

LitTea Episode 11: Kaylie Smith - Part 2

- Sabrina Hi everyone, welcome back to part 2 of the 11th episode of LitTea, with debut author Kaylie Smith. I'm your host, Sabrina Lotfi, and if you're just joining us now, be sure to check out the first half of this episode, where Kaylie and I chat about Kaylie's querying and submission path, creating aesthetics, ensemble casts, and Kaylie walks us through some incredible query and pitch strategies. So without further ado...
- Sabrina Do you want to do some writing questions?
- Kaylie Sure, yeah.
- Sabrina Okay. Are you a pantsier or a plotter?
- Kaylie So I am a pantsier.
- Sabrina Okay.
- Kaylie Yes, I'm a little bit of both. I can't write a book if I don't have an outline, I will say. But, I'm not super, super strict as my character is. Like, I'm not gonna do this or I don't want to do this, or like it's just very - I will change courses and change things. But I do like a good - I know where I'm going. I genuinely - pantsiers amaze me.
- Sabrina They amaze me too. My writer bestie is one and I'm just like, I don't know. I don't know.
- Kaylie Yes, they're genuinely so wondrous to watch. I have a few friends who are pantsiers and she's like, it's just so incredible.
- Sabrina You literally don't know any of it? Like you don't know? I think they may sometimes have a general, in their head, of like seeing it, but.
- Kaylie Yeah, but it's kind of the flashlight method, a lot of them. And I'm like, no, I need a point A to point B sort of situation. And then when I write series, I will just say it's so funny to me when people finish my first book and then beta readers are finishing the book two right now, because we're about to go to line edits. They're like, 'No, I want this to happen. Please, please.' And I'm like, 'It's so funny because you can ask me over and over again for something to happen.' But everyone has been like, their endings are fully determined already. That isn't changing.
- Sabrina Okay. You already know where things are gonna end at the very end.
- Kaylie 1000 %.
- Sabrina I don't know how you can juggle that many books, and that many characters, and have a plan for more books, and not have some vague idea, at least vague...
- Kaylie Right!
- Sabrina ...of where all that's going. Because I would make a giant mess.
- Kaylie No, truly.
- Sabrina For sure. I would write myself into holes and all kinds of stuff, yeah.

Kaylie Yeah, I need to know, for their arcs and their growth, where they're going in the first place. So people with ships and stuff, they'll ask me those questions and I'm just like, 'It's y'all. Whatever does or doesn't happen is already determined. There's no fan service. There's no swaying my mind. I'm so sorry.'

Sabrina I don't even have a say in this. I'm just doing what's happening. Yeah, I'm putting the words on the page.

Kaylie I truly don't. I'm doing their bidding, I will say, because the ending of book one shocked even me. And it's so funny. People who have that writing experience where their characters kind of walk them through certain things, or push back, and then people who don't have that sort of experience at all. I have friends who don't think like that. And I'm like, 'That's so interesting to me because my book, I think, would have been a little bit different if I didn't think of my characters as pushing back on certain things.' So, yeah, the ending of book one shocked even me, but I was like, 'Yeah, this is absolutely where things are supposed to go. Like, everyone's arc was kind of determined and made the most sense with plot and stuff.' Now, when I plot and do my outlines, I will do a series outline and then I'll do each individual book under that umbrella.

Sabrina Are they really detailed and long, or are they more bullet point and broad or... Yeah, how do you do so many bullet points?

Kaylie I do very in depth character sheets. All of my characters are so fleshed out. I mean, I have details about these characters that will probably never see the light of day of text, but I like knowing that they're there because they feel more, like, fully developed to me as, like, real people. But the actual book outlines, I do like a three act structure and sometimes I'll do a four act structure, and if I know what the climax is, and the catalyst is, I know how to do my bullets in between there, and then if a bullet is arranged, it doesn't upset me. We're fine. I can move a few things around, but I like knowing that I'm like boom, boom, boom. And I just cross them out as I write, and it's really satisfying.

Sabrina Okay. I usually do bullet points too. I usually start with like a really big, broad, vague one. I'm like, 'These are the big five things that are happening from beginning to end, probably.' And then I'll do like, 'Okay, how do I get from here to here? How do I get from here to here?'

Kaylie Exactly. No, it's so nice. It's like walking you through it. It's like baby steps. Also, it's easy when I have to stop or I get busy or something, I'm like, okay, I can leap off, like, around here and then I know exactly where I need to pick up.

Sabrina Yeah, that's a lot easier.

Kaylie I think that's always my biggest question to my pantsers friends. I'm like, 'How do you not have to reread everything to see what tangent you are on?' Because I will get on a tangent in my writing, which is why it's like when I hit a bullet, I'm like, 'Okay, now from here to here, this is what I have to do.'

Sabrina Yeah, I agree. Yeah. I don't understand. Pantsers' brains are just amazing to me. They're so amazing.

Kaylie Yeah, I think it's so cool. Which is also - it just goes back to my motto is there's no wrong way to write a book, which I love.

Sabrina However it comes to you, yeah.

Kaylie Exactly.

Sabrina Probably my way is wrong. There's just a little piece of paper everywhere.

Kaylie No, I love that. Yes.

Sabrina I honestly don't know how it turns into coherent chapter sounding e things with, like, full sentences.

Kaylie You know what, though? Okay, I do not remember even writing my books most of the time. So it's like, you know, just in the yeah, I literally will, like, get my finished copies and I'll flip through. Or, like the one that really sticks out to me is someone my friend the other day was like, 'Oh, I think I'm gonna put this quote on a T-shirt.' And she texted the group chat the quote, and I was like, 'Oh, that's so good.' And she was like '...Kayla, you wrote that.' And I was like, I was like, 'Betsy...

