was too unstable and dangerous to be around. So, I did exactly as I was told. Every day after school I went straight to my room and locked the door behind me. Until, one day, my curiosity demanded satisfaction.

I distinctly remember the intense, hysterical screams of a woman echoing down the hall. Even as I tried to talk myself out of leaving my room, my feet seemed to move on their own accord, and I soon found myself standing in the hallway. The piercing screams grew louder and my stubby legs moved faster. I rounded the corner that led to the living room and came to a sudden halt.

What I witnessed still terrifies me even to this day. I saw it. The monster. He was standing right over my mother's pale, lifeless body, which was covered in blood and bruises. Her face was so disfigured that I could hardly tell it was her at all. Her once sparkling, rich brown eyes seemed to be glued shut. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. This had to be a dream. A nightmare. The monster turned its head to look at me. Its piercing grey eyes softened when they saw the fear in mine. In one hand was my father's old baseball bat and in the other was his cellphone. In the corner was a pile of broken liquor bottles on the floor. He dropped the bat and stumbled towards me. I backed away until my back hit a wall. I couldn't recognize the man in front of me anymore.

I could soon hear the wails of sirens as red and blue lights flashed through the window. My mother was rushed to the nearest ER while my dad was cuffed and put into a police car. Me? Well, you can clearly see where I am today. I had already lost my parents and childhood a long time ago. Now, it feels like I'm slowly losing pieces of my sanity every day. I blame the alcohol.



“NEVERMORE” BY JEFF WILLIAMS

EMMA BURKE

A couple of weeks after a lyric video had been released I was obsessed with the song. It wasn't until I had played it in the car with my mother did I realize the reasons that I enjoyed it so much. It talks about the struggles and growth of two characters named Blake and Yang had gone through. I began to think of my own struggles and growth through a ten-year hell. Although Blake and Yang speak of a person, I thought of my epilepsy. For those who don't know, epilepsy is a form of seizures. I did not experience the kind of seizures that left me falling to the floor. Instead, I would stare out into space for a certain amount of time. The staring seems so mundane, so innocent. But I was having between one hundred and two hundred seizures a day. I have no memory of any of my seizures. They literally left me constantly dazed and confused. It was a tough journey for a little girl who just wanted to be like everyone else.

The song speaks of experiencing and recovering from tragedy that seems preventable, when in reality, is quite the opposite. I understand this feeling all too well. At first, I felt like my condition could have been prevented. Over time I realized that there was nothing that could be done. All the control I had came from taking twelve pills day and night. I hated everything about my condition. It took so much from me physically, mentally and emotionally. I was broken. It seemed like it would stay with me forevermore. The longer I had it, the more I got used to it to the point I would forget about it momentarily. However, there was one thing I would never forget: feeling like I had half a soul. My condition took the lead, and I was unable to even the score. I was surrounded by darkness. I held on to my hope that I could reach the light.

After ten years, I had won the war. I remember my mother and I being in the car on the way home during a cool February afternoon. All of a sudden we received a call from my doctor about a recent medical exam. In that moment, I could see light. I was told that I had overcome my epilepsy. My mother and I started crying out of pure joy. I was free, and the fear retreated. I felt whole again. Since that day I have been thankful that I have been able to go on with my life without being held back by something I had no control over. The piano at the start is short before jumping into guitar and drums, symbolizing how short the struggle feels after overcoming it.

Blake and Yang went through something similar. Although Yang's struggles seem miniscule compared to Blake's, it is no less tragic. Blake is a cat faunus, meaning she is a human born with cat ears. Faunus are seen as less than human and treated as such. She joined an organization called the White Fang that strived for peace between human and faunus. After her father stepped down as leader, the group became more violent and radical. A bull faunus, Adam Taurus, was her mentor. However, he was mentally, and probably physically, abusive. This caused Blake to view him as a monster beyond saving. She proceeded to leave the, now radical, White Fang, hiding her cat ears to blend in at Beacon Academy.

Yang is a human, unlike Blake. She and Blake clashed often, the two being complete opposites. Yang would not meet Adam until the Fall of Beacon. She and Blake shared their experiences with each other and would grow to be good friends. This would not last very long. During the Fall, Blake spotted Adam attacking innocent people in the name of what he called “justice”. Yang saw the fight and attacked Adam to protect her teammate. Adam was a more experienced fighter, and cut off Yang's arm in retaliation. This brought the

two together in a later fight with Adam, where he would lose and die after not heeding a warning from both women to walk away. In a way, Adam was like my epilepsy, and just like Blake and Yang, I would be given the chance to free myself of it.

