

LitTea Episode 10: Courtney Kae

Sabrina Hey friends, and Happy Holidays! Welcome back to LitTea! If you're joining us for the first time, I'm your host, Sabrina Lotfi, and we've made it all the way to Episode 10! Today I'm so excited to be joined by Courtney Kae, the author of *In the Event of Love*, which released this August! So, let's get to it!

Sabrina How is everything going over there?

Courtney It's been a struggle. The second book. Actually, my final is due on Monday. I was supposed to turn it in Friday, and it's taking me a lot longer.

Sabrina Oh, my gosh.

Courtney This whole book has taken me a lot longer than, like, I've had to rewrite it several times.

Sabrina This is the Ben and Adam one that you're working on currently? Okay, cool.

Courtney I'm getting there. My editor is so gracious, and working with me. So the final-final will be going to her on Monday. So I have through the weekend, which is great. It's getting there. Like, I'm finally proud of it. But it has been so hard. Like, probably one of the hardest projects I've ever worked on. Just different. It's different.

Sabrina Yeah. Oh, man. What's your second too, like, published?

Sabrina Did you have any of it written before you?

Courtney No.

Sabrina No? Those are the hardest. Those are the hardest.

Courtney So, Kensington, they bought the two book deal, and I gave them a full outline, pitch, and summary for the second book when they bought it. So it was ready to go in that I knew what was gonna happen. But then, during the drafting, I just didn't anticipate the mental blocks that came up, and just the self doubt and then dealing with reviews coming in for the first time on book one, and then just the pressure of getting it turned in. And also, it's only the second romcom I've ever written.

Sabrina What's your usual?

Courtney So, *In The Event of Love* was my first ever adult, and romcom. So I used to write YA fantasy before.

Sabrina Okay.

Courtney You're like, 'Oh, we vibe.'

Sabrina Yeah. We totally vibe, yes.

Courtney And I don't know, at some point, I had been working on so much YA fantasy, it was feeling so heavy. And as a reader, I was reading a lot of contemporary romance. Like, ever since Helen Hoang came out with *The Kiss Quotient*, I fell in love with the genre and just devoured it.

Sabrina That's a good one to, like, grab you and...yeah...uh huh.

Courtney Yeah, definitely. So good. And I didn't think I would ever write one, because it was so different from what I was used to. But it turned out that - I think doing a holiday one was a bit of a transition between the fantasy and the contemporary. Because it was so fun to add lots of whimsical details, and it was fun to create a whole world in that little mountain town.

Sabrina Well, and winter is such a magical time of year, too. Snow and all the sparkly lights and everybody - you know, everyone's getting cozy by fires, with hot chocolate in their sweaters. Yeah. It's a perfect, totally perfect transition, I think.

Courtney Yeah, thanks. And it brought so much joy during that really rough time for all of us.

Sabrina Yeah.

Courtney But then now, going into book two, it's been interesting - really kind of finding my footing in the genre. And it's a summertime romance, which still can add a lot of whimsical details at the beach. And I am creating a little town, as well. I don't like researching locations, so I like putting fake towns.

Sabrina It's hard!

Courtney And it's more fun for me to create spots that I wished I could go to, or it's kind of a mashup of a lot of places that I've been.

Sabrina Oh, I love that. That's cool. You probably see really good in your head, I guess.

Courtney I do.

Sabrina Can visualize really good. I cannot. I love doing research because I need to see what it looks like, and then I can go type it out. Yeah.

Courtney That's cool. But you know what is hard for me to see are my character's faces.

Sabrina Me too. I have these nerdy character walls.

Courtney No, I was eyeing that. I was thinking, that is so, so cool.

Sabrina I've got another one over here.

Courtney Oh, that's such a good idea.

Sabrina It's great. I just put poster board, and then I actually use magnetic tape with it, and then I can pull it off and like-

Courtney That's rad.

Sabrina I can pull them off and put them on my little - I have, like, little magnetic dry erase boards too.

Courtney Oh, my gosh. I'm obsessed with these kinds of hacks. I love that so much.

Sabrina Me too.

Courtney I love it. And I'm sorry, I kind of just kind of went off on a - just chatting, but...

Sabrina Oh, my god, I was actually gonna ask you. I was like, 'Okay, I know we haven't actually started yet,' but I feel like there was so much gold in that. Is it okay if I use some of that?

Courtney Of course I'm sorry. I don't want to take up your whole day.

Sabrina No, I was about to say the same thing. I don't want to take up your whole day. I'm good. So we just need to keep an eye on the clock, and you tell me when you're like, 'Hey, I need to go.'

Courtney All right, you lead the way.

Sabrina Stay cozy. Also, I love your whole little set up back there. Your bookshelf and your big book cover. That's awesome. Is that a poster?

Courtney It's a canvas.

Sabrina Oh, that's cool.

Courtney Yeah. Susan Lee, who wrote *Seoulmates*, she had one in her office, and I thought it was so cool, so I got one, and it's been really helpful during panels and zoom meetings and things.

Sabrina It's great. It's perfect. Here's my book. You have to get another one when you get ...

Courtney I'm gonna run out of room if I keep publishing books.

Sabrina That's okay. This is what authors need for decor. They just have a room with just all their books. You can turn it into wallpaper. It's fine. It's perfect. Oh, that's so cool.

Courtney Thank you.

Sabrina Okay, so we totally just started chatting hard. You ready to for real do this?

Courtney I'm ready. Let's do it.

Sabrina Okay. Two quick, fun little would you rather. Incredible story but bad writing, or incredible writing but a really terrible story?

Courtney I would go with incredible story.

Sabrina Okay.

Courtney I feel like I can look past the line issues that aren't particularly my taste, if I'm really invested in the character and what's happening.

