

### **LitTea Episode 13: M. K. Lobb**

- Sabrina Hi friends! So excited to share Episode 13 of LitTea with y'all! I'm your host, Sabrina Lotfi, and today I'm joined by special guest M. K. Lobb, debut author of SEVEN FACELESS SAINTS, which comes out February 7th!
- Sabrina Hi.
- M. K. Hi. Thanks so much for having me.
- Sabrina Thank you so much for joining me today. I am so excited about the upcoming release tomorrow, when this airs Of Seven Faceless Saints. It's gonna be awesome.
- M. K. So, yeah, that will be the next day. Oh, my goodness. Time is going so fast. It's crazy. [Laughs.]
- Sabrina It really is. And we're actually recording this pretty late in January. So how are you feeling? It's only like what is that? Okay. I'm terrible at time math, so that's like, what, two or three weeks?
- M. K. Just over two weeks, yes.
- Sabrina Okay. I'm really excited, but I'm in that space where I feel like so much is going on, it's hard to even think about it, if you know what I mean. There's so much that I need to do, and then there's book two stuff. So book one kind of goes on the back burner when you're doing that. But, I'm excited for sure. And, you're working on edits right now for book two?
- M. K. Yes, yes.
- Sabrina Like, you're literally on deadline, as we speak.
- M. K. Well, I'm also doing my third book, which I have to hand in to my agent. It's mostly what I'm working on right now, because it's my option.
- Sabrina Oh, my gosh! Okay, cool. How far into your option book are you getting before you submit? Are you doing, like, a partial?
- M. K. So it was already written, actually...
- Sabrina Ok, cool.
- M. K. ...so I was essentially just rewriting it after I had handed it in to my agent. I guess it was just in December. I'm just rewriting it now so that we can send it into my editor in February.
- Sabrina Okay, cool. Which is, again, right around the corner.
- M. K. Yeah, right. Like I said, a lot of things at the same time.

Sabrina This year is already - I mean, it just started, but it already feels like it's flying by too.

M. K. Oh, gosh. I know. I said that to my partner yesterday. I was like, 'Didn't we just have New Year's? This doesn't make sense.'

Sabrina We did.

M. K. It's wild. I can't even fathom it. But I'm sure as soon as my book comes out, it'll feel like time kind of slows down. But leading up, it seems like it's going so quick.

Sabrina I'm sure. So what book made you a reader?

M. K. There are a lot of books that made me a reader because I was a voracious reader as a kid.

Sabrina I love to hear this.

M. K. I was actually the kind of reader that annoyed my parents because I would, like, have a friend over and then just read while they were sitting there. [Laughs.]

Sabrina Oh, that's awesome.

M. K. Yeah. I think the one that really made me into fantasy books and stuff was *The Magic Treehouse*. I don't know if you ever read those.

Sabrina It has been a really long time.

M. K. Okay, well, I'm really into historical fantasy, and I've talked before about how *Seven Faceless Saints* started out kind of historical, and it's not anymore. We took all that out because it got to be too much. But if you read *The Magic Treehouse* books, they go back in time to different eras and stuff like that, and I just absolutely loved those as a kid. So I don't know if it was, like, the first book that made me a reader, but it's the ones I remember loving when I was really young.

Sabrina And kind of inspired you moving forward as a writer?

M. K. Yeah.

Sabrina So would you say that's the book that made you a writer as well, or did you start writing a little later?

M. K. I talked about this the other day and everybody laughed at me because the first thing I remember writing was fan fiction for *Warrior Cats*. I don't know if you read....

Sabrina Oh, yes!

M. K. Okay. And every time I say this, my friends are like, 'Oh, my God, why do you admit to that?' But that's the first thing I remember writing, was rewriting the end of one of those books, because...

Sabrina That's amazing! Tell everyone!

M. K. I need to write a fix it for this cat that died. I got to rewrite that ending. So that's the first thing I remember writing really young that was, like, actually close to book length.

Sabrina I love that. Actually, you know what? I haven't heard you talk about it, but I think you mentioned that in your 'How I Got My Agent' post.

M. K. Yeah, I think I did mention that. It was like that, and *World of Warcraft* fanfic was the first things I wrote.

Sabrina Yes. This sounds really familiar. So either I just talked to somebody who has the exact same, that I need to connect you with, or...

M. K. Imagine I don't know if other people did that, but if they did, I would love to talk to them.

Sabrina Well, I know Amanda de Witt, who was on, I think, my third episode. I'm sorry, everyone. I can't laugh. I know that she got started doing, like, online role playing, stuff like that.

M. K. Okay. See, a whole bunch of people have cool role play stories. I didn't even know that was a thing until recently. I was just like...

Sabrina Me either.

M. K. ...either doing it alone, which is probably less cool, but...

Sabrina It's so cool you're learning how to write and figuring out you like it.

M. K. If it ever resurfaces, I will have to move into the forest and never show my face again.

Sabrina No.

M. K. It is what it is.

Sabrina Oh, man. Okay, so would you like to share some hobbies or interests you have outside of writing?

M. K. Yeah, so I think the main hobby that I have - well, it's not really a hobby - but I play the piano a lot. I was a classical pianist for 23 years.

Sabrina Oh, wow!

M. K. So I started when I was, like, four, and I did performances and competitions and exams and stuff for a while. And obviously I don't do that anymore, but it's just kind of a thing that I do when I'm relaxing, play the piano to mix it up instead of writing and reading all the time.

Sabrina That's incredible.

M. K. Yeah. So I don't know if that's even a hobby. It's just something I do for fun. I go to the gym a lot, which, again, is not that fun, but I like it. Yeah. And then I love to do paint by numbers. That's like the relaxing thing. The other relaxing thing that I do.

Sabrina Oh, my gosh. Do you do the, like, the big adult ones?

M. K. Yeah, the ones that have the tiny little - it takes me so long, but I just, like, put on a murder podcast and paint, which is somehow relaxing to me. [Laughs.]