Sabrina Oh, that's so funny.

Kaylie ...I do not remember that. I could not tell you.' I was like, 'I don't remember any of this.' It's a surprise to me every time I reread it because I'll be like, 'Oh, that was a really good job past me. That was a line.'

Sabrina It's fun too. I love when I'm like, 'Oh, yeah, we cut that scene.'

Kaylie Oh, finding old drafts is so funny.

Sabrina Oh, it is. It's a little scary sometimes.

Kaylie Yeah. It's like I'll have to look for, like, bonus content or come up with some ideas for stuff, and I'll like, look through past drafts and I'm like, 'Oh God, I don't even know where we were going with this.' It's very interesting.

Sabrina But weirdly, doing it helped you get to where it's at. I don't know. Yeah, writing is super weird.

Kaylie Yeah, that's the motto here. That's the lesson. Writing is so weird.

Sabrina I should title these. If I actually titled these I would call this one, 'Writing is Super Weird'.

Kaylie I love that. That is a vibe.

Sabrina So you work chronologically, it sounds like - like in order?

Kaylie Yeah, I do. I cannot write out of order. When I tell you if I wrote out of order, I would just do all of my fun scenes and would never write the rest of the book, because I don't really have writer's block or anything. But I get lazy because I think I'm bored. And when I'm bored, I'm like, 'Well, something's wrong, because if I'm bored and I care, someone who's just reading this and has no stakes to care will also be bored.'

Sabrina That's fair.

Kaylie So I'm like, I'll just write chronologically and suffer through things, and then revisit them later, because otherwise it would just all be like, forced kisses and fighting scenes. [Laughs.]

Sabrina I mean, what else do we need? It's fine.

Kaylie So true. Yeah. [Both laugh.]

Sabrina Oh, that's funny. So, you know the fun scenes that you want and you have a kind of outline? Do you ever jot things down for future stuff?

Kaylie I do. That's where my journals do come in. I have pages and pages and pages of just, like, quotes that come to my brain that I'm like...

Sabrina You're like, this is going in some point. [Laughs.]

Kaylie Somewhere. Exactly. Sometimes they're just too good when they come to you, and it's just you can't help it in those moments or like, okay, this is so cheesy gross. But when my partner says something like, really adorable, I'm like...

Sabrina Do you go write it out?

Kaylie Yes. He wrote a very kind of iconic line for the horror romance project I'm writing. It's the pivotal line that my agent, everyone has picked out of the book. And I'm like, 'I hate to give you credit for it', but it really was him. He was like, 'Do I get a byline?' And I'm like, 'No.'

Sabrina You get credit for it too, though, because he wouldn't have said it if he wasn't saying it to you, obviously. Creator here.

Kaylie Thank you. Exactly. No, I was like, 'Okay, yeah, that was a good one.' I think I saved that for, like, two years, which is funny. So, yeah, I will definitely just get inspired. And it's so funny to me, too, because even when I have those inspos, I almost immediately know which character would be saying that. I don't necessarily know when or where, but as I'm writing I'll get to places that I'm like, 'I need something, like, very punchy right here.' And that's when I'll open my quotes and I kind of divide them, like, 'Oh, this is the one.' And I'll put it in. Yeah.

Sabrina I love that.

Kaylie You know what's so funny with those two is I'm always constantly worried. I ran into this thing when I was doing the second book, and I'm like, 'Did I plagiarize this? There's no way I came up with that.' And I worry because you never know what's gonna just imprint on your mind and just sit there. So I'm always constantly, like, googling stuff to make sure it was me. And then during book two, I wrote something and I was like, 'No, I've heard this before. There's no way.' But I couldn't find it anywhere. And then my editor read that, and I was like, 'You saw this in book one?' And I was fully plagiarizing myself.

Sabrina I always wonder that too. I'm like, I'm gonna have the exact same line a few different places. Constantly I'm thinking about those one lines.

Kaylie Yeah. And it was, like, kind of in the situation. It was a feeling, and it was, like the same exact character. I literally wrote it from the voice of the same exact character because they were, like, recapping a conversation. And I was just like, 'Oh, dang. That just really stuck in my brain because I pulled it back out.'

Sabrina Did you get to keep it in the second book, or did you have to change it?

Kaylie No, I did change it. Just because I would never want to repeat myself or anything, but at least felt a little bit better because it was recapping a conversation from the first book. So I was like, 'That's funny, though.'

Sabrina You just stole your own words. It's fine.

Kaylie Yeah, I was like, 'I'll do myself. It's fine.'

Sabrina That's so funny. Yeah, I'll notice that a few times, and sometimes I have to check and make sure that I'm not like, 'Did you already use this metaphor somewhere?'

Kaylie And that's just such a part of the editing process. I definitely learned that, because I think when I first got my edit letters, my copy edit specifically, and line edits, and they were like, 'Hey, here's a list of things you repeat a lot. Like just go cut, change.'

Sabrina Those are fun.

Kaylie And I felt really bad about myself for, like, a week, but it's just like, I - I got over it. I changed it. And it was like it's just we're taught like, we're creatures of habit. Like, we use slang over and over again or, like, just like, the way we grew up speaking. Like, it's just natural. So, like, I was like, 'Actually, that helps because that first list that I have when I was writing book two, I put the list up to remind myself not to do it.' And so when I get my line edits for book two, it'll probably be a whole another list.

Sabrina It will, I mean...

Kaylie It makes me constantly aware, at least. I'm like, 'Okay, great. I'm gonna try to make sure, like, constantly that I'm not repeating these things.'

Sabrina It's really hard not to repeat, and there are a lot of words, but you're writing an 80, 90, 100K book, like, probably I'm gonna repeat a few things sometimes.