Sabrina Okay, that's fair. I got the opposite answer on my last one and agreed with their response too, and I agree with you. I'm pretty sure that I don't think I could answer that one if someone asked me. [Laughs.]

Courtney It's a tough one.

Sabrina Sometimes I can't get past bad writing.

Courtney True.

Sabrina And sometimes I can. It kind of depends on the bad quirks, I think, too. I don't know. I think I'm just glad that I'm the one asking the questions right now.

Courtney Yeah, I know that one took a minute, but yeah...

Sabrina These are hard. Okay. If you could only read one, would you rather read the first page or the last page?

Courtney Oh, the first page.

Sabrina Okay.

Courtney I love opening a book and feeling like I'm stepping inside of a new world. I don't know, it's such a magical feeling to me. Definitely the first page.

Sabrina They're also really great for writers.

Courtney Yes!

Sabrina Querying writers, especially, like, good first pages are really hard.

Courtney Oh, absolutely.

Sabrina So what book made you a reader?

Courtney Oh my gosh. Ohhh. [Both laugh] You know what I'm gonna say. *Twilight*.

Sabrina Oh my gosh, yes. Okay.

Courtney I feel like there are a lot of us, me being a millennial, who had not read fiction like that before.

Sabrina I hadn't read fiction like that before, for sure.

Courtney Yeah. And growing up, I had what? *Sweet Valley High* and all the different things like that. But when I picked up *Twilight*, it was like, what is this? And I was actually in my early 20s when I read it, and I hadn't read anything like it, so it reignited my love of reading that I had lost, I think, over my teen years, when it became about studying and then into college. And then when I picked up *Twilight*, it just triggered something in my brain, like, 'Oh, this kind of thing exists.' And then from there, obviously, I discovered lots and lots more.

Sabrina Yes. I think I started *Twilight* in my 20s also. I didn't start it right away. It got really big, and I was sitting there going, 'What's the big deal? Why is everybody talking about this book?' And finally, I was like, 'Fine.' I actually think I watched the movie first. I was like, 'I should probably read the book.'

Courtney Okay.

Sabrina But I liked it. Yeah, I did. I liked *Twilight*. I liked *Twilight*, everybody. I'm sorry. We both did.

Courtney I did too. [Both laugh.]

Courtney I actually can't believe I'm gonna say this, but here we go. So, I read it before the movies had come out, and they were filming the movies, parts of the movies, around my hometown.

Sabrina Oh my gosh.

Courtney And actually, Jacob is from my hometown, like, to the point where—

Sabrina Oh my gosh.

Courtney I'm much older than him. So it was like, 'Oh, wow, that's Taylor.' We used to go to the same church as him when he was really little, and he did Sharkboy and Lavagirl, and he got up and talked about his role, and then all of a sudden he's in *Twilight*.

Sabrina Oh my gosh.

Courtney People around my town would bring like, life size cutouts of him to restaurants.

Sabrina Whoa. Okay.

Courtney It was kind of all happening at once when I started reading the books. And I kind of missed my whole fan fiction era in my teen years, as far as discovering what it was, but I would have been hardcore into writing fan fiction. I think that's actually why I started writing. Because I fell so in love with an epic feeling of a love story that I wanted to write something like that.

Sabrina Nice.

Courtney So is all of my work *Twilight* fan fiction? Maybe. [both laugh]

Sabrina Well, it doesn't all feel like that. Just so you know. [Both laugh.] Oh my god, that is so funny.

Courtney Anyway, getting real.

Sabrina This is the best. I love it. *Twilight* is such a funny one. Like, so many people are like, 'I hate it!' And then a lot of people are like, 'But, I secretly love it.'

Courtney Yeah, I mean, there's definitely so much to be dissected with the problematic issues of *Twilight*, but beyond that, yes, it was definitely - what's the word? - so impactful for a lot of us who are writers now.

Sabrina Yeah, I don't know, it was very different from what I was used to reading.

Courtney Exactly.

Sabrina And it was unique too. I mean, she made sparkle vampires and really cool, like baseball stuff.

Courtney Yeah. And I read articles...back to your original question. I have read articles where people have talked about the writing is not great. I don't know. I haven't read it in so long, I don't remember.

Sabrina I haven't either.

Courtney But that's where I feel like, in instances like that, you can look past the line level, and there was just something about, I don't know, the characters and what they needed that drew me in.

Sabrina *Twilight* also got me through a broken leg. I actually had a broken leg. I couldn't do anything. And it was after the fourth book had come out too, so I was able to just binge the whole thing and just disappear.

Courtney Yes. And that was before Netflix, I believe.

Sabrina It was definitely before the streaming Netflix. They might have had the DVD ones, but I don't know if I was doing that.

Courtney Yes! Oh my gosh. Yeah. So we could only binge books.

Sabrina Yeah, those were harder to binge because you could only get the one DVD at a time and then had to mail it. Yeah, that was fun.

Courtney Oh my gosh, I forgot. We've been through such hard times.

Sabrina We have. I also had a Blockbuster right next to me.

Courtney Yes!

Sabrina I could go get movies from over there.

Courtney I miss Blockbuster, to be honest. Those were the best Friday nights, going with your friends.

Sabrina And getting candy.

Sabrina And then you could see them all you can scroll through, but it was really nice to just see all the titles right there in front of your face.

Courtney Yes, it was an occasion. And sometimes you'd see your crush in there and be like, 'Oh, my gosh.'

Sabrina Yes.

Courtney 'Hi. They're looking at me.'

Sabrina 'Look around the aisle. I'm gonna go to this aisle.' Yes.

Courtney Telling you, kids these days are missing out on that.

Sabrina I know. That was good times. Oh, my gosh. We went off on the hugest tangent.

Courtney Sorry.

Sabrina I'm so sorry. Okay. Do you want to share some hobbies and interests?

Courtney Sure. Let's see. Hobbies besides reading and writing. I love gardening. I love my cats.