Sabrina Okay. I'm really excited. I just got one of those for Christmas.

M. K. Oh, did you?

Sabrina Yes. I think it's a beachy one. I think there's like a sailboat on it or something. But yeah, I'm very excited to dive into it. I just haven't had time to sit down and do anything.

M. K. They do take so long and I don't know what to do with them when I'm done, to be honest, because they don't always look great. I'm not great at them, but I like to do. It's the process, right?

Sabrina I do so much stuff like that where I'm like, 'Okay, I just made this thing and I don't have a shelf for it. I don't have anyone to give it to. I'm not entirely sure. I guess it'll just go right here in this little spot...'

M. K. And stack them in your closet, yeah.

Sabrina That's funny. Okay, I'm gonna have to try mine. I will let you know how it goes.

M. K. Yeah, you have to. I do think you'll enjoy it. It is relaxing, once you get past the fear of doing it outside the lines.

Sabrina Nice! Do you start on the lightest color and go darker or do you just like, start in a spot and like, move with yourself or like totally random?

M. K. That's a good question. I feel like the last one I did was numbered and I started at one.

Sabrina Okay.

M. K. I don't know if they're all numbered, but it doesn't seem to be like light to dark or anything. It's just random.

Sabrina Okay. Yeah. Nice. Okay. You want to jump into some querying questions?

M. K. Yes, absolutely.

Sabrina Okay. M. K. has an incredible 'How I got My Agent' post on her website, so I will link to it. But also just go check out her website and go buy her book and do all the things. So we're not gonna make her rehash everything right now. But do you have any tips for making your query letter stand out?

M. K. I thought about this for a while because I knew we were gonna talk about querying, and the first couple of queries that I wrote were stand outs and that they were so terrible. So I'm trying to focus on the ones that were better. I think the main thing that I always tell people when I'm reading their queries is that you want to be specific. You don't want to be too vague. I've read a lot of queries for people that are so vague in terms of what the characters' goals are, or even who the other characters are. You don't want to list a bunch of characters, but you want to make it clear why they're important if they're in your query. I've done Author/Mentor Match a few times, and the two main things that I always notice are make it specific but not too specific, which I know that's such a fine line, but once you've done it a few times, you know what the line is. But then the second thing is make it active from your character's point of view. I see a lot of queries that are really passive in terms of describing the world, or things that are happening outside of the character. And I think it's really important that you say, this is your character, this is what they want, this is why they're doing it, and really take that active voice from kind of the character perspective. So those are the two main things I always think of.

Sabrina Yeah, I see a lot of the really vague ones, too. And when you actually look at their projects and everything, you've got all the details in there. They're in there.

M. K. Yes, yes.

Sabrina And if you're hurting on figuring out what to say, think about how your character would describe it. Those make the best voicey queries, I think.

M. K. Yeah, I think those are the two things that I think lend to voice the best. So when you say 'What makes it stand out', I mean, to make it stand out, you have to have a good query, right? It's not just about like an interesting element usually. It's how you put it all together. And once you know how to put it together, you can kind of make anything sound interesting if you really try. I mean, I assume the book should be interesting anyway, right? But if you know how to kind of weave it into a good query, then you can make it all sound good.

Sabrina Yeah. Okay. And you also did some pitching as well, am I wrong?

M. K. So in Author/Mentor Match, there's not like a pitch element, but you just send out queries, right? So that's what people tend to do once they're done with their mentor, like done editing with their mentor. So it wasn't like I pitched a bunch of agents at once. It was more like I just sent out all these queries. Once I had my not editor, but yeah, once I had my mentor's blessing, but I did end up with a ton of requests. This was a historical fantasy that I wrote, which is actually a completely rewritten one, which is now my option book.

Sabrina Oh, okay, cool.

M. K. So I basically took those characters and setting and put a whole different plot with it. But yeah, so I ended up getting like 26 requests, or something like that.

Sabrina Oh, wow!

M. K. Yeah. Which I was so sure that I was gonna get an agent from that. It's like nobody ever gets this many requests and doesn't get an agent. And then I got, I think, five R&Rs, which are revise and resubmit requests.

Sabrina That's also an incredible number for one project.

M. K. It was a lot. I'll have to check the numbers on my blog. I haven't read it in a while or even thought about it, to be honest. So I had all these revisions that I was supposed to do, and I did manage to kind of interconnect all the different agents notes to kind of make it fit for each of them, because none of them were - they didn't want to revise and resubmit just for them, which I can't. Exclusive. That's the word I wanted. It wasn't exclusive.

Sabrina That's really nice of them. And totally how you should go, everybody.

M. K. Yeah, I know. I don't like the exclusive ones, if I can be honest for a second, because you put so much time into them, and then to have an agent send you, like, a form response after that, which is what happened to me with quite a few of them, it's so defeating.

Sabrina It is. And honestly, even if they accept it, you still want to be able to give your book the best chance. And why not? If they're the perfect fit for you, it doesn't matter how many other agents you talk to. So.

M. K. Exactly. Yeah. So I did all these revise and resubmits with the exception of one. So I think I submitted to four agents again. And like I said, I think two of them just rejected me with a form rejection, as if they probably didn't even remember me.

Sabrina Oh, my gosh.

M. K. And then there were two that gave me really nice responses, but passed. So by that time, I actually pitched my book again in - it was one of the Twitter pitch contests, and I can't remember which one it was. But my current agent requested it and I sent it to her, and she came back with yet another R&R.

Sabrina This was after you had done all the other R&Rs?

M. K. Yes. Okay. Yes. And so this is the new version that she's reading. So you can imagine, at this point, I've written it. I've gone through Author/Mentor Match. I've done all the R&Rs. And then she asks me for an R&R. I'm basically just head desk at that point, right?

Sabrina Did you do it then, or did you wait?