Kaylie Oh, yeah. So anyone who might feel bad about that, all of us do it. Like, everybody.

Sabrina We all have something that we like, cling to. Yeah, you're always seeing the tweets and stuff about the teenage sighing and eye rolling.

Kaylie I'll say, oh, my gosh. Mine's actually characters touching their hair, as you'll notice, watching me. It's one of my OCD compulsions. And it's so funny because I didn't intentionally write that into any of my characters, but one character specifically did a lot, and my editor was like, 'Hey, was this intentional? Because if it was, it's fine, but if not, it does it a lot.' And it was like, 'Oh, my God, no, it's just like, that's my filler. It's like it wasn't. So I went back and I cut a bunch of stuff because it was like, 'Oh, my gosh.'

Sabrina Yeah, that's so funny. I have a hard time, like, what other gestures do people make?

Kaylie Right, yeah. One of my favorite writing tools on the entire planet is a thesaurus called *The Thesaurus of the Senses*. And that has changed my craft so much. I feel like I'm an ad every time I talk about this book. Actually, my good friend Andrea, the author of *Where Darkness Blooms*, she's the one that gave this to me, and it literally changed how I write because it breaks it down into the five senses, so it's tastes, touch, smell, right?

Sabrina That's so smart. I always forget something.

Kaylie Right! And so every time I'm like, what sense? I needed a word, and I'm like, 'What sense are they experiencing right now?' And if it's like they're seeing something or if they're, like, touching themselves, I'll go to that section of the thesaurus and just comb through, and they'll have all the words, and then more words under each of those. I mean, everyone knows what a thesaurus is.

Sabrina Well, I have *The Emotion Thesaurus*, which I love, but this feels, like, really intense and I'm gonna love it.

Kaylie Yeah. I don't know. I was just like, 'This is so nice.' And maybe just because it helped me so much, I've imprinted on this book, but I'm like, I love it so much, and I'm always combing through it and learning words. They're like, I know, but I don't think of when you're writing.

Sabrina You haven't thought about it in a while.

Kaylie Yeah, I do recommend it. It's so nice. I just keep it next to me when I write now.

Sabrina Okay, I'm gonna go get that. Speaking of, do you have any other favorite craft books or blog posts that you like to go to? Any of that sort of thing?

Kaylie To be honest, I never really read a bunch of craft books or anything like that. Learning craft was just doing it and then reading.

Sabrina Trial and error?

Kaylie Yeah. And then just so much reading. I read voraciously in high school. My mom was worried about me because I did not go out with friends. I stayed up till three in the morning just for reading, like my little Kindle indie books. Oh my gosh. So, yeah, I think it was just like I kind of learned what I like to read the most, and then when I started writing, it was just trial and error, just constantly. So I don't really have any recs.

Sabrina That's okay. No, the other one is great. The other one is great. Well, that is the best way to learn, I think, honestly, is by reading and seeing how other successful authors put sentences together. How they bring about plot points, how they introduce characters, how they show versus tell, and when they tell versus show. Yeah. You can learn so much from just reading.

Kaylie 1000%, especially because I don't think I'm the kind of person who could even read a craft book. And I don't know if it would stick in my head to utilize. I was never really good with textbooks. I was an art major, so that kind of learning just never really stuck with me. Like manual stuff like that. My partner makes fun of me all the time, because I will just throw the manual away and then have a billion questions on how something works. And he's like, 'There was a whole manual.' We're very differently brained.

Sabrina Oh, that's funny.

Kaylie Yeah. I want to learn by physically doing it. I don't want to have to read like, gosh.

Sabrina No, that makes a lot of sense. So you said you don't really have writer's block?

Kaylie I don't.

Sabrina Okay, I'm gonna skip that one unless you want to talk about it.

Kaylie I was about to say I think I don't have writer's block in the way that I think other people describe writer's block. Because to me, writer's block has always been a symptom, not the actual issue itself. It's a symptom of, like, my plot isn't working. So quite literally, and it's so different from me being, like, lazy or burnt out, because sometimes I am both of those things, and I'm just not in the mood to write, and I have to learn to recognize when that's happening to me. Like, I'm just exhausted. But if it's true, like, the story is not working, I keep hitting a wall, it's because my plot - something's wrong. So, yeah, I never feel like things won't come to me. Things will always come to me. My brain never stops.

Sabrina They just might not come to you right that minute. Probably, there's a reason for that.

Kaylie For me, in my experience at least, has always been an internal issue with the actual work itself. I've never run into it where something didn't need to be majorly changed.

Sabrina So you just kind of, in your gut, you're like, 'This is not going the correct direction, and I need to backtrack a minute, and I need to figure out where I need to backtrack to.' Okay.

Kaylie Yeah, I kind of like, pull that thread. And that's why I always kept coming back to that original *A Ruinous Fate*. I was like, it was the plot. It was never working. It was like Calla wasn't even like the pivotal character. It was another character.

Sabrina Oh, that's interesting.

Kaylie But she kept coming up because I think she was most... Calla and I, personality wise, are nothing alike. But her growth, like, the way she treats herself and her arc, very similar to what I've been through, because writing from experience. And so she kept always popping up more, and I just shifted her into focus. And then I was like...

Sabrina Someone wants the attention.

Kaylie Yeah! And it was like their magic stayed the same, honestly. Actually, the character that honestly has never changed is Ezra, which is so funny to me, and he would love that. But it's like, very much like her magic never changed. I was always really obsessed with this idea that she's a siphon. And all of these, like, the witch elemental things. When I started writing this book at 16, elemental powers were huge. And then they went out of style, and then they came back in, which is why I never changed it, because I always liked it. And that's a big like, if you like it, write it. If you want to read it, someone else does too.