Sabrina Oh, gardening, cool.

Courtney That's basically it. I'm a very boring person.

Sabrina No.

Courtney And it's kind of been a couple years of - of course - we were in the pandemic and then a couple of years of being on deadline. So I haven't really allowed myself the freedom to enjoy activities. And not that I'm complaining about deadline, but there is this sense of when you have free time, you should be writing. So my deadline comes to an end on Monday, and I feel like I am just going to rediscover myself in many ways.

Sabrina Yes.

Courtney I love Animal Crossing. I'm kind of - I love it so much. My island is full of weeds, so I'm looking forward to fixing my island.

Sabrina Nice. Okay. I have not played 'Animal Crossing' and I hear so much about it, and I don't have the little system for it is the big problem. But every time I hear people talk about it, I'm like, 'I want to play'.

Courtney And I'm that way about Sims. I really want to play Sims, but I'm scared because I feel like it will take over my whole life.

Sabrina You know, I was just going through the Dalia interview, and she was talking about people playing the Sims with their characters, to better get to know their characters. So you could do that and then call it research.

Courtney Well, we were actually just talking - Falon Ballard and I were just talking to Lillie Vale about this same thing. And I was saying how in Animal Crossing I've actually sat at my writing desk and thought, 'Okay, well, on the island, they have different character traits for each villager' and how, like, one is the rock star, one is the gym junkie, one is the very sensitive bookish type. And it's funny. They have festivals. They have all these things. So I referenced Animal Crossing a lot in world building, which is kind of hilarious to me.

Sabrina That is funny. You said you have a cat. What's your cat's name?

Courtney I have two. I have Winter, and she is a little white, like pointed calico. And Star is a tortie. And there are definitely grump sunshine situation going on.

Sabrina How cute. Who's sunshine? Who's grump?

Courtney Winter is the sunshine and Star is the grump. Star only likes me, and it's a huge source of pride for my ego.

Sabrina That's fair. Cats are very selective, so they know. They know.

Courtney She doesn't like anyone else in the whole world. And my family is so offended by it. But I'm like, 'It's fine. She likes me.'

Sabrina Oh, my gosh, I love it. My cat loves me but does not want to be with me all the time. My dog is like, 'What room are we going into? Okay, I'll be right here. Okay, let's go outside together.'

Courtney Oh, sweet.

Sabrina Actually, I was laughing when you said Winter and Star. I was like, 'Oh, those are perfect names for you knowing, like, you, reading your books as your pet names.

Courtney Oh, gosh, my book. Has it become my entire personality, or is my personality my book? Maybe both.

Sabrina Probably a little of both, I mean. Okay. You want to dive into some querying questions?

Courtney Oh, yes. I love.

Sabrina Yay. Okay. Do you want to kind of walk us through your path and like, the books you submitted, and just however much you want to share?

Courtney Yeah, I'm happy to share about my querying journey. It's kind of almost a sense of guilt for me because it was very fast. I like cringe even saying that, because I know how difficult querying can be.

Sabrina Some people's paths are really quick, some are slower. It's okay.

Courtney And we all have our different things that we struggle with when it comes to finding... I guess getting to the milestones that we hope to be at. And for me, it took honestly, about maybe eight to ten years before I even felt comfortable querying at all. So that was where my struggle was, is getting to that point where, 'Okay, I feel ready.'

Sabrina But you were writing that whole time.

Courtney Writing that whole time, yeah. So I started with short stories. Well, I kind of started with daydreaming and conceptualizing a whole novel for, what, a year? And that was like, 'I should maybe try to write.' And it turns out that it was very difficult to grasp the breadth of a whole novel for me right away.

Sabrina They're hard. Books are hard.

Courtney There's so much structure that you have to learn, and your voice, and your tone, and there's so many layers to a novel, right?

Sabrina Yeah.

Courtney As we know. So it was easier for me to sit down and grasp, like, the concentrated version in a short story, to develop the plot and the characters, but have it be bite sized almost.

Sabrina Okay.

Courtney And then I took what I learned from that and expanded it into a longer story. So I read a lot of craft books as I went along to learn how to do that. And especially because my brain is very - I like methods, and I like hacks, and I like structure. When it comes to creating, I like creating within a structure. So a couple of books, if it's okay to mention?

Sabrina Oh, yeah, mention away.

Courtney Cool. *Story Genius* by Lisa Cron was one that unlocked something in me, because she takes you through your character, where they're starting from. And then she asks you questions throughout the book that helps you create this blueprint, or a map, if you will. And by the time you're done, actually, it's more of a workbook, really, and she is actually working with a writer, in the story, in the book, to develop their book. So you're seeing examples of what this person is doing to develop their story, and you're kind of working along with this person. She gives you tasks to do, and by the time you're done, you have a fully fleshed outline and all you have to do is fill it in. To me, that really put something - like a light bulb went off in my brain of how to then dig into each part and make it make sense. Yeah. And then with romance, I used *Romancing the Beat* by Gwen Hayes, which is a very, very short read if you are wanting to get into the structure of how to develop a romance, or a heavy romance subplot. And then of course, what's it called? Oh, my God. *Save the Cat* by Jessica Brody. *Save the Cat Writes a Novel*, as we know, but even that one, I had a hard time grasping all of the beats or, like, translating them into my brain. So between those three, that's like my trifecta.

Sabrina I need to check out the *Story Genius* because I hear a lot of people talk about it. I'm sorry, writing world, that I have not checked it out yet.

Courtney Oh, gosh, you're fine. And some people don't like craft books at all.

Sabrina I love craft books. I love them.

Courtney I do, too.

Courtney Just help me figure out where I'm going because I tend to freeze up if there's too many options.

Sabrina Oh, me too. I love *Save the Cat*, and it's so good with character growth and everything, but it's not necessarily the best for having a perfect plot outline. So, yeah, I'm gonna check out using those together. That sounds really smart.