M. K. No. So at that point, it was, I think, three months or so after I had handed in the first revision to those other agents. And so I already had pretty much an entire other book done that I'd been writing.

Sabrina Okay.

M. K. Yeah. So I never sent her the revision for the first manuscript. I ended up just querying her again with the brand new one, and that is the one that she finally offered on.

Sabrina And you all are taking the one that she sent the R and R on as an option book?

M. K. That's right.

Sabrina Awesome. I love when we pick up books that we set down for a minute. Yeah.

M. K. I mean, it's completely different from when I sent it to her the first time, but it was just those characters that I loved so much that I was like, 'I'm gonna put them into a new story.' And that's kind of what this is.

Sabrina OK, cool.

M. K. But it was definitely a long haul.

Sabrina That sounds like it. That's incredible. You did a lot of research, I'm sure, when you were doing all this. Do you have any tips on researching agents?

M. K. Yeah, so I think the first thing that I ever used to research them was a site called 'Literary Rambles', which I will plug because I am also doing a kind of a blog post on there with my agent in the next couple of weeks.

Sabrina Oh, cool.

M. K. I can't remember exactly what day it is, but I think it might be out by the time this is out. So her blog just has a ton of different - essentially posts - that talk about different agents. And some of them are even written by the agents themselves saying what they're interested in. Or, it's the agents and their clients talking about the clients' projects, so you can kind of see what other projects they rep. So I really love that. I also love 'Query Shark' for actually writing the queries. So if you're looking to learn how to personalize to an agent, or when you should even personalize, I find that really useful. And then honestly, this is gonna sound so intuitive, but make sure you go on the website and pay attention to what the submission guidelines are. [Laughs.] I know when I talk to agents, one of the first things they say is like, 'The submission guidelines are there and people don't follow them.' Like they don't read them closely and sometimes they're not very clear. I will say that. Like, there are some agencies, I've gone to their page and I can't find the guidelines, or I read them and even I'm not fully clear on what they want.

Sabrina I've queried like 20 times. I should know it. Figure this out right now.

M. K. Exactly. So when people come to me for help and they're frustrated with it, it's like, I totally understand that because it is so frustrating.

Sabrina I feel like that's on the agency at that point. And just do your best. Absolutely. If it's gonna be a rejection from that, they should probably word things better and that's on them.

M. K. Exactly. Which is what I've said to a bunch of people. I said 'Even I don't know from reading this what they want. Submit it with whatever feels right to you, and use your heart for the best.'

Sabrina Use your heart. Go with your heart.

M. K. Which isn't always great advice, but in this case, sometimes you have to right?

Sabrina Fully agree.

M. K. Yes. And I guess the last thing is if you can talk to an agented author or even somebody who just has been in the industry a while. I don't advocate for jumping into a random author's DMs or anything, but I know people like myself all tweet or post on Instagram that my DMs are open. If you have a question or if you have a message from an agent that you want clarification on without emailing the agent back. I've helped people with that before that just came into my DMs and said, 'Can you tell me what this means?' Or 'Is this a good agency to query?' And I'm more than happy to tell them, right. Like it's two minutes to just explain something, and I think that's really invaluable when you just are kind of coming in the door, and you don't know what to do. So yeah, I'll say that again here. If you ever have a question, my DMs are still open. I am happy to help you.

Sabrina Yay. I love seeing that for people. It's so nice and generous.

M. K. I think when you first come into this scene, it's so hard to know anything if you don't know people, right?



Sabrina It's so hard. You can do all the research in the world and there's still a million things that aren't online.

M. K. Yeah, I feel like I didn't really know a lot until I was lucky enough to get into AMM, the Author/Mentor Match program and to connect with people. and then through connecting with people and talking to them, that's how I learned all the stuff that I learned subsequent to that. But yeah, so if you're trying to connect with people and finding it difficult, there are authors or even just people who have been querying for agents, whether they're agented or not, that have so much knowledge. Yeah, they might be willing to help you.

Sabrina And if you are querying, especially for the first time and you don't have a writer community, get on there and just make some other friends who are querying and in the same boat as you. It's so important to have people that you can complain to, and cheer with. So important.

M. K. I know it sounds hard too. Nobody wants to feel like they're bothering people into being their friend. But, at least in my experience, there are so many people querying who feel like they're alone, that if you put some feelers out, you can usually find others who are in the same boat who at least will want to try and support you if you support them in return.

Sabrina Yeah.

M. K. I know it's kind of scary, but give it a shot.

Sabrina It is. It's super scary. But I will say I have never once regretted asking someone to be my writer friends, because I've made the best writer friends.

M. K. No. Same. Absolutely.

Sabrina And honestly, it's not worse like getting rejected. It's not really worse than like getting a book rejection.

M. K. Yeah, exactly. You'll move on, it'll be - well, I always say to people when they're like, 'How did you meet all these writer friends?' Well, I just tried to be their friend, and if they seemed like they weren't interested, I moved on to other people.

Sabrina Okay, 'Bye bye.'

M. K. I feel like you can kind of tell sometimes if you're connecting or not, and if you're not, that's okay. There's so many people online in the writing community who you probably will connect with.

Sabrina You just have to find your crew. You'll find your people.