Sabrina And trends come and go. So if something is on the downswing, it'll come back up again at some point.

Kaylie 1000%, because it is elemental. I'm thinking, like, *Truthwitch*, *Windwitch*, which I love Susan Dennard. And elemental things kind of started coming back, and it was like...

Sabrina They did, yeah.

Kaylie So all of that stayed the same. But what she was going through, the actual plot changed so many times because it just wasn't working. I was like, 'None of this makes sense. It's not right.' I think it's also because I was so young, that naturally I pulled things from things I was currently reading, and was already a thing. To be honest, for a while, there wasn't like an original thought in my head. My voice was original and my characters were original, but my plot points were just regurgitated, and so that none of this is working. And then when I found something that I was like, I first of all fully developed as a human being, and then realized that I have my own creative thoughts and they're good, because I think what I used to do was 'Those words sound silly. Those aren't good ideas.' So I'm just gonna take the things that I know are good ideas from other people. And I'm like, 'Well, you can't do that.' I have to stop writing about vampire love triangles. That has been done. So it's just sort of like I became an individual human being. I grew up, and then I was like, 'My ideas are good. I have to stop telling myself that they're not.' And that's when that plot fell in place, and I was just like, 'Okay, I don't have block anymore. The story works now because it's from me. Everything's from me.'

Sabrina That makes a lot of sense. Okay, this is always my favorite part of every interview. Are you ready to get into some bookish questions about *A Ruinous Fate*?

Kaylie Yes!

Sabrina We've been talking about it a little bit, but we'll be talking about it more now.

Kaylie I'm so excited.

Sabrina So, for anyone who hasn't come across *A Ruinous Fate* yet, a) get on it, b) get your pre-orders on. And will you give us an overview of what it's about, and who your characters are? Whatever you're comfortable sharing. I know it's not on shelves yet. It'll be out tomorrow as long as all the publishing gods stay with us. As far as so many things have been pushed back, it's just I don't know who is gonna happen to but as of right now, it's gonna be the next day.

Kaylie Yes, I know we're on track and we're fingers crossed.

Sabrina Yay! I have a good feeling about it.

Kaylie Thank you. I know, because I've been, like, tiptoeing around it too, because I'm always scared. But, yeah, I think things are going very nice right now. Knock on wood, but yeah. So *A Ruinous Fate* is about a witch named Calla, whose fate is directly tied to magical dice called Witch's Dice. And after her ex boyfriend Ezra betrays her, she becomes one step closer to fulfilling this curse that could decimate all of the witches on her continent in the realms. And so she gets an offer from a mysterious witch, and he offers her to go into this sentient demonic forest called the Neverending Forest with him, to reset both of their fates. And it turns out that this witch is her ex boyfriend's older brother.

Sabrina Oh, okay.

Kaylie Calla and her friends have to get everything together and they have to leave and go on this adventure to reset their fates. And it's a silly little witch book. It's so much fun.

Sabrina It truly sounds like a mix of adventure, fantasy, and romance. It really does feel like just a big coming together of all three. I love all three. I'm super excited.

Kaylie Absolutely. Thank you. Yes. No, definitely. Those three elements are, like, my favorite thing in the world. I wanted this to be one of those things that was never boring. I love stuff when it's just always happening, and things are chaotic, and a mess. So I was like, 'That's what I'm gonna do.' And it might not be for everybody, but I am so excited about it.

Sabrina It's gonna be fun!

Kaylie I'm so excited. Yes. Thank you.

Sabrina Yeah, we've been talking about it. It is part of a series? Is it two books? Do we know if it's gonna be more than two books? Can you say? Are you allowed?

Kaylie I think I am. You know what? No one's told me not to.

Sabrina Okay.

Kaylie So for me, it's planned four books, a quartet.

Sabrina Ooh, yay!

Kaylie I have fully planned it out to be four books. Whether or not things in publishing are strange, like the way things work, the first two are fully bought. So, you know, you're absolutely at least getting those first two, and very hopeful that if this goes well, they will get the last two, but no matter what, they will be written.

Sabrina Yay! Okay. You're gonna finish them out no matter what?

Kaylie I will be finishing them no matter what.

Sabrina Okay. Awesome. Yay.

Kaylie Yes, for sure. Also, I don't know if I could leave anybody hanging like the way books one and book two.

Sabrina No, that's fair.

Kaylie Yeah. I'm really excited that it's four books. I do love a trilogy so much, but I find that with four books, you get to do a little more development on relationships. Because a lot of times in trilogies - and it's just sort of the nature of the beast - it's very much like the meeting point and getting to know each other. And then book two is like, we can't be together or get together. And then book three, it's like something stops. Like, okay, we're together now, but then something comes between us, and then we have to fight our way to be happy by the end of book three, and I wanted this to be just an entire roller coaster.

Sabrina I just redid *The Cruel Prince*, and I'm laughing so hard. [Laughs.]

Kaylie Absolutely. Just it's not a knock against anyone like that.

Sabrina It's a really good structure. It works really well.

Kaylie It's so good. I also think it's like a very natural structure for people. I think that even happens in real life to people like this sort of before whatever happens at the end of your relationship and however it goes forward, I think everyone kind of experiences similar ups and downs. But I like a fourth book because I'm like, 'I can throw a wrench into anything. I can make it slow burn.' There's so much room for me to do stuff with their development. So I'm really excited about it.

Sabrina It's super exciting. Okay. I'm really excited too. Four books. Yeah, I saw the deal announcement with the two. Okay. I think you said that you were done with the second one. Where is it in the process?

Kaylie So for book two, we are in final developmental edits, and we're about to go to line edits, which is super exciting. And, I've actually already started drafting book three, because book three...

Sabrina Get a head start on it.