Courtney And *Save the Cat* is really helpful to bring out the cinematic beats that you want to hit, like your climax and especially the beginning of the story.

Sabrina Your big moments.

Courtney Yes, exactly. So I use *Save the Cat* to make sure I'm hitting those big moments and then *Story Genius* helps me go to the other layers.

Sabrina Yeah, it's the other layers that I have a hard time with when I'm just looking at *Save the Cat*.

Courtney Same. I had several. So I did this for short stories. And then I have so many novels that I started, and will never see the light of day, and it's definitely for the best on many of them. I was working on a YA fantasy for, god, two years. I rewrote that thing probably four times. I mean, it was a sweeping, epic world with no real magic system. Nothing made sense. I just wanted to write this big romance. And then when I became a romance reader and I got this idea for Morgan and Rachel, I just knew in my gut that was the one I wanted to query. And at that point, Pitch Wars was going on and I had used it every year as sort of a goal, a time frame goal. I wanted to enter every year, and it was just never ready. And then once I wrote *In the Event*, I was ready and I entered. I was shocked to get in. And I worked with Rachel Lynn Solomon, who is just a light in this world, and our brains clicked, and working with her was an absolute dream. She's such a dear friend. And from there, I signed with my incredible agent, Claire Friedman. I love you, Claire. She's really incredible. And the book sold very quickly. I think because - I think about this a lot because it's a sapphic Hallmark, basically, which I think at that point publishers were, and I'm sure they still are - I hope they still are. But at that point, that's what Kensington wanted, and it worked out.

Sabrina I'm so glad it did. We needed a sapphic Hallmark, yes.

Courtney Thank you. And I never dreamed that that would happen because it felt like niche, niche, niche. It was a holiday book, and I feel like there aren't many debuts that are holiday. I feel like that's something that people kind of write once they already have an established career. I am wrong. And also, I didn't know - would anybody even want to buy a holiday book. And it's queer. It ended up working out, but I think, bottom line was I wrote what I desperately wanted to read and what gave me so much joy. And so everything else was just - I kind of was sitting there like, 'Oh, this is actually happening.' And I still feel that way. Honestly, it has not settled in. It's been kind of a whirlwind, and I'm so grateful and all of it.

Sabrina Yay. Well, I'm so glad it did. I really enjoyed, and I'm really looking forward to Ben and Adam's story.

Courtney Thank you.

Sabrina Yeah. So, you did Pitch Wars, and then you also signed with Claire, and then you obviously got your book picked up. So what kind of revisions went into each of those different processes? First with your mentor for Pitch Wars, and then once you signed, and then once you got your book deal.

Courtney Sure. So, revision wise, let's see, *In The Event* was my *Story Genius* book. So I feel like the characters were pretty solid. But I had never written a contemporary book before. I had always written YA fantasy. And while I knew the conventions of the genre, as far as being a reader, it is, of course, a little new way of - kind of like, learning a new language when you're writing in a new genre. So I had to learn in Pitch Wars how to - let's see, there were some awesome tips that Rachel gave me that I'll never forget. Like, in a romance, you always want to - the question is, 'Will they end up together?' So you always need to have that tension going through until the very end. That is like your ultimate happy ending. The whole time, the readers, like, obviously, you know they're gonna end up together, but there has to be that tension of 'Will they, though?'

Sabrina And it's got to feel real because you know they're gonna end up together. So yeah, that's hard.

Courtney Let's see, it's best to either have your main couple - your love interest - interacting at least every other chapter in some way.

Sabrina This gives me hope. Okay, cool.

Courtney Yeah. Like with Morgan, for example, there were a lot of other relationships that she needed to mend and work on and there was, of course, this big fundraiser she had to plan. So there were a lot of moments to sort of interweave. Like Rachel and Morgan were the main thread, but then you also have to intersperse the plot points, and the world, and the different relationships. So always kind of coming back to that love interest and keeping that the main focal point. It was really helpful to remember. And I had a lot of restructuring to do in the middle of my book because another thing that I learned was you have to - Sorry... you don't have to do anything. For my book, what I needed was I had actually two tree farm events in the original draft, and it was too monotonous - repetitive - and it just was not interesting. I remember in my CP feedback, they were like, 'Wait, the event is happening already?' And so I learned how to interject different festivals. Kind of like a mini climax that builds to the next act. Also in the climax, it's helpful to - basically all of your main plot threads are going to come to a point in your climax to then blow up and bring us back down to the dark night of the soul, if you will.

Sabrina Yes.

Courtney So, yeah, sorry to get super crafty, but that's everything that I learned.

Sabrina No, I love getting crafty. That's why we're here.

Courtney Yeah, so that was what I worked on. And then once it went to Kensington, we actually had super minimal revisions because it had been through so much.

Sabrina Pitch Wars.

Courtney They really get in there. And I had also some amazing critique partners that - I had so many eyes on it and very grateful for that, so. Yeah.

Sabrina Nice. Okay, cool. So do you have any tips for making your query letter stand out?

Courtney Oh, my gosh, yes. Okay, so one thing that I did in the beginning of my query letter - and this is not like a blanket statement of 'This will work', but it is helpful to almost put - it can be helpful to almost put a little logline up front. I'm sorry I don't have the query in front of me, but I put a line in the very front before I went - dove into introducing the character. It was '*In The Event of Love* is a steamy queer Hallmark', and I'm sure hopefully I said it, I wrote it better than that in the query. But doing a little brief snapshot, working that in like a one line hook, if you will, so they know what's ahead.

Sabrina Yeah. It really puts you in the right mindset for when you dive into, 'Oh, now we're meeting the characters', which can be a little bit slower in introductions in a query letter because you have a lot to introduce.