M. K. Yeah. Exactly.

- Sabrina What is your very best advice for querying authors? And this can be in terms of protecting your mental health. It can be in terms of getting your work out there. It can be in terms of just improving your work, whatever you feel like sharing.
- M. K. I feel like this would kind of tie into what we were just talking about, because what I always tell people is to have a support system. And I don't necessarily just mean people, even though people are amazing supports, but knowing the things that you can do that will make you feel less stressed about the process.
- Sabrina That's good.
- M. K. Yeah. And also, if you're having a terrible time and you need a break, take a break. It's okay. It's not a rush, right? And I know it feels like a rush. I totally queried things too early way too many times. But just knowing the hobbies you like to do, knowing the hobbies and stuff you like to do that kind of help you wind down when you're feeling really stressed about it or stepping back and taking a break. Yeah, I just think that's really valuable. And for me, things like going and exercising while blasting my music, and not checking my phone. Things like that really help. Like simple things, right? So, yeah, the people are definitely important. And I still would absolutely advocate for trying to build a community with friends in similar situations, and also in different writing situations. Like, having a couple of agented friends is always really useful if you're still gathering information. But, if you can build yourself that support system in more than one way, I think that will really help you. Once you reach that point of getting a query rejection and crying on your kitchen floor, because I have done that, and it sucks.
- Sabrina It does suck. Good news is we do get past that crying on the floor stage.
- M. K. It's true.
- Sabrina Eventually.
- M. K. Eventually, now that I'm talking about this, I'm going back in my mind, 'Oh, my God, that sucked so much.'
- Sabrina I know. I think back to my really depressed days where I'm just like, 'I don't want to do anything but just cry and eat cheese.' [Laughs.]
- M. K. And I mean, even once you get past that stage, even leading up to debuting, I've had so many days I just want to cry and eat cheese. You just become upset about different things.
- Sabrina Yes. There's so many ups and downs in this industry, and honestly, some of the really good things can just be so overwhelming as well, that they can make you just as upset. Like, bad things.
- M. K. It's true. Yeah. I mean, I'm so grateful for every good thing, don't get me wrong, but there's definitely times when so many things are happening at once, you feel like you're drowning. You're like, 'I cannot get all this stuff done and respond to all these people', and I'm still happy to be doing it, but there is definitely the kind of stress that makes you just want to hide for a few hours.

Sabrina                    Yeah. You're like, 'I just need a nap.' Like, 'Just one nap.'

M. K.                      It's a lot.

Sabrina                    Well, I think you're doing great.

M. K.                      Well, thank you very much.

Sabrina                    And I can't wait. I'm so excited.

M. K.                      I'm excited too.

Sabrina                    Do you want to do some writing and revising questions?

M. K.                      Yeah, let's do it.

Sabrina                    Okay. So do you want to kind of describe your writing process to us? Like, if you're a plotter or pantsler, and if you write chronologically and that kind of thing?

M. K.                      Yeah. So this is kind of a hard question because I think my process differs every time, which probably everybody says that, but I used to be...

Sabrina                    You kind of adjust per project?

M. K.                      Yeah. And I used to really be a pantsler, and I think I still am at heart, but now I have to hand in outlines to my agent or editor, right? So I've really had to learn to become a plotter a bit more than I was.

Sabrina                    I've heard that a lot.

M. K.                      Yeah. And I think every author who's publishing is saying the same thing. If they were a pantsler, you have to learn to become more of a plotter. Now, whether I stick to my outline, that's a whole different story.

Sabrina                    That's to be determined per project.

M. K.                      Yeah, exactly. But, no, I'm definitely pantsler at heart. If I don't have an outline that I've handed in to somebody already, and they're expecting a certain book, I tend to kind of mentally plot a few chapters ahead in my head as I go, and past that, I kind of have a vague idea of the ending, and that's about it. I really believe in kind of figuring out who my characters are as I go. I know a lot of people are really good at kind of establishing all these traits about their characters beforehand and, like, their personality types and stuff. I know nothing. I kind of know vaguely what they look like, and I know their names, and then I let them tell me who they are as I write.

Sabrina                    So you're like a discovery writer in that aspect?

M. K. Yeah, in characterization, for sure. I think in terms of plot, I have more of an idea of where I'm gonna go, but, yeah, I'm definitely a discovery writer when it comes to character building, for sure.

Sabrina Cool. And do you write in order, did you say?

M. K. Yes. Sorry, I hadn't answered that part yet.

Sabrina Oh, no, that's okay. It was a kind of a convoluted question. I kind of threw a bunch of things out there.

M. K. I'm actually very impressed by people who can write non- chronologically, I think, because right? I think because I'm such a discovery writer, like, character wise, it makes no sense for me to write out a sequence because I don't know who that character is in that scene that's further along in the book. So I just can't do it. I have to write in order because if I write, like, an ending scene, I feel like I'm working with people that I don't know. So, that's my struggle there. [Laughs.]

Sabrina I do the same thing. I have to write chronologically too, and I feel like it's kind of a domino effect. Like, I need to know what this domino has on it.

M. K. Exactly.

Sabrina Because it affects this one and then this one and then this one.

M. K. That's definitely how I function as well. And I know some people have everything planned out, and they just write the scenes that they want to write.

Sabrina They're, like, excited or thinking about, yeah.

M. K. And I really respect that because there are certain scenes I can't wait to get to as I'm writing, but I can't do it. It has to be like, my little cookie at the end. I have to get there slowly. It's my treat.

Sabrina Yes. I love this. Oh, I'm gonna start thinking of the scenes that I can't get to yet as my cookies. I love that.

M. K. Your little cookie treat. Well, actually, I don't know if you've ever read Susan Dennard's blog, but she calls the scenes cookie scenes that she loves writing.

Sabrina Oh, that's cute. I don't remember that from there. I have read a few of Susan's blogs.

M. K. I'm probably not explaining it very well, but she says when you're plotting out your book, you should try and make every scene that you can into a cookie scene. So what's the one thing that makes you excited to write that scene? And if you're not excited about your scene, go back to your plotting notebook, or whatever, and find the thing that will make you excited to write it. And I just love that advice because whenever I'm writing it, it kind of seems monotonous. I think, what is the cookie? What's the thing that would make me excited to write this? So I always thank her for that advice. I think it's so good.

Sabrina I love that. Okay, I'm gonna start thinking about. I'm just gonna put a big cookie picture up for me to look at my left as I'm working. I love this. Yeah, perfect. Okay, so you said you've done Author/Mentor Match a few different times as a mentee.