Kaylie ...it's gonna be a beast. As you know, each book gets a little chunkier. And honestly, this one's already chunky. Like, *A Ruinous Fate* is 432 pages.

Sabrina Oh, wow. What's the word count on that? Do you know?

Kaylie It's 98,000. I'm obsessed with word counts and translating to page counts.

Sabrina Me too.

Kaylie And I swear growing up...

Sabrina I'm actually surprised by that. I thought you were gonna say higher than that. What's the page count?

Kaylie Yeah, I know, right? It's like the formatting is so interesting, but I think it's because my book - so they have different literal sized books, and mine is one of the bigger book sizes. It's like six by nine, or something.

Sabrina Okay.

Kaylie So I think it had more room for words on the page. So it's like 432. But I was obsessed growing up. I tried to Google like, 'Oh, this book is this many pages, because I wanted to know how many words to write for my own stories, and no one ever said them. And I was like, when I'm an author, I will make that information readily available to anyone who asks.

Sabrina I have this - it's a really great site. I think it's called arbookfind.com. Have you used it before? Now they don't have adult titles and you can look up different kid lit titles every once in a while. And it's really rare I'll come across, like, one that I haven't been able to find. But it'll give you the exact word count on there, and it'll give you the page count. It'll show you all the different issues that have been released with their different little ISBN numbers, and everything. It's really great.

Kaylie Oh my gosh. I will absolutely be looking that up.

Sabrina It's a good one. I use it all the time.

Kaylie I love it. It makes me so I don't know why, I just, I'm obsessed with that. But yeah. So book one is 98,000. Book two at the moment is like 102,000. So, just a tad bit longer. Nothing shushmade. Yeah, but book three is gonna be a beast. I can already tell. Like outline one, because it's kind of like book one is like very much an introduction to the world. And I always say the sequel books are the hardest books in the world to write. And it's because you have to expand on the plot, and the characters. But the characters are very different starting book two than they were starting book one. They're completely different people a lot of the time. So it's like figuring out who they are, while keeping them in character.

Sabrina And then also you probably have to add more growth again. So where are they going, so that they can be new people by book three?

Kaylie Right! Making sure it's not filler, is like my biggest thing. Like that second book curse. So I'm just like book three. The stuff that happens in book three. I know I'm speaking so far ahead, but stick with me, everybody. It's gonna be so worth it, I swear. I'm literally so excited about it. [Laughs.]

Sabrina Hey, you money people, make this happen because I'm excited. So, if you want to save Kay from future stalking from me, on book three, then let's just make this happen. [Laughs.] How far into it are you right now? So, you said you have an outline, and that that's a beast. Have you actually started the writing?

Kaylie Yeah, I was like ten to 15,000 words. Not super far in. Things, yeah. Because, like, it's crazy right now, but I definitely was like, 'I'm gonna get a head start, because book two was rough.' I think I was like two weeks late on my deadline to turn in book two, which was fine.

Sabrina Everybody's behind right now. Your editor probably was happy about it.

Kaylie No, my editor literally was like, like, 'Actually, this works out perfectly, because by the time you do turn it in, I can actually - I'll have time to read it.' So I was like, great. Yeah. I hate missing deadlines, though. But I was like, 'Oh my God, I was tortured.' I was like writing 3000 words a day, I think, at one point just to get the words out, because I waited too long.

Sabrina It's hard. And there's a lot of pressure with that deadline there. I have to get the words, and you have that pretty... You just finished up making a project shelf ready and pretty. It's hard to get past some of those, I think, and be like, 'Oh, it's a mess right now.'

Kaylie Yeah. And actually my agent told me this, but she's like, 'Editors expect the next book you turn in. It needs to be workshopped.' Because I think when you go on sub and they buy your first book, it's a full book already, usually, and it still definitely goes through a lot of edits, but I think you just feel a little more confident in it. Like, my agent had read it and we had already done edits, but book two, my agent didn't get. She read it, but only when I turned it in to my editor. They read it at the same time?

Sabrina Yeah, y'all didn't have time to do it, yeah.

Kaylie Exactly, especially being a couple of weeks late. So it was just sort of like one of those things. And I'm like, 'Oh, hope you don't hate it. I'm gonna go hide now.'

Sabrina As everybody reads it for the first time, yes? [Both laugh.]

Kaylie Because I was so stressed out. I was like, 'Oh my gosh, it's so bad. So bad.' But she loved it and it's like, I'm glad I followed my instincts and stuff, but it definitely is different writing on deadline. And you have all the time in your world for the first book. All the time in the world, no one's rushing you. But that second book, when you're on contract, it's just like, 'Oh, man, okay, people are watching.'

Sabrina People are waiting for it, yeah. So where did all your inspirations for *A Ruinous Fate* come from? You've kind of been collecting them over the years, it sounds like.

Kaylie Yeah. So lots of different stuff. The - Calla herself characterized - her relationships are built a lot on the tumultuous journey of me dating, and people and finding out what I not only need from a partner, but what I deserve from a partner. And also her journey with herself is definitely a metaphor for my journey of my identity. Like bisexuality, she's half a witch and half a being called a siphon, and she doesn't want to be a siphon.

Sabrina What does that mean?

Kaylie Okay, so siphon. Yes. Let's get into that. Siphons.

Sabrina If you can share, can you share? Is that okay?

Kaylie Yeah, absolutely. Siphons, in *A Ruinous Fate*, are beings that... it's random. When you're born, a random curse kind of affects them. And what happens is if they touch somebody, they can drain their magic and energy, and use it for themselves.

Sabrina Ooh. Okay, cool.