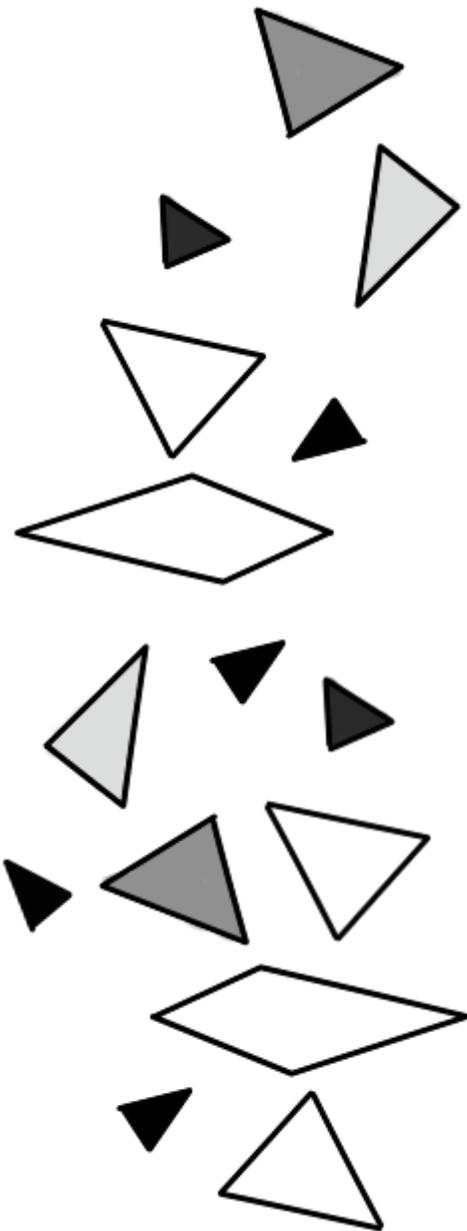
The past year has taught me something very important: tragedies are inevitable. Life will never be sublime. Tragedies teach us not to take anything, big or small, for granted. Appreciate what you have now, because it won't last forever. Everything could disappear in a moment.

Every tragedy gives two options: be consumed by hate and spite or take back what was stolen from you. When the battle ends and the war begins, what do we choose? I chose to take back my soul. I refuse to let hatred consume me. Not now, and nevermore.

WINGS FOR THE WISHING

ANITA CADE

Sometimes I imagine having wings,
Two outstretched, fabulous wings.
The brightest star leads the way.
I go far to a better place.
For now I'm trapped on the ground
With my stress
And my pain.
Sometimes when I stand on the edge,
I close my eyes
And leap.
The wind aggressively plays with my hair
Outstretched wings, a smile on my face.
I'm finally live the life I want to live.
With my fabulous wings
I can finally be free.
No regrets.
No going back to the nest.



“THE JUDGE” BY TWENTY ONE PILOTS

JACOB FRAZIER

That was the summer I fell in love with art. My days were fragile and foggy, hungry for direction. I rewrote the world, found passion like it was a diamond in the rough, built commitment out of continents and trust out of stardust, and broke free.

It was one of those hollow summers, the ones where days stack in on each other like Russian nesting dolls-smaller and smaller. I had small interests; theatre and singing; but nothing that gave me the sensation of getting up in the morning and having a song to sing or a trail to blaze. It was more so the sensation of sitting on a makeshift raft in the middle of the ocean and dying for a glass of water. I wanted a hobby, I needed a passion. Insisting I keep busy, my mother made me do yard work for my grandparents on the weekend. There was no reason to object, since it was a decent way to pass the time. I would mow or pull or wash or plant, all while listening to whatever song came on my playlist shuffle. It was here that I heard the solemn ukulele strums of Twenty One Pilots’ The Judge humming through my tattered headphones.

It gripped me. Hearing Tyler Joseph’s soft reflective songbird hymn was a gentle wakeup call- like opening your eyes one day and suddenly realizing you’re drowning. I began to dig deeper into their music, and soon was consumed by it. I studied it, dissected it, found the arteries and the nerves and the bones. The sound was alive; mind, body, soul. It could dance with the sunshine. It cried with the rainclouds. It strode alongside mountaintops and dove into river valleys. But never had I known art to be as naturally potent as The Judge.

The song comes into blooms with ukulele instrumentals like a lilac pulling itself out of barren soil. Look up and you will see a hill of gravel and rock climbing steadily upward this is the drums. Look down and see a river wading between shallow and deep, fast and slow, rushing ever onward clean and clear. Here flows Joseph’s vocals. And as you walk along the bank, watch as fish splash along the water while birds sing tunes happy and sweet. You are seeing fingers flying across a keyboard, pumping life into the world around you.

I did not want to just listen. I wanted to swim in the waters.

I suppose, if you frame it right, Tyler Joseph was the reason I started writing. His ability to express such sensational passion for music made me yearn for that same tranquility. I began building worlds that summer, be it out of the words I strung together in my writings or the characters I learned to portray in my acting. These worlds began to hold people, and those people began to hold stories. I plucked those stories like fruit off the vine. I grew a garden out of stories that had started with a simple seed: The Judge.

It’s a song all about the artistic expression. More than any other medium, The Judge encapsulates what it truly means to be the artist: to give oneself entirely to your garden without fear that it may produce fruit bitter or unripe. To lay down everything, standing open to ridicule and shame, and relish in the ability to grow with your garden. Whenever I find myself lost in a spiraling hole, it is that sweet ukulele strum that sowed the seeds of creativity. What I do not know even now is whether it is I or the song that has grown. But I am comforted in knowing that Joseph himself is unsure when he pours out, “I don’t know if this song is a surrender or a rebel.”

I AM A MONSTER

EMMA BURKE

I looked in my mirror. My reflection stared back at me almost like a complete stranger. My eyes were like an ocean; wide, endless, full of life, and able to destroy it if you went too deep. My small freckles complimented them. Decorating my face like ornaments on a Christmas tree.

I am a monster.