M. K. Yeah, I've done it once as a mentee, and then I did it twice as a mentor. So Three times.

Sabrina Are you still doing that? Are you, like, currently doing it?

M. K. I'm not actually sure if it's still running this year.

Sabrina Oh, Okay.

M. K. I wasn't going to anyway, because the beginning of the year is usually when you're going through all the submissions and picking a mentee. And I just thought, even if it was going, which again, I'm not sure that it is, I don't think I could fit that in for...

Sabrina You have a lot going on this year. I think it's okay.

M. K. Especially at the first part of the year. Yeah. So I did love doing it. Going through everybody's work was so amazing. It was so cool to see what people were working on, and it's just like I felt so honored that people wanted to work with me and would send me their work because that is so scary, just sending a random person your book. So people are brave and they have great books. Like, there were so many amazing ones that I read, but eventually you just have to pick the one that you really think you can work with and help, right? So I really do love mentoring. I loved being a mentee too, but I love when you're looking at somebody else's work and you just have a light bulb moment of like, 'Yeah, I can help this person with their book.'

Sabrina Yes, sometimes you can't always help your own books, but you can help other peoples'.

M. K. Yeah, that's what I was gonna say. I'm looking at my own book all the time and I don't feel like I get the same light bulb moment. There's something about reading somebody else's and it kind of all clicks together way faster for me. But maybe because I always think of what my friend Kelly says, she's like, 'You can't see the forest for all the little tree details' or something like that. Because you're so deep.

Sabrina Yes. And there are so many tree details in a book.

M. K. So many you're so deep into it and you've just been thinking about it for so long. And when you look at somebody else's work that you don't have that close connection to, it's just so much easier to work with. So, I do love mentoring for that reason, but I think critiquing my friends works kind of fills the mentor shaped hole.

Sabrina Yeah. Honestly, I don't really see a huge difference in the two. You're giving feedback and helping them improve. But I think with the mentoring side, you do a little bit more of the like helping with querying and stuff.

- M. K. Yeah, no, it is very similar, except with my friends, I'm a little more chaotic about it.
- Sabrina Yeah, exactly. I'm a little more structured and like, 'Okay, we're gonna do this and I'm cool over here. It's fine.'
- M. K. No, exactly. It is different, but it is in the same way. It scratches the same itch, I guess.
- Sabrina Yes. What's the best thing you learned as a mentee as far as where visions go and improving your work?
- M. K. When I did Author/Mentor Match as a mentee, that was my first time being critiqued by pretty much anybody. I'd only written - I think I'd written like five books at that time, which sounds like a lot, but I hadn't really edited them. I've written them or I had written them, and then nobody really read them ever, except a couple of people I met on Bookstagram, maybe or something like that. So I never really had anyone come in and give me structured critique. So when I did Author/Mentor Match, it was the first time I'd really had someone say, 'This completely has to kill your darlings,' is the phrase that most people use. I learned to kill my darlings.
- Sabrina That's so hard, too!
- M. K. It is so hard and it sounds so obvious, but it was the first time anyone had really told me, like, 'I don't care if you like that scene, that does not work.' [Laughs.] My mentor was amazing, and I don't think we ended up cutting a ton of it, but there were definitely things that I had to get rid of. And that's kind of like a mental barrier you have to overcome when you first start getting critique, especially when you're used to working alone. You really have to really have to change your mindset and kind of understand not to take it personally and go into it thinking, 'This is how I need to make my book better,' and just trusting their advice. I guess in that sense, I learned a lot of things about how to edit for the first time.
- Sabrina That's interesting that you say that, because yeah, it's a lot easier to see a comment on your document that's like, 'Oh, I don't fully get this. Give me more like, 'Oh, you love it. Give you what? Wait, you want me to cut the sentence that took me 3 hours to come up with? You what?'
- M. K. Yeah, exactly. And it's so hard at first, even now, sometimes I handed my stuff to my agent. She's like, 'Yeah, this is way too long.' Like, what do you mean I worked so hard on this. Isn't it perfect? Like, what is wrong with you? But once you sit on it, or at least once I sit on it for a while, I pretty much always realize that they are correct and I need to cut it. But it is hard because you put so much work into stuff and you just have to learn to accept that it's not all gonna make it to the next draft.
- Sabrina My last project was actually too long, so anytime someone said to cut anything, I was like, I don't even care what it is. Just trim it. Get it out, get it out of here.
- M. K. Everything I write is too long. Actually, the book I'm working on now is the first one I've ever written that is under 100,000 words. At first.

Sabrina I just did that too! High five! Oh, that's awesome!

M. K. Nice! We haven't gone over 100,000. I was feeling very proud of myself for that.

Sabrina How long is *Seven Faceless Saints* word count wise?

M. K. I think the final word count is just over 100. It's obviously gone up and down a ton, but I think it ended up at 101 or 103 maybe.

Sabrina That's not super ridiculous over 100.

M. K. No, it's not too bad. But yeah, it's gone from, like, I think it was 88 at one point, then it was 107, then it was down to 90. So it just has been bouncing all around. I think it ended up just over 100. Yeah. It's still long.

Sabrina And some of that was - you said it was more historical before, so I'm sure some of that was when you were taking out the historical aspect and everything as well?

M. K. Right, yeah. When I first submitted it to my agent, I'd already cut a bit of the historical stuff, but I had used a lot of terms and, like, I guess names for the characters, not names, but, like, titles for the characters that were directly from the time period that I was inspired by. And then I also had all these magical terms that I'd made up right, for the fantasy aspect. And just between all the made up words and all the historical titles that most people wouldn't know, it was just too many proper nouns and confusing words. So we had to cut the titles. And once I cut all the titles, I might as well cut most of the historical stuff, too, right? Because otherwise it doesn't really make sense. And I was sad at first, but now that I read the final version of the book, I think it's so much better that I did because it's already a lot of world building. And if I had left that historical element in, it would have just been overwhelming in terms of trying to get that information across. Yeah, I still had to cut a lot of world building, even when it was just fantasy.