Kaylie So they siphon magic from people. And so obviously people are like, 'You're, like, taking my magic could kill me.' Like, 'I'm a little wary of that,' right? Or like - and even though that's how Calla perceives other people are thinking about her, even though a lot of other people she meets do not perceive it that way, but it's kind of like my journey. Or, she thinks about herself as half a witch and half a siphon and not, like, a complete person. And I feel like growing up, everyone was kind of, did that thing where they're like, 'Oh, you're half straight, half gay. Just be straight. It's easier.' And I and, like, we know now as adults that that is not how identity or things work, but when you're impressionable and you're young, I was just like, 'Yeah, being straight is just easier, especially being from the south and things.' And it's just like, I always told myself, 'I am attracted to men, so I should just date men because my life would be easier.' But then I was always, like, dividing myself in half, and that is just not how identity or bisexuality works. I'm not half gay or half straight. Those are two fully separate identities. And so coming to terms with that, and accepting myself as a whole person, definitely influenced Calla's growth and her arc, which is why I had such a hard time writing the book for so long. a) because she was a side character at some point, and b) because I hadn't figured that out for myself yet. I hadn't learned that lesson.

Sabrina Yeah, you were still growing.

Kaylie Right. I didn't know where her story ended, because I didn't know where I was going. And then, I ended up finding my partner, who is an angel on earth, and kind of figuring out the love I deserved. And that the person I wanted to be seen as, by other people, regardless of if they liked it or not, I wanted to like myself. And that influenced her character a lot. And then the actual book part, like, because I'm a big proponent of, if you want to dig and you want to dissect literature, I think that is so exciting, and I think everyone interprets things differently. But also, if you want just like an escape, just reading for entertainment, like you don't want to dissect things. It also is just a silly, fun little witch book. So it's like the fun part of it is definitely - we're big board game people. We have an extensive board game library collection and we were playing Monopoly, which is my least favorite. I do not like to lose. I am so competitive. But my family has always been incredibly - we have very high stakes game tournaments, and nights and stuff. Always have. I've been banned so many times from Scrabble. I literally had a viral tweet about that. Don't get me started on that whole thing. But yeah, it's just so funny. So I'm very competitive and I was playing with my partner, and there's no one I'm more competitive against than him, because I just want to beat him at everything. And he's so good at Monopoly, okay? And it's because, in our house, when you play Monopoly, you can make deals for whatever. So he would promise people, like, 'You give me all of this color property, I'll own the whole board, but I'll give you in real life, like, I'll buy you dinner or something', and they'll give in to him. So this man owns this whole board. Okay? I just remember this so vividly. And it wasn't even a time where I was writing the book. Like, this was literally during Covid, and we were playing virtually with a friend, and then we were in real life with the board.

Sabrina That is so smart.

Kaylie Yes! And just to set up the scene for everybody. I know this is so long, but I swear this is how this concept came into being. So in Monopoly, people have their properties all over certain spots, right? He owned an entire corner of the board, and I was on the space right before his ownership started, okay? And all I needed was to roll six, and I could get past all of it. And you have two dice. So I was like, 'This is fine, I've got this.' And I rolled like a three or something. And I mean, he bankrupted me in that one move and I flipped the board - I was so angry. We were kidding. He literally won. Like, that was his winning move. So I don't want people to be like, 'Oh, she's so aggressive.' But I was like, because we knew he had won, that won him the game. And I was like, so upset. And he was just laughing, and I was like...

Sabrina Oh, that's so funny.

Kaylie And then I went to sleep that night, and I hate this story so much, because I remember being a teenager, listening to Stephanie Meyer saying *Twilight* came to her in a dream. And I was like, 'I don't remember my dreams. That's not fair.' But sure enough, I went to sleep that night and I had a dream about a girl rolling a dice, and the number it landed on got burned, like, the dots were, like, burned into her arm. And I was just, like, magically. And I was like I woke up and I was like, 'That's it.' Because I was just like the roll of a dice, like something that random, costing me the whole game. Imagine if that ruled your life. I was like the stakes that that would have. That's just wild. And that's how the concept was born. Like legit. It's so funny how things happen, yeah.

Sabrina That is so funny. That's such a fun story. That's hilarious too. That's true. Especially if in Monopoly it really is a roll of the dice.

Kaylie Truly. What are the odds? Like two dice and I rolled, like, a one and a two. I was like, really?

Sabrina Yeah. You would think that you would get higher than that.

Kaylie That was so long. I'm so sorry. But that is truly how the plot came to me, which is so funny.

Sabrina Oh, that's so fun. Was there any unique or fun research you had to do for this one?

Kaylie A lot of bodily functions, actually. So there's three types of witches in *A Ruinous Fate*. There's onyx witches, terra witches and rouge witches. And terra is like earthy elements, physical things, telekinesis. Onyx witches are like storms, wind, things like that. And then rouge witches are like, kind of like in your inner system, your veins and your blood and your muscles. So it's like, very autonomy based, like your heart, things like that. And I think I kind of just wrote based on my own personal knowledge, when I was first drafting the book. And then we got to developmental edits, and I knew I was gonna have to do more research, because I don't know how any of that works. Because there's some points where it's like, rouge witches can kind of, like, stop you from breathing because they can tighten the veins, like under your skin, and stuff like that. And so I was like, 'Oh, I need to know how, like, respiratory works, and like how blood vessels work, and things like that.' So that was some very interesting research and stuff. And then I did a lot of research on fantasy tropes, and making sure everything included in my book was good to go, and made sense, and stuff. But yeah, as far as intentional, I need to kind of understand how this works. Yeah, a lot of anatomy.

Sabrina Okay, that's cool. That's interesting. That's really interesting magic that we get to look forward to, too. That's cool.

Kaylie Yeah. I'm so excited about it because I was like, witches are the same. How are they kind of separated and stuff? And I was like, 'Yeah, let's make them weird.' [Laughs.]