My hair was short and wild, the color like that of a sun hiding behind a cluster of clouds, waiting to shine again. My skin was similar in color, however, you would not know simply by looking at it. It was close to a darkened porcelain. I thought I would have been paler since I'm never allowed outside. Or out of my prison for that matter.

I am a monster.

I often wonder if Father put the mirror in here just to mock me. I look down at my hands as they glow a bright shade of blood. I take deep breaths to calm down, watching as the glow disappears.

I am a monster.

I felt small droplets fall from my eyes, knowing that I could terminate any living thing I touch. Everything other than myself. It would be better if I could. Father would agree.

Because I am, and will always be, a monster.

“JUST LIKE ME” BY SUMMER WALKER

JAMIAH STROUD

There’s something so comfortably disturbing and so depressingly true about Just like Me by Summer Walker. I mean this from my 2:00 am tear stained cheeks, several empty bottles of beer scattered across the floor, and half a blunt sitting on my window shield.

Having dealt with my emotions toyed with, I know what it’s like to feel used by someone you love. When I first met her we talked on the phone every day about visiting Thailand, me cheering her on in the WNBA, and being married in late fall outside after the leaves started changing colors while wearing amber tuxedos. I should’ve known our commitment would be temporary. Our never ending conversations were reduced to 12:00 am dry run-throughs of our days. What I didn’t know but soon found out was that when she wasn’t talking to me she was making equally empty promises to someone else. Our daily rendezvous became two stranger sitting on opposite ends of the couch each paying more attention to their cell phones than to each other. Having reached my breaking point of sobbing while water cascading upon my skin, I blocked her on social medias all while losing sense of self because she chose to let the opinions of other flood her brain. That is when I heard the weary, doleful voice of Summer Walker on Just like Me.

It is true that there are nights when you’re halfway through a box of tissues ruminating on old love , holding an empty tub of vanilla ice cream , and you’re balled up in a snotty pink blanket, and it just wouldn’t do anyone justice to comfort you or to try and drag you out of your fragmented state. At the same time, there are moments when you’re so thirsty, so zealous for love that even the most open and isolated contact with it--say you get the perfect amount of intimacy and closeness from the person you desire the most, to be able to recognize from your past wounded memories that it’s just got to be an authentic connection. Because distorted love just don’t feel like this rational- well such intimacy could only leave you feeling impaired.

So what’s all this got to do with Summer Walker? When Summer Walker in her melancholy, tranquil way says “how you hate me for being like you” you wallow in it the way a chastened African American woman sits in the blood of her son after he’s been shot by a white policeman. And when, in her vulnerable broken college student manner, she makes sense of her question, asks the question so humble and forceful gathering momentum lyric after lyric while she climbs the stalk of your subconscious thoughts, scuffing up the depths of your pain- you know that by the time this Saturday night dissolves, you’ll be neck deep in tears but all of those hay stacks of bird nest that love to make their homes on front porches will have fallen down into the bushes. And by the time that’s happened you’ll be as relaxed as the ashes, and grit, and crumbs at the bottom of Summer’s rugged voice.

“COME OUT AND PLAY” BY BILLIE EILISH

VICTORIA SPEAR

A week filled with worthlessness and regret. My stressed days and nights passing by with forced worded papers littering my bed and school desks. Fresh love tightening around my neck with aches of pain in my stomach. Restless nights of pool filled cries of yearning and resentment. All coming to a stop, my clouded storming mind cleared to a warm fire of love. Tears dry with paint strokes and comforted raindrops on the roof. The sounds of the thunderous clouds talking above on how I'm not alone in the caged up home with no key to the lock. The sound of lonely crushed up snow, caving in on the lost soul.

The heart reaching song of Billie Eilish filled my ears with the comforting warmth of love and compassion. The song was passionate, understanding, and inspiring! The blanketed for of solitude I sealed myself into was no longer a fortress, but imagined as a comforting embrace. “And I know it makes you nervous, But I promise you, it's worth it”. The sealed off heart enclosure was slowly developed, peering its opened wound to be opened up to the crowded world of unique minds and dirtied souls. “To show 'em everything you've kept inside, don't hide, don't hide” The home was still locked, I was still trapped inside no freedom of mind that could be given.

The world's time passes on to God's dark collection of night lights illuminating the sky. My dearest love over the phone listening to the blossoming song to both calm our fragile stained red glass hearts. Basking in the presence of both our love emitting from the speaker. “Too shy to say, but I hope you stay” Silence ignored till I can't take anymore. A new shining light and hope with now my lose love around my stained red glass heart. Lover's breaths luring us to the dark abyss where we shall lay till another day. “Don't hide away, Come out and Play”



LIKE MOTHER, LIKE DAUGHTER

KENZIE CHAMBERS-ROBINSON

“Mama, I don’t understand why I can’t get a perm!” She almost yelled at me.

“I don’t want you listening to those ads and magazines, our hair is beautiful,” I stated boldly. I wanted and needed her to understand how important it is that she stayed true to herself.

“Our?” She looked confused and tense.

“Well where do you think you got your curls from sweetie,” I chuckled.

“But mine is on my head!” Her voice raised, but not in a defiant way. Her tone was still laced with confusion.

“And it grew on your head that way for a reason.” I was beginning to get frustrated.