Courtney Yeah. And I had an author friend recommend that to me when she was giving me feedback on my query, and it ended up working really well through Pitch Wars, and then with querying agents in that agent round. And then what I do from there is: Who is your character? What do they want? What is going to stop them from getting what they want? How are they going to circumvent that obstacle? And then what happens if they fail? And then, so those are the stakes that I like to hit in the query. And then you wrap it up in the end with a brief bio and goodbye.

Sabrina I love the little bullet points you just put in there, too.

Courtney My brain loves structure. And also, actually, if you look at the inside jacket or back cover copy of books, it's essentially a query letter. It goes through all of those beats and hooks you with that. If they fail, there's that last kind of like, 'What's gonna happen? I have to see how this unfolds.'

Sabrina What direction is it gonna go in?

Courtney Yeah. And so that was something that I used a lot to learn how to write a query letter where it was the summaries of books and you can find them online too. Goodreads. Any book summary will help you kind of develop a query.

Sabrina They usually have really good comp titles.

Courtney Also a fun thing for comp titles is if you look at blurbs for a book, you might have an idea of what it might relate to your book or comp to your book. A lot of the authors that blurb books are in that same vein. It can be helpful to pull from those authors. Like, if you're trying to pull comp titles.

Sabrina That's a good idea.

Courtney Another thing, in your bio, is don't hesitate to - obviously I wouldn't go into, like, it's not the place to give like a resume, but do mention if you had editor interest in a pitch or in a pitch contest or something, like anything that's going to say, 'Hey, there's some interest in this book.' If you've had that through a pitch contest, or anything like, 'I've had something published here,' Just know - that cannot hurt you to mention. It's seriously not gonna hurt you. I think it can only help you.

Sabrina Yeah, no, I think that's really smart, too. I've seen people send nudges with some of that information sometimes, as well, if they're already querying. And then you enter a pitch contest and get like an editor like, or whatever, and then it's been three months with an agent. 'Hey, have you got the chance to read this? And also, by the way.' Yeah.

Courtney Actually, because of Pitch Wars, before I had even signed with my agent, I had editors liking my showcase pitch, my showcase entry on Twitter. And it's interesting because when we went out on sub, there was already interest because of Pitch Wars. So these things really do kind of link together. And because of that interest, I think that's a huge reason why my sub process went so quickly, because we were able to nudge it along from that interest. So if you're involved in those contests and stuff, it really can't hurt you to mention any sort of interest that you might have garnered from those. They're all inter - it's a very small industry.

Sabrina It is, yeah. I mean, it's also really easy for them to hop over and peek at it and be like, 'Oh, wow, it really did get a lot of attention.'

Courtney Yeah. And it's helpful. I would imagine it's helpful to the agent, too, to sort of have a starting point of, 'Oh, okay, this is somebody I could have on the sub list.'

Sabrina Speaking of Twitter pitches, this is the perfect time to jump into this. Do you have any tips for constructing pitches?

Courtney I do. I haven't cracked this book open in so long, but it was instrumental in helping me do this.

Sabrina Which one is that?

Courtney It's *Writing Irresistible Kid Lit*.

Sabrina Oh, cool.

Courtney By Mary Kole.

Sabrina Okay, cool.

Courtney It was actually the first craft book I ever read.

Sabrina Oh, nice.

Courtney Yeah. And it actually walks you through those beats of the query. Oh my God. Okay, I can't find it. So what I'm gonna tell you is there is a book called *Writing Irresistible Kid Lit* by Mary Kole. And she actually walks you through the query, and she walks you through the logline as well, like a very quick elevator pitch. And it essentially is the meat of your query. So it's: Who is your character? What do they want? What's gonna stop them from getting it? And what happens if they fail, basically? And if you can answer all of those things. Let's see. So my pitch for *In the Event*, it's actually still up on the internet. It's on the Pitch Wars showcase for 2020. And I had used that structure, Rachel and I had used it to develop it, and it's actually still what I use. It's what was in my publisher's marketplace announcement. Yeah. So it mentions Morgan. She's an event planner. She has a major blow up, so she's at the height of her career. So what she wants is her promotion, right? And she has a major blow up scandal with her career. So in order to save her career, she has to take a job back in her rustic home mountain town, where she finds that the owner of the tree farm she's there to save is the girl who broke her heart seven years ago. So you're left thinking like, 'Oh, gosh, how is this gonna work out?' Obviously, we know, but that is like a concise way of breaking it down.

Sabrina That's a really good recommendation just because usually those things get tweaked at all the different levels. That's impressive.

Courtney Yeah, it had a pretty cinematic pitch, I think, because of the steamy queer Hallmark element, because it was such a spin on that.

Sabrina Well, it's three words and it says so much, too.

Courtney Yeah. And I think, too, developing those things, and having that ready in your toolkit can be helpful as you're writing, because it helps keep you on track with your plot sometimes.

Sabrina Oh, totally. So, do you have any tips on synopsis?

Courtney Oh, yes. Okay. I only have one: that is please look up the 'How to Write a Synopsis' by Susan Dennard. Okay. Have you read that?

Sabrina Uh huh.

Courtney Yeah, it's the only thing I use. Susan wrote *Truthwitch*, I believe. And so she has this - I can't even imagine how many hits that blog post has gotten. But essentially - and what I did to write my synopsis - is I wrote it after the book. But you could also write it from your outline, which is great for pitching if you are looking to option, or something like that. But using your outline or going through your book and writing just basically one line that happens in each chapter.

Sabrina That's my favorite, too.

Courtney Yeah, and condensing it. And of course, the difference between a synopsis and a query is - the query you bring them up to what's gonna happen if they fail. And then the synopsis, you bring us through the entire book. It's essentially like so that an agent, or an editor, or a publisher, can look at it and say, 'Oh, okay, so this has legs to go all the way through.'