Sabrina Yeah. No, that's super awesome. Who was your favorite character to write?

Kaylie 1000% Delphine. Delphine and Caspian are definitely fan favorites. I would say 80% of the time if someone tells me their favorite character, it's one of the two of them. Because they're so damn funny.

Sabrina Okay.

Kaylie Yes, I adore Delphine, and she has a huge role in book two. She's just so funny, and I like to think of it, I'm not an intentionally funny person. If I intentionally try to be funny, it never works, and no one ever laughs. But Delphine, I just really channeled that, because Delphine is always funny.

Sabrina Oh, that's awesome.

Kaylie Also, she's definitely like the song 'Maneater' by Nelly Furtado. That is, like, Delphine's song. She's a man eater?

Sabrina Yeah. Okay, cool. I can't wait to meet her. I don't know if you can do this, but would you like to read an excerpt? It's totally up to you.

Kaylie Let's see. I can read a little bit of something from the second chapter.

Sabrina Yes, these are so fun for me. I get all cozy under my little blankie over here, and I'm like, 'Okay, storytime, I'm ready. Let's go.'

Kaylie It's so much fun. Let's see. Let's do Chapter Two. So, Chapter Two, Calla and Ezra have just kind of had a little bit of a showdown.

Sabrina This is the ex, Ezra? Okay.

Kaylie Yes, Ezra is the ex, and she just removed herself from the situation. And so, here we start. “So after a few minutes of stalking through the streets, Calla could start to make out the line of the ashwoods appearing in the distance, the wind carrying the familiar scent of pine. She shivered again. All she had to do was make it five blocks to her tiny apartment. Maybe she could finally take Delphine up on her offer to make Ezra go away for good. Calla suddenly lurched forward, gripping her neck as the oxygen was violently ripped from her lungs. She clawed at her throat and whipped around to find Ezra stalking toward her, his dark hair and clothing silhouetted against the milky moonlight streaming behind him. His hands were too casually shoved into the front pockets of his trousers as he strode closer. And she hated how effortless he looked as he used his wind magic to pull the air from her throat, that he could easily suffocate her without breaking a sweat. She hated him, she decided. Hated how he was a constant reminder that she was not as strong as she wanted to be. No matter how well he had taught her to gamble or take risks, Ezra would always have the upper hand against her. ‘He is ever more on my list’, she thought. ‘If I ever get my hands on him again.’ All thoughts vanished, as the pressure in her chest approached a crescendo, and she sunk to her knees in pain. The onyx bastard stopped right in front of her, crouching down until he was at her eye level, his mouth a grim line on his angular face, as his cold eyes flamed with anger. ‘You are going to take this from me,’ he told her, his voice low, and deliver it as he thrust his fist out and revealed the cursed dice in his palm. She shook her head wildly, unsuccessfully trying to push his hand away. ‘You’re going to take it willingly’, he repeated, ‘or I will let you suffocate right here in the street.’”

Sabrina Oh, my God. It's so good. I'm so excited. I also just got goosebumps. My goodness. Okay, so this is when she gets the dice. Okay.

Kaylie Yes.

Sabrina I'm assuming. I mean, maybe. We'll keep reading to find out.

Kaylie I will say yes. It's so funny. Ezra, as a character, too, I did not think a single person would like this man - ever. I wrote him with the intention, like, knowing in the back of my head I had a lot of work to do because I was like, ‘Readers, you're not gonna like him.’ All of my beta readers, and my agent, came back the first time they read it and was like, ‘This is my favorite.’ And I was like, ‘What?’ I was like, ‘We all need therapy. We should unpack that.’

Sabrina [Laughs.] We all really need...

Kaylie Because I'm like, ‘This man is threatening to suffocate her.’

Sabrina Well, I mean, honestly, I feel like one of the greatest examples of a really terrible person that we also end up just loving the crap out of, is Damon, in 'Vampire Diaries' is awful. He's the worst in the beginning! He's the worst!

Kaylie You are speaking my language. Hold on. I made a TikTok, I'm not even kidding, a couple of days ago comparing the love triangle. It's the literal love triangle. Like, ‘Vampire Diaries’ raised me. I love...

Sabrina I love ‘Vampire Diaries’.

Kaylie Yes. The heartbreak of that love triangle, that's really what I wanted to capture. Like, the characters aren't the same at all. Their motivations aren't the same. They're not the same beings at all. But I was just like that feeling you get, like the heart wrenching. I was like, ‘That's what I want here.’

Sabrina Oh, yay.

Kaylie So I'm so glad you said that.

Sabrina That's one of my favorites.

Kaylie Agreed. I love Damon. I love Damon. I'm just a Damon girl, for sure.

Sabrina Yeah, he's a really great example of just shit. Like, does some awful, awful, awful, and we can still love him. I don't know why, but also, I do, but yeah.

Kaylie No, I think my thing is always, like, asking myself, because he is an awful person, but it's also kind of like, 'Who is better for Elena? Who pushes Elena to grow or be the version of herself that's not only the best version, but also the version she wants to be?' Because that's a lot of what ARF is about is, it's okay if maybe the version of you that you want to be isn't the version everyone else likes, or thinks you should be? It's like your fate is really up to you to choose - right, wrong, or indifferent. And I always thought the version of Elena with Damon was vastly more interesting than the version of Elena with Stefan.

Sabrina Me too, me too. Okay. Are there any recently released or upcoming books you'd like to recommend?

Kaylie I really love - I just started *The Undead Truth of Us* by Britney Lewis, and it's great so far.

Sabrina Oh, cool.

Kaylie I literally can't wait to finish it. I started that over the weekend and then *Where Darkness Blooms* is coming out a little bit after *A Ruinous Fate*, by Andrea Hannah. I love that book! Andrea let me read it.