Sabrina Oh, wow. Okay.

M. K. Yeah.

Sabrina You have to do so much and put so much thought into that. I'm not surprised. You literally are creating an entire world.

M. K. Exactly. And yeah, it's so hard when you're drafting it, because you tend to want to front load it right with all the information. And I am really bad for them. In first drafts, like the start of my books, they're always way too long. So I really had to cut back on a ton of that early world building once I got to the final drafts of this book.

Sabrina Well, it doesn't help that there's so much advice out there, too, about, like, 'Well make sure that the important world building stuff is upfront so that people aren't confused and so that they don't have too many questions moving forward.' Yeah, it's really hard to find that balance.

- M. K. Exactly. Well, even giving it to readers, I get people who are like, 'Yeah, I need more world building. Like, there wasn't enough world building in this book.' And then I have other readers, of course, who are like, 'There was way too much world building. It didn't move fast enough.' I think no matter what you do, you're just gonna run into that. So at this point, I just have to not care.
- Sabrina Yeah, there's a lot of that with everything. It's kind of like when you're looking at reviews, too, and they're like, 'I love this book!' 'I hate this book!' and they're talking about the exact same element.
- M. K. Yeah. Even when I used to look at other book reviews, like, you go to your favorite book and everybody says this, but the takes are so wildly different. So you just have to accept that.
- Sabrina Okay, so as a mentor, you see a lot of books coming in and a lot of projects. So are there any tips and tricks you have for some things that you see that are really common, that people do that may benefit from some improvement?
- M. K. Do you mean in terms of the actual submission materials themselves?
- Sabrina I don't want to say. I mean, everything's so subjective and rules can always be broken and stuff, but yeah, any kind of writing things that you see sometimes that are overdone.
- M. K. Yeah. Now, like you said, it's so subjective, but I think a lot of the early drafts and like I said, I do this too, but they tend to be front loaded with a lot of information and not enough early character development. And I'm not saying develop your character immediately in chapter one, obviously, but just letting us know who the character is that we're gonna be following. Because like I said, when I'm reading the, I think I just got one chapter or maybe 50 pages. I can't remember what the submission materials were for. But you're only reading a little bit of it, right? And I think I read like the first five or ten pages before deciding if I wanted to ask for more. And so in those five to ten pages, it's a big hurdle to get over the wanting to explain everything right at the start. And I get that, which is why I try to skim past. If there is too much front loading of information, then I say, 'Okay, I do this too. I've got to look further into the book to see if we get past that. And there's something here that's really good.' But yeah, I think just more character building earlier and not giving too much information is key, but also kind of building the world in a way that makes the person want to keep reading it. There needs to be that kind of drive, right, that makes you want to go from chapter one to chapter two or even page one to page two. And I think some people struggle to create a sense, I don't want to say of urgency, but just something that makes the person want to keep turning pages, right? And it might be urgency...
- Sabrina But it might be urgency, or it might be like a question that you have as a reader. There's a lot of things that can compel you to keep moving forward.
- M. K. Yeah. Just some compelling element, I think is a good way to put it. Even if it's like the way that you've written a character and you like them quickly and want to figure out what they're gonna do next, right?



Sabrina Yeah, exactly.

M. K. And I know that's something that writers really have to build over time. At least I don't sit down and write a first chapter that's amazing... [Laughs.] I think when you're looking at submissions like that, at least I'm personally very aware that they might be very early drafts, or they might be fifth drafts, right? You never know. And so I tried to look at them all with sort of a really open mind. So if they're not ready in the first few pages, you can go further in and see if there's still potential here to fix that and make this at least a book that I know how to fix?

Sabrina Yeah. And honestly, that's one of the hardest things as far as making selections, I think, when you're mentoring, it's just like, do you have the skills to help that author get where you think they need it to go and where they think it needs to go? So...

M. K. That was the hardest part for me because I read some submissions that were just like, I loved them, they were so fun, and I wanted to keep reading them. But looking at the first 50 pages, or whatever it was, it's like, 'I don't know what I would change, or even if there is a problem, I don't know how I would fix the problem.' It kind of sucks because you want to help. Everybody wants to be a mentee, and you just have to pick the one that you connect with and know how to help. Yeah. And sometimes that takes a lot of thinking. Like, I don't think I knew how to fix. Well, I don't want to say fix, but I didn't know how to help the first book that I picked until I really sat down and thought about it, because there was just something compelling to me that I knew was really good and I didn't know how I wanted to bring it out more. And once I dwelled on that for a little bit, I came up with something that I knew I could use. So it's just a lot of thinking. It is fun, though.

Sabrina It is! It's super fun! Honestly, a lot of the times I'd have to read through a whole thing before you really know. And, I had a co-mentor, which was helpful.

M. K. Oh, yeah.

Sabrina Do you want to get into some stuff about *Seven Faceless Saints*?

M. K. Yes, let's do it.

Sabrina I am so excited. This is always my favorite part of these. Like, I love talking craft and all the tips and stuff, but I'm just such a big reader, so these are always my favorite.

M. K. Well, thank you. I'm glad you're excited. I am also excited.

Sabrina I know. I hope so. I'm sure you're probably a little nervous, too, because that always comes with it, but it's true. It's so close. It's gonna be awesome. And I've heard such lovely things, so.

M. K. Oh, thank you. Yeah, people have been really sweet.

Sabrina Okay, so for anyone who doesn't know yet, would you like to share a little bit about what *Seven Faceless Saints* is about?

M. K. Yes. Well, no, I do not like pitching my book, but I'm gonna do it. I won't like it, but I will do it because I'm practicing.

Sabrina See, even on these, it's hard.