“Doesn’t mean I want it,” she said matter of factly, “I want pretty, straight hair.” She looked so upset. It almost physically pained me to see her like this. All of my previous frustration was washed away and replaced with worry.

“Our hair is beautiful. The curls add volume, the color is vibrant yet dark. It makes us unique. I personally love our hair,” I smile.

“Why do you keep saying our hair if we don’t share a head?” Her large eyes stared at me, waiting for an answer.

“We don’t but we share so much more, and I want you to grow up loving and embracing that part of you.” I felt confident that she understood the point now.

“What do you mean ‘that part’ mama?” She hesitated, but her eyes were knowing.

“You know exactly what I meant.” She quickly looks at my arm after I say this.

“I do mama, but-” I interrupted her, “But nothing, you and that hair on your head is beautiful.”

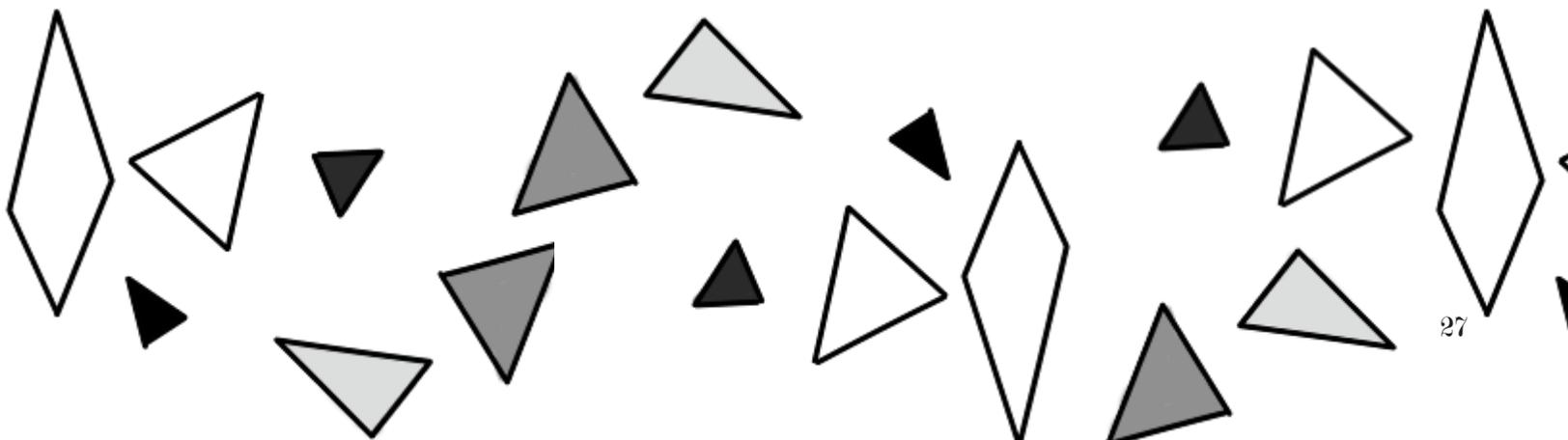
In that moment I looked into her eyes, they were filled with a new light. She finally understood.

“I guess it is soft, and I’ve always loved your hair mama.” She looked at my hair with awe.

“Our hair,” I corrected.

“Are you saying that my hair is pretty too?” Her dark eyes lit up.

“Honey, that’s what I’ve been saying this whole time.”



FLORANA

JACOB FRAZIER

The city of Florana springs out of the ground like a rose in the desert. If looked down upon from the top of the sun, it is speculated that one will see the face of a flower smiling upward, divided into eight decadent petals which are perfectly equal in every way save for the different colors that they omit.

This, of course, is merely speculation, as few have ever been known to sit atop the sun and those that have reported that they were much too preoccupied to check. When Florana is viewed from the outer borders one will often describe it as a beautiful cityscape with complex architecture and luscious parks. A friend often then interrupts one, who claims it is, on the contrary, a horrendous culmination of factory smokestacks and protruding skyscrapers. By this point, a third party will come up and assure one that Florana was an ancient structure filled with deep history and old-age simplicity. Unable to decide, the three will then ask their local clergyman which is correct and be told that, no, you're all blind; it's a stalwart epicenter of modern surrealism and innovative technology. More often than not, this results in a vividly articulated argument between one and company: at best several ruined friendships, at worst an angry mob.

All of his may be avoided if one simply knows that each of Florana's eight divisions holds a unique breed of citizen wholly unlike any of the others. Each of these sectors is as closely kept to itself as it is absolutely and in every way different from those seven surrounding. Every side of the great Floranian octagon lives, learns, works, prays, mourns, dances, and even speaks entirely separate from that of its neighbor.

The octets each hold their own unique political function ranging up and down the bureaucratic scale like a choir of tone-deaf, tongue-tied, fallen angels. Because each knows strictly their own tongue, they are inclined to believe that they are the most powerful of the eight and thus in charge of all other sectors. Normally this would cause much tension, but because nobody can understand anybody else it often just results in awkward handshaking and avoided eye contact.

At its center is an iron turning gear so vast and heavy that one thousand men are required to shift it, each with the strength of a hundred lions and the stamina of one hundred gazelles. These men are selected at birth, raised in total isolation, fed exclusively on raw eggs and bloody steaks, and are capable of pulling a two-ton boulder out of a fifty yard ditch before they hit puberty. Once a week- from dawn until dusk- they slowly and painfully turn the wheel.