Sabrina I love that method.

Courtney I do too. It's really the only thing that works for me.

Sabrina I actually do a really giant one. So I use Scrivener. And then in the little index card thingy part, I just type out the chapter in a little paragraph form of like, What's in this one? And then I'll print it out when I'm trying to fix stuff. But I do pretty in depth ones on there, like specific things that are in that scene, because I usually have a lot of moving parts per scene, and I always forget where specific things are, like when did you talk about this one thing?

Courtney That's so smart.

Sabrina So that's helpful. And then I used to do bullet points, this most recent book, I was like, I'm gonna write it really pretty, and then I'm gonna use this when I need to make my synopsis and I'm just gonna start condensing.

Courtney I love that.

Sabrina But it's also been really helpful finding stuff.

Courtney Oh, yeah, for sure. Like a little blueprint.

Sabrina Yeah.

Courtney Also it's really nice because once you do put down everything, like a little summary for each chapter, there are obviously chapters you're not gonna need to include. You're probably just gonna want to hit your major beats and bring us - wrap it up to the end. But at least when you have it all written out, then it's easier to go back in and slash things.

Sabrina It is. So I love printing them out when I have my book done, too, and I'll look at those for like, "Okay, what kind of big picture edits do I need to make? What's happening, where do certain characters disappear," those kind of things.

Courtney How helpful. And I think, too, something I'm just remembering now is you have your A plot and your B plot, right? So you have your external 'Oh, no, we have to save the tree farm.' And then your internal journey that is the character arc, right? Your character's internal journey of healing, or whatever they need to go through. And so I think it's important to show both in your synopsis.

Sabrina Yes. Character growth as well as plot points. Yeah. Do you have any writing routines that you do? Do you have any favorite snacks or favorite, I don't know, places to write?

Courtney I have my little office that I love to write in, and sometimes it feels too isolating if I'm really having a tough mental time at it. So, I will either be writing at my desk and something that kind of triggers my brain 'Oh, it's time to write' is I have a little lamp that I'll turn on on my desk. And I also have god, this is so dramatic. But I have a, like, aromatherapy thing. Diffuser. Diffuser.

Sabrina Nice.

Courtney So that's going. And I have to have noise, so I don't get too distracted in my own brain. Something that becomes white noise. So I'll pick a song that feels like the moment, and I'll just play it on repeat. Also, I will write in my living room, and basically my poor little family has to orbit around me, and I take over the TV, and it only loops Hallmark movies because they kind of become that white noise, and you just get the vibe.

Sabrina Well, they can kind of join you, and watch a Hallmark movie if they want to.

Courtney They do. And they're like, 'We've seen this one like, 25 times.'

Sabrina Like sorry, I haven't, I'm over here.

Courtney Yeah. And it becomes, oh, my gosh. I've been really deep in edits and turning in multiple different drafts. So at each stage it's been like crunch time, the crunch weekend. And my family is so sweet, and my little one, like, they just wanted to hang out with me. And so we put a blow up mattress in the living room, and it was like, I was on the couch, my husband's on the other couch, my little one's on the blow up mattress. And we're all just hanging out with, like, a big slumber party.

Sabrina They get to be a part of your writing process. That's adorable.

Courtney Yeah, they're really super supportive.

Sabrina Cute. Do you have any tips to battle writer's block?

Courtney It's something I really struggle with. And the only thing that I can say is that it's typically coming from - for me - either I'm just so up in my feelings about insecurities, and when it's that, I just need to push through it. And the only way to do that is to start writing. And it sucks. It's, like, almost painful to open my computer. I mean, I think we all know that feeling of, like, it's like, oh, painful. But then once you get going, once you get into the flow, you kind of leave that behind. And I think it's this moment of stepping out of your conscious, right? And letting yourself just ease into the act, getting into the flow of creating and embracing your subconscious. When it has to do with an element that isn't working, I feel like sometimes I'll know it in my gut, but I don't want to face it. So it does take a little bit of, 'Okay, let's fix this problem,' and then things will flow. And usually that comes from asking questions of the problem. In this last draft, I had to come up with something that my character had failed in the past, and the answer ended up being closely related to the business he owns. And it kind of made everything seamless, but my brain had to get there, right? So asking questions.

Sabrina Sometimes you have to see the wrong, and know it's wrong, before you can figure out what it needs. I do that a lot.

Courtney Yeah, me too.

Sabrina There's a lot of times where I'm like, 'I can't move forward yet. I know that I wrote crap here, but I know this isn't right, and it's gonna really mess with me, moving forward.'

Courtney Yeah. And another thing I do, which is extremely helpful to me, is write badly on purpose. So it feels intentional, because it is intentional, and it's the only way sometimes I can get words on a page, especially in that first draft.

Sabrina And to figure out where the story needs to go before you make it pretty, yeah.

Courtney Yeah, because it doesn't need to be pretty, at that point. It's going to change so much, and there's no way you can hit everything on that first go. Some people can. That's amazing.

Sabrina Some people can.

Courtney I am not one of those people.

Sabrina We hate you a little bit. With love. [both laugh]

Courtney Exactly. So writing badly on purpose makes it feel intentional. And it's like so if I see something and I want to cringe, it's like, 'No, it's supposed to be that way right now.'

Sabrina Yes, that's a good one.

Courtney So it's easier to keep going.

Sabrina I can't do it in my computer. I cannot. So I do them by hand, and then I'm like, 'Oh, my handwriting is messy and it's shorthand. No, there's no THE's in it.' Yeah, there's no descriptions yet, but it's fine because it's just in your notebook.

Courtney Yeah. And switching between digital and handwriting is so helpful too. That's a great point. I do that a lot.