M. K. I know. Some people have such good pitches ready to go. I'm still working my way through it. So essentially it is a young adult fantasy murder mystery that takes place in sort of an alternate Italy. And it is two friends turned enemies turned maybe lovers who have to team up, who have to team up in order to solve the series of murders that are plaguing the city. So essentially it's two points of view. Roz and Damian. Roz is a rebel. She's part of a group that's kind of working against the government's theocratic system. And Damian works for that system now, so that's kind of why they're at odds, obviously. And so when all these people are being killed in the city, nobody's really doing anything about it because the city is divided into people with magic and people who don't have magic called the unfavored. And so when the unfavored are dying, nobody cares. But then suddenly a disciple dies who is one of the people with magic. And that's when Damian gets told, as someone who works for the government system, that, 'Hey, you need to solve these murders because we don't want our magical people dying.' And Roz is already trying to solve these murders because she wants to know what's happened to the unfavored, unmagical people, because she wants justice for them since nobody is looking into their murders. So obviously they're paths intertwined because it turns out the same people, or the same person, is killing the unfavored and the disciple. So angst explodes from there.

Sabrina I'm so excited, and I love that. I love the friends to enemies to like, we'll see trope. Those are so great.

M. K. It's one of my favorites.

Sabrina There's history there. There's so much history in those.

M. K. Exactly. You can just use that. I do love character, kind of meet cutes, but I also love when there's so much dramatic backstory that you can draw from. So it's one of my favorite things to write, for sure.

Sabrina They're all good, I honestly. I'm like pretty much any trope I'm there for if it's done well.

M. K. No, same, honestly. Especially the romance tropes between the two leads. Yes.

Sabrina I mean, and that's why they're so popular. As tropes. We just can't get enough of them.

M. K. You can sell me on anything. Yeah, do it right, and I'm there.

Sabrina So, where did you get your inspiration?

M. K. So I always wanted to write a murder mystery, and I didn't really like, I've read mysteries, obviously, and I love to read mysteries, but they're usually also sort of fantastical, so I thought, I want to try and do that. And then the elements of the world building, I got from. So in Florence hundreds of years ago, there was this thing called the Seven Major Guilds of Florence, and there were minor guilds as well, but I focused on the major ones when I was researching, and they were kind of in charge of Florence's economy and arts and trade and stuff like that. And like I said, I'm a really big history nerd. That's kind of how I get a lot of my inspiration. So I thought, what if there was a world similar to that? And instead of these seven trade guilds being in charge of the city, it was seven magical guilds.

Sabrina Cool!

M. K. So that's where these seven different - yeah, so, and then I kind of made each guild correspond to a type of magic and a saint that they essentially worshiped as their patron saint. And that's where it all started, at least. And like I said, I didn't keep a lot of those historical elements. It got too unwieldy, and it was just it was confusing. And it was also it was a long time ago, like 16 hundreds and even earlier. So there was a lot of stuff that I didn't really want to use in terms of, I guess, old world building, if that makes sense.

Sabrina No, that's fair. That's fair.

M. K. Yeah. So, yeah, that's where it came from. And then once I had built that world, I kind of put my murder mystery into it. And like I said, I was a pantsner before I had to hand stuff into my agent and editor.

Sabrina Now with this one, you just went for it, right?

M. K. Yeah. So the first draft was probably terrible. I can't really remember how it ended, like, at the very beginning, but it was one of those things that I wrote it, and then once I knew how it was gonna end and who the culprit was, I went back and seeded little things into the plot.

Sabrina Okay, cool.

M. K. So basically working backwards and forwards again to make everything line up over many, many rounds of revisions.

Sabrina Yes. As we do.

M. K. Yeah, exactly.

Sabrina That's so awesome. It sounds so good.

M. K. Thanks!

Sabrina Who is your favorite character to write? I know that's a hard one. I know it does not mean you don't love your other characters.

M. K. I hope they're not listening. People always ask me, and I love to write dual point of view or even multi point of view. And so it's so hard because I love them all, but I think probably my favorite character to write was Roz, who is the rebel, the female point of view, just because I would say that she was so cathartic for me to write. And when you read it, you'll notice that she is very angry and frustrated and a little explosive and feels very strongly about a lot of things. And I'm sure that will be frustrating to some people because that kind of character can be frustrating. But for me, I really relate to that, especially me as a teenager, is what I thought of when I was writing her. I know that depth of rage that you just don't even know how to expel, and sometimes you don't even know how to explain it or why you feel it. And so I think just letting her be furious all the time and angry about the injustices around her and things like that. She's complicated as a character, but I really enjoyed writing her and trying to pull that teen angst out of me, if that makes sense.

Sabrina I love that. I love a good ragey character. I hear all the ragey characters.

M. K. I do, too.

Sabrina Be angry, get mad, yell at everybody. I am here for it.

M. K. I do love Damian, too, because he's got all my sad feelings inside him. But Roz is...

Sabrina Oh, is he a sensitive boy?

M. K. He is a sensitive boy. But I like Roz because I feel like I am the same as her in that when I'm sad, I don't like to let myself feel sad. I always tend to want to channel it into anger. And I'm better at not doing that as I get older. But I was not good at not doing that when I was a teenager. Anytime I felt upset, it was immediately rage. So in that sense, it was cathartic for me. Yeah.

Sabrina Are you getting an audiobook?

M. K. There is an audio book. There is. I have not heard the final version, actually, but the excerpts that I have heard are excellent.

Sabrina Do you have multiple actors on there?

M. K. Yeah. So there's one for Roz, obviously, and then one for Damian, and then there's a third one for this. There's like these little outtake scenes when the murders happen from kind of the perspective of the person who's getting murdered, but I don't say really who they are. So there's a third narrator who reads those scenes since they're not from either of the main characters point of view. And yeah, all three of them are really good. I'm really excited to listen to it.

Sabrina That's awesome. That's really cool. Yeah. I love audiobooks.

M. K. Me too.

Sabrina Poor everybody listening, they're just like 'Sabrina is obsessed with audiobooks. She will not shut up about them,' probably.