The city begins to shake. From underneath a maze of cogs and cranks stretching all across the Floranian border shift the land above them. The great octets rise and fall, push and pull, bend and straighten, until all eight of the pieces sit next to two of their neighbors that it had never before laid next too.

There are two hotly debated possibilities for why they should undergo such a heavy ritual. The first is that each unique culture loves learning about the other so much they would yearn to always move about so they may constantly visit each rich land without walking farther than a morning's stroll. The second is that the citizens of Florana hate each other so much that one cannot be near another for longer than a week before breaking out into bloody, brutal war. The theory as it stands today is that because the octets all speak different languages, not even they can be sure if they are supposed to love or hate the other. Still, they turn.

DOOMSDAY

KAITLIN HARRIS

“But on that day and hour knoweth none,” he whispered. Sweat pricked my steaming flesh like rime as the sun shot through the octagonal windows of what seemed to be a garden.

“After the fall, the sun will darken, the moon will not give its light, and then stars will shoot down from the heavens,” my pulse quickened with the sound of metal tools clanging. The raven-haired man dressed in black began to fill the needle with a clear fluid.

“And the ancient serpent, the deceiver of the world, was thrown down to the earth, his angels following.” My wrist was now enclosed within his hand. He leaned into me, his eyes piercing mine. A painless death, a suspension of the mind into a different level of consciousness, is all I bargained for.

“And I will unveil unto you the truth of this reality.” The liquid rushed through my veins as the oddly familiar screams filled my mind once more. Images of burning bodies clouded my thoughts, and I began to feel myself dissipate.

Tingles of dewy green caressed my feet, and chilling winds lifted my eyes to the murky atmosphere. Was the injection successful?

“You have awakened,” a gentile female voice discerned. Men and women appareled in black arranged themselves on either side of me. Individual eyes were fixated on the leaden, desolate plateau revealed before us. Their necks were garnished with lambent crystals, seemingly bearing auras of different kinds. I turned to face the drifter.

“Where am I?” I questioned.

“The physical aspects of your presence have remained. However, your perspective has been altered.”

I gave her a questioning stare. Everything was swallowed in flames. Every crevice of that city was consumed by sweltering heat. My brother and Jack... I must be dead. The final drops of the prison injections swarmed my vessels. There is no other possibility; my bones are thin as ash now...

“Sequences within your life thus far have all been illusions, false images and emotions imbedded within the mind,” she continued. “This is reality in its truest form. Your world is merely a trivial maze to enlightenment in which a revival is encountered each moment the cycle is unveiled. You, Mathilda, have uncovered Adam’s ale buried beneath the sand.”

In that moment, the faltering memories of destruction became clear. Counterfeit love and sentiment is everything that I had. The aspect of my humanly experience was a brutal lie. What left is there other than to question the quintessential fiber of my existence?

“Forget what is behind you and strain toward what lies ahead,” she leaned forward, lacing a Moldavite stone around my neck. Tuesday, September 15, 2037, is known to most as the Thirty-seventh Awakening Day. However, it is known to me, in this very moment, as my Doomsday.

PIXIES, PINECONES & PARKING LOTS

DALAH JONES

“And why are we at the park again...?”

Anissa, the Joker Witch (sometimes called Magical Witch), complained. Joker Witches, like its name, are witches who use their powers for mischievous purposes. Things like telekinesis, illusions, and electricity. But, not all Joker Witches are purely evil. Their magical creativity is used for entertainment purposes as well. Fireworks, confetti, and poker cards. Two of Anissa’s closest friends, Verona and Zelda were wandering through what seemed to be a college campus park. All three stayed on the pale colored, concrete walk trail that separated the soft freshly mowed grass from the hay that surrounded the large trees. Sighing exhaustingly from Anissa’s whining, Verona closed her eyes slowly.

“Because, we’ve been riding our brooms for an hour and a half already. The beach isn’t that far from here. It’s good to take a break and enjoy nature for a minute.” Verona replied in her gentle, meek voice. Anissa found herself rolling her eyes at her friend’s modesty.

Unlike Anissa, Verona was a Life Witch. Anything that dealt with nature, animals, and healing, Verona knew about it. Anissa is still amazed to this day how Verona’s pale skin and white hair literally glows in natural sunlight. Anissa secretly wonders if Verona is just a nature fairy in disguise.

“Ugh! But we don’t know anyone here! We’re surrounded by complete strangers! What if we get into trouble? I want to go to the beach already!” The Joker Witch whined again, the short witch throwing a temper tantrum.

“Do not worry Anissa, we are full fledge witches now... We can handle things ourselves. Besides, my curses should work on Blanks...” Zelda mumbled under her breath. Blanks, another word for non-magic people. With her statement, Zelda showed the two witches her wand and dark magic book that was secretly hidden inside her long coat. Zelda was a Death Witch. Things that focused on dark spells, curses, sacrifices and darkness, Zelda knew it all. Zelda always wore dark clothes, and her long black cape; she constantly looks



tired, droopy dark eyes with bags under them. Anissa and Verona both chuckles nervously, persuading their friend not to shorten anyone's life unless necessary. With all this talk about death and curses, Verona became very jittery.