Sabrina That one looks really good, too.

Kaylie Yes, she let me read it last year and it's just like four messy girls and it's a thriller, so it's so much fun. I really enjoyed that one.

Sabrina Yay. Okay, I'm adding both of those.

Kaylie Yes! Oh, it's so funny. I just thought about two. I think both of them have sunflowers on the cover, too, so I don't know.

Sabrina You're in a sunflower verse.

Kaylie Yeah, maybe I'm in that mood. Yeah. I'm kind of loving things with a little bit of, like a spooky edge right now. I'm still like...

Sabrina Spooky nature?

Kaylie Yeah, I'm in that fall vibe still. I can't believe it's already winter. I'm not ready to let go.

Sabrina I can't either. I'm literally over here with, like, a blanket on my lap because it got so cold. This is not my happy place.

Kaylie Oh, my gosh. Yes.

Sabrina Tell everyone where your launch is gonna be.

Kaylie Oh, yes. Okay. So my launch is gonna be at Books of Wonder in New York City, and I will have several little tour things after that. I'll have a date on the fifth in New Orleans at a bookstore called Tubby and Coos. And then my hometown bookstore, Beausoleil Books. I'll be doing something on the 7th of January, and then I literally go to Houston, and I think I'm gonna be going to St. Louis, and possibly San Diego as well.

Sabrina You're going all over the place. You are about to be so busy. Are you gonna be writing while you're doing all the traveling and promo and stuff?

Kaylie I'm up in the air. I probably will be, just because I never don't, but to be honest, I've heard everything after launch. Like, things slow down and you kind of lose your mind a little bit, because it's, like, constant simulation and then you don't hear anything. And I know that's probably gonna be hard on my mental health, so I'm thinking I'm just gonna save my writing for that downtime. So, I can come back, recoup, and I'm just writing, and distracting myself from the silence.

Sabrina Okay. Yeah.

Kaylie So I'm really excited, though, to travel and everything. I'm so nervous that - I think probably everybody is their first time. People not showing up...

Sabrina I'm sure.

Kaylie ...but I think it'll be okay. I have really amazing friends.

Sabrina It's gonna be fine. You have good friends. And I know I'm not the only person who didn't know who you were, and was excited about your book, so...

Kaylie I appreciate that, yeah.

Sabrina Yeah, I've seen a bunch of people excited.

Kaylie It makes me so happy.

Sabrina It'll be fun. It'll be so fun.

Kaylie Yay!

Sabrina So where can we find you and *A Ruinous Fate*?

Kaylie So, pretty much every social media platform that's not brand new. And my @ is the same on every single one of them. It's @KaylsMoon and you can find me on my website, kayliesmithbooks.com. But yeah, I am always hanging out. I am easily accessible at the moment on DMs. I get a lot of people asking me querying questions and stuff like that, and I am the slowest texter in the whole wide world, but I do try to get back to every single human being. Sometimes, I'm just very much like, I refuse to look at my phone, and then in one day, I'll answer like 75 messages.

Sabrina Oh, my gosh, okay. That would be so hard on my brain to do that. That's incredible.

Kaylie Yeah, I'll really slack on it, and then I'll open an app and my DMs are just a mess. And I'm just like, 'Okay, I'm just gonna do all of it right now.'

Sabrina I don't get a lot of - everybody listening - this is gonna be like, 'I'll go send you a weird DM now.' [Laughs.] I don't get any DMs from strangers. Honestly, the most DMs I get, like I don't really get any. I don't want to put this on my air. I don't really get any of the creepy ones either. I like tempting fate. The only things I get are literally people asking me if I need a part time job. So apparently I just look like I need money. [Laughs.]

Kaylie Oh, my gosh.

Sabrina I get so much like, 'Would you like a job?' spam. And I'm like, I'm not clicking your link. I don't need, yeah, like the, 'Thank you.'

Kaylie Yeah, I get so excited. Like, 'Ooh, a message request.'

Sabrina And I'm like, oh...

Kaylie That's so funny!

Sabrina ...it's literally just spammers.

Kaylie I feel like things have ramped up in the last few months, than they ever have been before, because it's like a mixture. I'll get mostly people asking me advice and stuff. And then recently, when people finished my book, if they've liked it, they will send me the kindest messages that make everything worth it. And then I'll get those DMs being like, 'Why was this in your book? Or why was this?' And I'm just like, 'Well, I'm gonna ignore that.' And then, I do get the creepy messages.

Sabrina Oh, no.

Kaylie But it's fine because, forewarned, anyone who sends me a creepy message, I absolutely have the most fun in the world with them. You will regret sending me that message, so go ahead. But yeah.

Sabrina Oh, that's so funny. Okay, you have been warned and scared, [both laugh] so do with that what you will.

Kaylie Yeah, pretty much.

Sabrina Oh, that's so funny. I had such a good time. This is so great and you are so amazing, and thank you.

Kaylie Oh, no, thank you so much for reaching out to me. I was so excited. I love this. I love a podcast format. So I'm so happy that we got an opportunity to talk.

Sabrina I know. It was so fun. We talked a lot of ...

Kaylie Absolutely. I know. I'm so sorry. I'm literally looking like we've been here for two and a half hours. I'm so sorry.

Sabrina We really have. It's okay. Oh, no, I had the best time! I actually really enjoy these.

Sabrina Okay everyone, that's a for real wrap on episode 11! You can find all the Kaylie links and a content list in the show notes page of my website, linked below, and you can follow me or the podcast on Twitter @LoftilyLotfi and @LitTeaPodcast. Thanks so much for joining us! Okay Ginny, say goodbye!

Ginny Barks