M. K. Well, it's so handy. You can just throw them on whenever. I throw them on when I'm driving to and from work, I can't get enough.

Sabrina I would not be able to keep up with my TBR without them.

M. K. No. Same.

Sabrina I have read so many more books this last year. I only discovered audiobooks probably within the last like, two years, I think. I mean, I knew they existed, but I hadn't actually started utilizing them.

M. K. No, I love them, especially because I'm super annoying in that I love to collect special edition books but will not open them.

Sabrina I do the same thing. I get them, and I'm like, 'I can't read this one because I'll mess it up.' So then I'll have to wait and get it from my library or whatever. Yes!

M. K. One of my friends said to me recently, she's like, 'You're not really a reader, are you? You're a collector.' And I'm like, 'Oh, my God, she's so right!'

Sabrina As far as my hardbacks go, that's true.

M. K. Yeah. I get, like, the special editions from FairyLoot, or whatever, and then I listen to the audiobook so I don't have to open and ruin the very nice book.

Sabrina If I'm dying, I'll do it, but I'm just, like, 'Okay, nobody breathes. I know. No doggy ears..

M. K. I can't handle the stress. I got to listen to it.

Sabrina I love it. So, are there any recently released or upcoming books you'd like to recommend?

M. K. So the one that I always have to recommend first, because I've read it many times, is *The Whispering Dark* by my critique partner and very good friend, Kelly Andrew.

Sabrina It's so good. I read it last year, too. It's so good. I've only done it once. I'm sorry, Kelly.

M. K. That's probably okay. But everybody's probably like, You've got to stop recommending this book. It's just because your friends no, it's because her prose is so I just want to eat it and roll around in it at the same time. It's so good.

Sabrina She's a beautiful writer. She's a beautiful writer.

- M. K. Yeah. And the characters like the character building. If you like dark academia, if you like thriller elements, but also fantasy elements, but in a contemporary world, if you like characters who are kind of hate to love, it is an amazing book. Other books that I read recently that I really loved are *Only a Monster*. I listened to the audiobook. It's by Vanessa Len. It has kind of a time travel element. And I love a girl who is a monster, so I don't think that's a giveaway.
- Sabrina I do, too. I haven't read that one yet. I need to add it to my thing.
- M. K. I really liked it. I really liked the audiobook. That's how I read it. So that one was amazing. I read *Legendborn*, which I adored. I still need to read *Bloodmarked*, but every time I recommend that to people, I feel like everybody's already recommended it to them, but I have to do it again anyway because it's just so emotional but also so fun. What other ones did I love this year? Oh, *A Far Wilder Magic*, if you like *The Scorpio Races* or anything that's kind of darkish folkloresh. This is beautiful. It's by Allison Saft. It has elements of alchemy, and there's, like, a soft boy who's kind of charming and flirty, and then a girl who's very angry and doesn't want anyone to talk to her, which I love that pairing. I'm really drawn to books that are so beautifully written. Like I'm a huge Laini Taylor fan. I always cite her as one of my favorite authors ever. But Allison's book well, both of her books, but *A Far Wilder Magic* and *Call Down the Night*. I believe it's another one.
- Sabrina Yeah, I was just blanking on her first book title.
- M. K. I haven't read it in ages. It's so good.
- Sabrina *Down Comes the Night*.
- M. K. *Down Comes the Night*, that's what it is. It is - either one of those - gorgeous. She's an amazing writer. I don't know if I should tell people about upcoming ones. Am I allowed to do that if I've read them early?
- Sabrina Yeah, especially if they're, like, coming up in the next couple of months or whatever.
- M. K. Okay. Because I've read a lot that are coming up in 2023, obviously. So a couple that I loved are *Together We Rot* by Skyla Arndt, I think is how you say her last name, and it's got, like, some creepy religious vibes in a contemporary setting, and there's like an evil forest. And it's just so creepy and weird. And it also has a grumpy girl and a softboy.
- Sabrina Oh, yay.
- M. K. That is an amazing book. I can't wait to read it in its final version because I read it quite a while ago and then I haven't read this yet, but I really, really want to read *Sing Me to Sleep* by Gabi Burton, I think is her last name. Yes, that's right. Okay, so *Sing Me to Sleep*, it has, like, sirens and an angry, powerful girl, and apparently there's romance and it just, it has everything that I want in a book, essentially. So I'm very excited for that one.
- Sabrina Oh, yay. Awesome. Okay, cool. Yeah. Do you want to tell everyone where we can find you and *Seven Faceless Saints*?

M. K. Yeah. So I am on all social media at @mk\_lobb. That's just the letters MK. Underscore Lobb. My website is mklobb.com. And you can buy *Seven Faceless Saints* pretty much anywhere that's like your major book retailer. But I highly recommend that you pre order or buy it from your local indie or through bookshop.org if you have that.

Sabrina Yeah.

M. K. But you can pretty much get it anywhere, so.

Sabrina Yay. Oh, my gosh. Okay. I cannot believe we crammed all that into this 1 hour. Look at us go.

M. K. Thank you so much. I guess it's at the end. Are we done?

Sabrina We are. I cannot believe made it. And I so appreciate you hopping on with me. I know you've been the busiest over here.

M. K. I have to say, even being busy, I'm just so glad that I get to do this and talk to people who are interested in the things that I'm working on, and wanting my advice on stuff like, that's so surreal. I am honored.

Sabrina You gave such good advice today. I love it! Thank you so much for joining me.

M. K. Thank you for having me.

Sabrina Okay everyone! That's it for Episode 13! If you're looking for the transcript or content list for this episode, please forgive the delay! I'll update the links and post on Twitter @LitTeaPodcast and @LoftilyLotfi as soon as those are available, but you can still find all the M. K. links now, through my Show Notes page, linked below. Again, huge apologies, and thank you for your patience!

Sabrina Okay Ginny, say goodbye!

Ginny Barks!