"A-Anyway! We'll be fine. How about we walk off this trail and explore around a bit?" Verona insisted, trying her best to change the subject.

The two other witches agreed. Anissa would do anything to get out the baking heat; Zelda wanted to collect some small animal bones for an upcoming spell. Either way, the three witches stepped off the walk trail. With that, the girls dispersed into three different locations in the park.

The naturistic witch then strolled herself over to some floral bushes. She noticed that a few flowers were still in its bud state. The girl looked around cautiously before slipping out her wand that was neatly hidden in her satchel. With the whispering of her spell and a flick of the wrist, Verona used her nature spell to awaken sleeping buds. Watching them blossom into gorgeous flowers, Verona smiled.

Anissa was far more interested in the generator that was placed behind a red brick building. She was intrigued by how blanks still used old technology like the generator, something that witches of the 21st century consider ancient technology. Now, it was all about supersonic broomsticks and transportation spells.

Zelda, a wand in her hand, she casted a death spell towards a few lively squirrels that were scurrying up a tree. Their furry skin and muscles sliding off their bodies like butter, leaving nothing but bones. Satisfied, Zelda collected the squirrel bones, putting them in a small black pouch. After their little exploration, all three of the girls met up in the middle of the park.

While sitting down, they did a nature watch together. While the witches expected no magical creatures to show up in the blanks world, they were surprisingly wrong. Anissa, Verona, and Zelda were greeted with a few pixies that lived in the trees and shrubs of the park; pixies cannot be seen through the eyes of blanks, only people who contain magic can. With their small, humanlike bodies with wings, pointed ears, naturistic clothes and hat, the pixies dash and spin around the three girls. It was a cute, magical moment before one of the pixies tried to steal one of Anissa's golden rings. They are very mischievous and thieving type of mythical creatures. The girl realized this and snatched her belonging from their grasp.

"Ugh! Stupid pixies! You guys are always stealing other people's things! Go on now, shoo!" Anissa urges the pixies away, swatting her hand at them to make them leave quicker. The pixies giggled and teased before they finally left the girls in peace. Anissa sighed in exhaustion, but not before she could smell the tangy, smoky smell of a nearby grill. Her head shot up and her spirit was quickly uplifted by the smell of food.

"Oooh! I smell a grill! Hey, why don't we all get something to eat and head back on our broomsticks once we're done, okay?"

Verona and Zelda agreed. They all stood up and made their way towards the nearest grill that was just a few parking lots down from the park. Walking beside Verona, Anissa couldn't help but hear a quiet, high pitched laughter. Looking over, she saw that a pixie was hiding in Verona's white hair, it seemed to be somewhat attached to life witch. Maybe out of curiosity or familiarity? Anissa didn't know, pixies don't latch onto witches just because. A slow smile was created on Anissa's face; she shook her head, said nothing and faced forward again.

In the back of Anissa's mind, all she could think about was that maybe, maybe... Verona was a fairy after all.

BASE

ZOE MCCREAR

All I could see were flashing sirens, fire trucks, and ambulances planted all across my driveway. My heart began to pace faster and faster; all I was hearing was “thump, thump” like a drummer going at it. I began to see police running faster and faster then all of a sudden I noticed all the doors of my SUV were open.

As I climbed out the driver seat and grabbed Carlos out his car seat I saw an older policeman come closer and hesitantly stated, “Caydence Amelia Base and Carlos Aaron Base we are so un-pleasured to inform you, your mother is no longer here.”

All my eyes began to do is overflow with heated tears, I was stuck, frozen, and my heart was resting deep down in my stomach. I saw the two-year old baby boy my mother prayed for, confused in the midst of the day that will forever change our lives. All I could do was yell to the heavens we got our faith from, the heavens that would do so much for us, to the heavens that laid a foundation for this family; why did this have to happen to us? But nothing was coming out. This entire situation fell into the wrong timing. Wrong family, wrong timing, wrong children; that is one of the one million things I kept repeating.

I took a single blink and every memory fell from my eye in the form of liquid. I replayed every argument and thought was it really worth it? Yes, yes it was. She built me into the nineteen year old female I am today. And she is gone...gone forever. I could not believe that this was a reality and then I saw that this was who we are now. I saw that five foot seven crisp black body bag get taken out of the front door.

I have to do it. I have to do it. This I kept repeating.

I did it. I grabbed my sweet baby brother and ran straight through that yellow tape. Neighbors trying to stop me but they do not understand the pain every limb, every breath I am taking, every single beat my heart is making—they don't understand what my body is going through. Taking my mind off the background noises and off all the pain I am swimming in, I noticed a note lying on the coffee table. Indecisive on whether I should grab it, being just like Mom I eventually grabbed it. It was to me from Mom.

I opened the note so slow and it read, “No matter what happens in life, remember lay the heavens as your foundation and then remember I am your base. Through every trial life slams you into, you remember every word I have spoken into you. I am forever your base. Never let life take you for granted, you are to make a spectacular change, after all you are a Base. Kiss Carlos—I love you guys forever. Love Mom”

What mom leaves her kids for such a wicked world? What mom releases her two-year old innocent son for this world? That's exactly what I wanted to think. But then I thought of everything Mom has been through. As a young girl she lost her mom in a car accident and her thirteen year old sister was drowned. Her biological father was never in her life. Then my cruel dad put Mom through a broken marriage, divorced her two weeks after she lost her grandmother. And Mom kept a smile, she never stopped working to keep this family going. But now? Now what are we? Two lonesome kids in need of parental love.