Sabrina Yeah, I do that a lot. Usually I start in a notebook and then I'm like, 'Okay, now I have no idea what that is and I need to make a little bit of sense of it.' So I'll go type it up. A lot of times I would just give myself permission to just type it up badly. So I'm like, 'Just type it up the way it is. Put the gaps in there and there's no dialog tags, and it's fine. Just get it in there.'

Courtney And it just gets you in the flow. And then it's helpful to start a writing session that way, like typing what you already wrote in a notebook. Because usually it kind of helps you bypass that 'Oh, I don't know where to start' because you've already started, you're typing it up and then usually your brain can keep going.

Sabrina Oh, that's a really good one. I didn't actually think about that, but I do that a lot.

Courtney I do too.

Sabrina I'll get stuff ready and then I'm like, 'Okay, tomorrow I'm gonna type this up and then keep going.' Yeah, that's a good one.

Courtney Yeah, that's helpful to me, too.

Sabrina Do you want to jump into some book questions?

Courtney Yeah, let's do it.

Sabrina Okay, so we've kind of talked about this as we talked about revisions and stuff made, but for anyone who hasn't read yet, would you like to tell us a little bit about *In the Event of Love* and your inspiration?

Courtney Yeah, I'd love to. *In the Event of Love* is - we've already said all of this, but yeah, it is a sapphic, steamy Hallmark. I feel like people are gonna walk away from this being like sapphic, steamy Hallmark. Okay, got it.

Sabrina It's just all they're gonna see. They're gonna be like writing it in their sleep. [both laugh]

Courtney Okay, so we have established that it was inspired by actually a tough time that my family went through in the end of 2019. And what gave us a lot of comfort was sitting close on the couch, and watching endless holiday movies, because it kind of was this little bubble. We could cuddle and everything ended happy, and it was this really good escape that we needed to sort of heal from this moment in our lives. So, of course, while watching those movies, it was impossible not to notice that they are all very heteronormative and, especially at that time. And I think it's really cool that so many movies are coming out now that center queer couples. I think actually Hallmark has their first one coming out this month. Next month?

Sabrina That's awesome. Okay, cool.

Courtney Yeah, they have their first main couple, gay main couple, and I think it's - is his name Jonathan Bennett? I just adore him. But so it's called the Holiday House Two. Or The Christmas House 2. And Christmas House 1, they were a side couple and that was a huge deal because they shared a kiss, and it was like this big thing. So it's happening. It's happening.

Sabrina Yay.

Courtney And of course, Netflix and different streaming services have been on that in Lifetime with *The Christmas Setup*, which was adorable. And that was filmed in, I want to say 2020. And the main couple and it has Fran Drescher as the mom. I just adore her. But the main couple, they're actually married in real life, and they were able to film and actually do on-scene kisses because they were married in their quarantine bubble. So that was really sweet to learn. Yeah.

Sabrina That is cute.

Courtney They exist, but I definitely wanted to create it in book form.

Sabrina Okay, so that is about Morgan and Rachel. And then you also have - Do you know what month in 2023 yet?

Courtney Yeah, it's coming July 25, 2023.

Sabrina Okay.

Courtney *In The Case of Heartbreak*. And that is Ben's story, who is a

Sabrina Ben and Adam. Ooh.

Courtney Yeah, Ben and Adam. And Adam is Rachel's brother, who owns the auto shop in Fern Falls. And Ben is our cinnamon roll of a baker. It has a very different feel from *In The Event* in that we kind of dive into a lot of, like, Ben's childhood trauma. So that's been a lot of working. So there will be different trigger warnings for book two that I'll put on my website. And once, you know, ARCs are ready to go out. I would imagine the spring is when they'll start funneling out ARCs.

Sabrina Okay.

Courtney But we go to copy edits next week, so we're getting there.

Sabrina Yay. And is that all Ben's point of view?

Courtney Yes, and the point of view, because it's a series, will be the same as book one, so it'll be first person present, to have that same flow of a series.

Sabrina Okay, cool. Are we gonna get a third Fern Falls book? Do you know yet?

Courtney I don't know yet.

Sabrina Okay. It's a little early, so.

Courtney Yeah. I would love to pitch a Whitney and Tanner book. I just have to kind of figure that one out.

Sabrina Okay, I can see that.

Courtney So we'll see. That would really be the only other avenue I would go for that series.

Sabrina Okay. That's cute. Everybody, bug the people that can make this happen.

Courtney It'd be fun to do little novellas, too, like a Morgan and Rachel honeymoon, or things like that. It would be super fun.

Sabrina You know what would be really fun is if - Do we have a movie deal yet? Are we coming to Hallmark yet? Is that happening?

Courtney Please put the vibes out there. That would be awesome.

Sabrina It's only fair with all the Hallmark advertising you're doing for them, that they make you a movie. Right? Come on, Hallmark.

Courtney It would need some closed door editing, I think. But that's okay.

Sabrina It probably would.

Courtney Yeah, which is fair. I mean, it's like a major network, so they have to... but I don't know. Hopefully one day. That's a dream, right? For me.

Sabrina Yes! That would be so cool. Was there any interesting research you had to do for either of the projects?

Courtney Yes, I had to research land development for book one, which is so boring. But my husband actually, he was a geologist, and so he helped me with the questions for this one scene that actually required some technical terms. And it was so funny because I tell Rachel Lynn Solomon that she saved my book from becoming, like, a real estate manual, because sometimes you can get so deep into those details, you feel like you have to work in everything.

Sabrina Well, you put a lot of work into the research, too. It's like, 'I'm gonna use this. I just spent hours learning about these things.' Yeah, that's fair.

Courtney And then also getting on Google Maps. Fern Falls is supposed to be a location that is kind of like in relation of Mammoth to LA, in California. So spacing it out time wise and making sure, like, this fake town could actually exist in a space like that. And then the fake town of Fern Falls is inspired by so many mountain towns and places I've been that I would like to condense into one spot, and also places I wish would exist.