My best friend is gone. The biggest heart a kid could receive is gone. Now it's up to me to do this life how Mom was doing it. It's up to me to make sure Carlos has the best life. It's up to me to make sure every trial he goes through, I am there to grab his hands. No matter what it's up to me to make sure no matter how hard life gets, I don't give up on us—this is forever. After all I am a Base.

A new reality is what started to run through my mind as I stared at the family photos taken during Christmas time, our school portraits, Mom smiling brighter than ever is what lied in the wooden surfaced frames. They lied what used to be a family on the walls.

32 A new reality, a new change, and a new base. It is us now.

YELLOW

TORI ELLIS

I knew him before the disease did.
I remember his shining eyes, blazing like a luculent flame.
His hearty laugh that rang in my ears,
Back when his lungs could afford it.
Late nights on the town he'd holler at women in a way that was crude, but it was only for
our amusement.
He'd apologize to the ladies with a flushed face,
Back when his cheeks could afford the rich color.
He kept the corny jokes close to his heart that our father told us when we were kids, and he
used them every time he saw a frowning face.
His hands were rough, calloused— brawny from endless hours of work in a rough world,
Trying to build a better life for him and his wife from the ground up.

The heart monitor ticks like a clock,
A monotone irritation of good news for passing nurses,
A deafening roar in the ears of the man who lays beside it,
Day in and day out,
Listening to his lifeline disdainfully.
His own breathing, shallow and ragged, creates a sickening melody in the bland room,
Plagued by white and grey.
Sickening.
His sharp cheekbones jut from his frail skin, his eyes drooping and hollow in his skull.
His dark chestnut hair looks jet black against his worn face,
Turning the color of a devout cigarette smoker's teeth.
The only wrinkles in his skin are laugh lines.
He has lost all hues of red and pink like the dead do, and is left with the discoloration of a
bruise.
The sun does not shine here,
It is deepset, hidden behind trees,
A sickening shade,
Reflected on a ghostly face.

I hold his hand now,
Broken down to thin bone like a hand reaching from the grave.
He feels me here, and I feel him slip,
A smile softening his fragile features.
His breathing slows,
“Sleep well, brother,”
I give his hand a final squeeze,
Feeling the life trickle out.
The monitor flatlines before my eyes.
His breathing has faded,
The melody has ceased,
Yet somehow the room is louder than ever.
I have never heard a silence so sickening.



Emma Burke is a rising junior at Evangel Homeschool. She is a member of Key Club, a cheerleader, and ballet dancer. When not studying for exams, she's listening to music, reading "Maximum Ride," or writing.



Anita Cade is 14 and homeschooled. She enjoys writing really bad poetry, listening to music, painting with watercolor, photography and keeping to herself. Anita is on her way to writing her first book and plans to have it out by the time she's 16. She also enjoys listening to slam poems on YouTube and hopes to perform some of her work if she can get over her shyness in a few years.



Jaz Carrasco is ascending into sophomore year at Pelham High School, where she often sings and acts at their "Write Night" and "Dessert and Drama." Jazmine has been in several musicals. Her latest being "Legally Blonde." Jazmine enjoys being a petty queen, and staying inside (because who actually goes outside?) Other than being obnoxious, Jazmine loves taking care of her two little sisters. Jazmine is obsessed with doing makeup. She is an outspoken individual, who speaks their mind.



Kenzie Chambers-Robinson is a rising junior at Gardendale High School. Kenzie participates in theatre and serves as an ambassador. She enjoys reading, photography, acting, and binging Netflix shows. She has been in several theatrical shows and plans to be in several more. Kenzie spends a lot of time volunteering around her community. Also she enjoys writing, obviously.



Devyn Coar is a rising senior at Gardendale High School. She is honored to serve her peers as the vice president of Gardendale's HOSA (Health Occupation Students of America) and Key Club for the past two years. She is also the newly elected Historian of her school's National Honor Society chapter. She enjoys petting dogs, impulsive haircuts, and hippopotami. After high school, she plans to get as far from Alabama as possible. Hopefully attending one of her dream schools, Columbia or Swarthmore.



Max Coryell is a rising sophomore at the Alabama School of Fine Arts, where he majors in piano. He is the eldest son of local poet and amazing mother Alina Stefanescu, and his writing has been featured in Highlights children's magazine. He spends his free time practicing his instrument, taking photos of his neighbors' plants, and accumulating knowledge.



Tori Ellis is a rising senior at the Altamont School, where she has received the Lynn Clark Award for creative writing for two consecutive years, the Hollins Book Award for creative writing, regional recognition with the Scholastic Gold Key for poetry and national recognition with the Scholastic National Gold Medal for short fiction. She is currently working on being published. Outside of school, she spends her time holding down a job, volunteering at the local animal shelter, thrift shopping, getting involved in theatre, searching for good classic movies and trying to teach herself guitar. She aspires to go to college up North, and the rest is yet to be determined.