Sabrina Yeah, that's fun. Who has been your favorite character to write?

Courtney My favorite character to write? Oh my gosh. Some of them have made me laugh just because I don't even know where they came from. I appreciate Whitney and her smash the patriarchy vibes. That's always fun.

Sabrina Whitney feels like she'd probably be a fun one to write.

Courtney That's fun. And Tanner, actually, I introduced him in book two, as Fern Fall's favorite manic pixie dream himbo.

Sabrina Yes.

Courtney I feel like that is him in a nutshell. They have been fun to have on the outskirts, but definitely I have a very soft spot for Ben.

Sabrina Okay. Yeah. Ben's a sweetie. I love Ben. He's such a cinnamon roll.

Courtney Thank you. I'm glad that that was achieved.

Sabrina Yeah. I'm really excited to read his full story.

Courtney Thank you. He's not having a great time right now, but he'll be okay.

Sabrina Aww.

Courtney He goes through so much.

Sabrina Oh, Ben. I'm gonna just send him a mental hug through the pages.

Courtney Thank you.

Sabrina Which character are you the most like?

Courtney I think I'm a mix of Morgan and Ben, to be honest. I think sometimes when you struggle with any sort of, like, mental health, any mental illness, or in my case, I have OCD, anxiety, depression, that fun little cocktail. So sometimes I have to be a Morgan, and kind of be that more extroverted version for my day job, or whatever needs to happen. But internally, I'm very much a Ben. It's kind of learning how to - I guess we all are kind of many different things in one.

Sabrina Yeah.

Courtney Our characters pull out different facets of ourselves.

Sabrina Yeah. Well, I mean, we wrote them.

Courtney I guess we did. I love how we're talking about them like they're people that exist.

Sabrina They are. They do exist. Who was the hardest character to write?

Courtney Ben has been the hardest - from his point of view - because he's been very layered and so it took a lot of excavating.

Sabrina Yeah.

Courtney Morgan was always - her voice was, like, always right there. I think she was very angry, and so it like came across, like, very loud, her voice. And Ben is a lot softer and dealing with a lot of insecurities. And so I think it's been like, 'Okay, come on, work with me here. Tell me what's going on.'

Sabrina See, they are real.

Courtney I know. This is, like, where us writers just get each other and people on the outside are like, 'Um-kay.'

Sabrina I know. It's a good thing this podcast is for writing. Y'all will get it. Okay. So are there any recently released or upcoming books you'd like to recommend for people?

Courtney So many. I will keep my list brief because you just can't stop, right? So, *Pride and Protest* by Nikki Payne, which just released this week. Absolutely incredible. Let's see. *Astrid Parker Doesn't Fail* comes out next week by Ashley Herring Blake. *The Make-Up Test* by Jenny L. Howe is, of course, a favorite. *Seoulmates* by Susan Lee. I'm so excited for *Georgie, All Along* by Kate Clayborn. I was so lucky to write a blurb for *Kiss Her Once for Me* by Alison Cochran, which is just - I love how Allison describes it. She says, 'have you ever seen *While You Were Sleeping*? And thought, Wow, Bill Pullman reminds me of a Portland lesbian' that is *Kiss Her Once For Me*. That's that logline.

Sabrina Yes. That's amazing.

Courtney Yeah. If you haven't picked that one up, it's just an absolute joy.

Sabrina That's amazing. Okay. I love that.

Courtney *Season of Love* is a great one by Helena Greer. And then *How To Excavate a Heart* by Jake Maia Arlow. I'm really excited. I haven't been able to read it yet, but I'm excited for that one. That one's YA.

Sabrina Okay, cool. Yeah, that's on my list as well. Okay. You kind of mentioned a few, but Happy Holidays, everybody. This is our holiday episode.

Courtney Yay. Happy Holidays.

Sabrina Are there any favorite holiday books or movies that you'd like to recommend for people?

Courtney Yeah, an extra holiday book would be, *You're a Mean One, Matthew Prince* by Timothy Janovsky. And I was just on a panel with Reese Ryan, and the name of her book was oh, my gosh, why don't I remember it? Shoot. It's like Valentine....

Sabrina It's because you're trying to think of it.

Courtney I know. It's like *Valentine in the Vineyard (A Valentine for Christmas)*. I'm really excited to read that book because the way she described it was absolutely incredible.

Sabrina Nice.

Courtney Okay, so that one - movies - I don't know if I've mentioned it yet, but the one that I watched on loop while writing *In The Event* was 'Christmas Ever After' with Ali Stroker on Lifetime.

Sabrina Okay, I don't think you did mention it yet.

Courtney Yay. Okay, cool. That one is, like, my comfort one. I watch it constantly, and Ali Stroker is just absolutely incredible.

Sabrina Cool. Okay, so do you want to tell everyone where we can find you and your books?

Courtney Sure. I'm online at <https://www.courtneykaebooks.com> and then social media. I'm on Twitter and TikTok, but not really. I'm mostly on Instagram. Instagram is my happy place, so you can find me on any of those platforms @Court_Kae.

Sabrina Yay. Well, thank you. Oh my god. This was amazing. Like, so much good stuff in here. Thank you. Thank you.

Courtney Thank you so much for having me, Sabrina, and for hanging out with us to all your listeners. It's been a joy.

Sabrina It was so fun. Okay, bye.

Courtney Bye. Thank you.

Sabrina Okay, friends! That's it for Episode 10! I'll have a content list and all the Courtney links in the Show Notes page of my website, linked below. And if you'd like to follow me or the podcast on Twitter, you can find us @LoftilyLotfi and @LitTeaPodcast, and if you'd like to have a question featured in a future episode, message me anywhere! I'd love to hear from you! Happy Holidays, everyone! Thanks so much for joining us! Okay, Ginny. Say goodbye!

Ginny [Barks.]