Jacob Frazier is a rising senior at Gadsden City High School. He has written several short story narratives and had a poem of his publicized during his sophomore year. He has a deep love for creative writing in all forms, and wishes to both study and teach American Literature in New York City. One of Jacob's biggest passions is theatre; he has performed in almost two dozen musicals and straight plays, competed in theater festivals around the world, and won state trophies for his set designs. He enjoys running, reading, singing, and set construction.



Y'onna Hale is a rising sophomore at G.W. Carver High School. This is her second time joining the workshop and she enjoys it a lot. While ending her first year she received eight certificates retaining to her having the highest-class average in Spanish 1, the highest G.P.A in Biology, English, and Career prep, etc. She has also been accepted in the Health and Sciences Academy as well as the Animation Academy. During her free time, you can catch her in her room with Guns n Roses, Hozier and everything in between blasting out of her awesome earphones.



Kaitlin Harris is an upcoming junior at Bessemer Academy. Her extracurriculars consist of serving as a student ambassador and Senior BETA member. Kaitlin's passions lie in creating dark fiction and visual art and pretentiously gawking over indie films and aesthetic Brooklyn studio apartments. Along her journey, Miss Harris aims to gain her footing by working as a content editor for a New York publishing house; however, she will settle for desperately marketing her novels on the streets of Manhattan. She has been published in the 2018 ASFA Summer Anthology, as well as Bessemer Academy's 2018 and 2019 yearbooks. Furthermore, Miss Harris has been named both a first-time district and third-time class winner of the AISA Creative Writing Competition and winner of the Patriot's Pen Essay Contest of



David Hester IV is a rising senior at Ramsay High School. He performed his first open mic at his 8th grade drama show. He participated in his school's track team from middle school to high school. Also, he did musical performances at several of his school's talent shows. He hopes to pursue a successful career in creative writing or in music producing. In his spare time, he enjoys writing poetry, playing Halo and NBA 2K, and spending time with family and friends.



Dalah Jones is an upcoming senior at Central Park Christian School. During her last school year, she earned five A Honor Roll Awards in African American History, Chemistry, Language Arts, U.S History, and French. In addition, she was inducted into the National Honors Society. She spread her art skills throughout the school in a variety of ways. Her artistic creativity helped her 11th grade class win the Homecoming Art Contest. Outside of school, Dalah enjoys reading books, writing stories, and drawing digital art; she loves art so much, she wants to create her own art company. If you want to see some of her wonderful creations, follow her on Instagram @[externally-beautiful](#).



Zoe McCrear is a rising junior at Gardendale High School. She is a part of HOSA, Student Council, Key Club, and serves as an ambassador. She also runs track where she competes in the 800m and 1600m. She has an overwhelming amount of hobbies, but her favorite is writing. Zoe spends a lot of dedicated time to her creative writing class, Wordsmiths at Birmingham-Southern College. When she's not focused on academics and athletics, Zoe thinks about how she could survive on mac-and-cheese and cake for the rest of her life.



Jonica Owen is a rising junior at Oak Mountain High School. She is a part of Theater, Show Choir, Thespian Club, Apologetics Club, and Concert Choir. She has many hobbies, which include creative writing. She enjoys spending time with her family more than anything. Her goals are for her to go to college and have a double major in English and Psychology. She spends most of her time writing and singing. If she got a tattoo, it would be for her mom and lung cancer awareness.



Victoria Spear is a rising junior at Clay-Chalkville High School, where she explores her talents in band, art, and writing. She has achieved awards for her academic achievements and even was sixth place in Alabama's Seventh Congregational Art Competition. She's a proud member of the National Honor Society and Art Honor Society. Her hobbies include art, music, reading and writing. Her dream is to be a comic book writer and to major in creative writing. If she's lucky enough she will either go to UAB or the University of Alabama. None of these compare to her wanting to make her family, boyfriend, and grandmother proud!



Jamiah Stroud is an upcoming junior at Vestavia Hill High School. She enjoys listening to music, going to the YMCA, and spending times with her friends. She plans on playing volleyball and running track during her junior year. Her favorite books are "In the Mean Time" and "Trust" by Iyanla Vanzant.



Kaya Watkins is sophomore at Helena High School. She is on the junior varsity volleyball team. She is a part of the science honor society. She is ranked #4 in her grade. Her most preferred subject is Math. Her favorite type of writing is non-fiction. When she grows up she aspires to be a forensic scientist or a pediatrician. She is determined to be valedictorian of her class (2022). She loves watching “vampire diaries” on Netflix and sleeping. She thinks writing is a tool that can help you step out the box in a creative way. She also enjoys spending time with her family. She hopes to live and build an family in Honolulu, Hawaii. She has a puppy named Snow.



Christopher Woodry is a rising freshman at Mountain Brook Junior High. He was noticed at his school’s honors day for achieving second in the Emmet O’Neal Library’s Art Forms, in the short story section. His hobbies include playing video games, writing, and playing tabletop role playing games with his friends.



Amaria Woods is an upcoming sophomore at Ramsay High School. Amaria is in her school’s orchestra class. She has played the piano and participated in numerous recitals since she was five-years-old. She has also played softball and volleyball for almost three years. Amaria has earned a certificate from the Alabama Bandmaster Association for receiving a superior rating in trio, duet, and solo recitals. When she is not busy with school, she enjoys reading and writing stories on Wattpad, binge-watching Marvel movies, and creating chaos with her best friends.

