

LitTea Podcast: Episode 8 Dahlia Adler Part 2

- Sabrina Hi everyone! Welcome back to the second half of episode 8 of LitTea, with me, your host, Sabrina Lotfi, and my very special guest, Dahlia Adler. If you missed the first half of our interview and you'd love to learn more about Dahlia and hear all her genius querying advice, go check that out first! Otherwise, play on.
- Sabrina This is a little bit different. You are great with swag and giveaways and stuff. Do you have any tips for people?
- Dahlia Oh, I don't feel like I am at all. But yeah, I mean, my number one tip is always keep your swag flat. I'm gonna give my usual disclaimer. Going back to the whole swag thing is like a greater thing. I'm sorry, because I'm totally taking this out of fun zone and I'm back into serious publishing zone. But a big thing that's really hard to tell from the outside is what authors are doing for themselves, versus what publishers are doing for authors. You think you will always know. You do not. There are authors who have done bonkers campaigns for themselves. Like truly, truly, whatever their motivation is, clearly they financially can handle it, whatever it is. But also a lot of those are done by publishers and they might look exactly the same. And so they're footing the bill for shipping or for creating items. So I always say this about enamel pins that I think they got really big with Julie Murphy's *Dumplin'*. They were awesome. They were adorable. They were also publisher financed, but then suddenly they became the thing every author felt like they need to have. They cost more to make and ship than the purchase of the book will bring in.
- Sabrina And they're not flat.

- Dahlia Because they're not flat. So my advice is A) never spend more on your swag per book than the sale of that book will bring in, which is math you can do with your contract information. So keep it flat. And there are a lot of options in flat. There are bookmarks, there are bookplates, there are character cards, there are art prints, there are tattoos, there are stickers. There's so much you can do with flat. Be creative, whatever, but if you see somebody who's selling like a thing - that's either publishing or they have money to burn, and if that's not you, do not try to make it you. Like, flat is great. I do - my publisher for *Cool For the Summer*, did a bookplate on a sticker sheet. Then for *Home Field Advantage*, I did my own. I had an art print commissioned and my own bookplates commissioned and like that's it. A bunch of people got it. For *Going Bicoastal*, I'm hoping to do character cards because I think it really lends itself to it and I think they'll be really fun. I have to actually find somebody to commission for them, but that's it. I like them maxed out at two to three items. I think bookplates are the best, especially if you're just not somebody who's gonna be able to do a lot of signings. And then another thing that I would advise, if you can, is partnering with an indie bookstore to do it. Because first of all, you drive business to that indie. Second of all, you just give them the stuff once and then they send it out with each purchase of the book. So rather than you shipping bookplates to 50 people who preorder your book, they include it with the book. You've now saved time and postage on 50 bucks while sending people to an indie bookstore. So that, I think, is a really, really good way to do it, if you can. And if you don't have that relationship, then ask your publisher to do it. That is a perfectly fine thing to ask your publisher to do, to seek out an indie book store or two or five to partner with on a preorder campaign.
- Sabrina Great advice.
- Dahlia Yeah, I like that.
- Sabrina When you do your orders yourself, like bookplates and stuff, where do you go? What company do you use?
- Dahlia So I've had lately, Erin Bowman, who is also an author, has done my design, so she designs my bookplates. She designed my bookmarks. My older ones were done by Maggie Hall, who doesn't really design anymore, but is wonderful. And then I think GotPrint.com or Vistaprint.com? I think I usually use GotPrint for actually making them. For bookplates, you're not looking for something called bookplates. You're looking for stickers. You want 3 x 4 stickers, usually. I mean, some people do smaller. I like getting 3 x 4 stickers.
- Sabrina And then you just design it?
- Dahlia Yeah. So I commission people to design because I have no artistic skills. So, thank you Erin Bowman. So if you're ordering bookplates, you're ordering matte stickers. Very important.

Sabrina Good distinction. I know, because I was just like, 'I want to order a bookplate on Google,' and Google would be like, 'You want to do a what now?'

Dahlia A bookplate that you like. If you look it up that way, you're gonna be spending a lot more. Bookplate is a very different thing.

Sabrina Oh, my gosh. Okay. Yeah, don't do that.

Dahlia You want stickers and pay attention to the matte versus glossy. Like, I do get glossy bookmarks, but then they really need to be signed with a sharpie, or something like that. And I like bookmarks because I can sign those, too, and they're good. I would also - if you have multiple books - once you have a bunch that makes sense together, just put those all on one thing. So now, I made *His Hideous Heart* bookmarks. But I didn't do it for *That Way Madness Lies*. And now comes *At Midnight*. I have bookmarks that have all three anthologies on them. So my name on one side and a tagline, and then the other side has all three books. And I've always liked the multi-book merchandise. Do not make new swag for every single book.

Sabrina Yeah, no, that's super smart.

Dahlia I mean, do it if you want to. Sure. It is not my advice to make new swag for every single book, especially if you are on a budget.

Sabrina On a budget and have multiple projects out there. Yeah.

Dahlia Yeah.

Sabrina Do you want to give us some advice on some of the more common writing issues that come up, and maybe how to recognize those things, and improve them the best you can?

Dahlia So I just started as an editor at a company where I'm editing interactive fiction and visual novels, and so my brain is very set in how to do that, which is very different from prose novels. So the writing advice I've been giving lately is very inapplicable to actual novel writing. Man, I don't...

Sabrina I wrote some more broad areas if you want me to spit some at you.

Dahlia Sure, let's do it that way.

Sabrina Okay. So one thing I noticed, I mean, I've read pretty much everything you've written, and you're so good at voice. So do you have any tips on getting the voice as strong as you can? Like, if you're having a hard time with that, if people are like, 'Oh, this character is kind of flat,' or whatever, how do you...

Dahlia I, personally, I just write like I talk, which is also why a lot of my characters sound like me. But what some people advise, that I think is really good advice, is to sort of pose other questions to your character. What it is, for me, as I think of my characters as people, which I know sounds like duh, but like, no, actually. Where, like, you envision their lives off the page, where are they gonna be five years from now? How would they react to this scenario? What's their relationship? What are things that happened in their lives before we ever met them on the page? What are their relationships like with the different people in their life? How does where they live affect how they would approach this? And all those different things. So if it helps to ask yourself, you know, to make up little scenarios about your characters, even play some people play them out in The Sims. To really get to see and spend some time with their characters. I think that helps a lot. Look, it can bite you. There are, I think, a lot of people reading characters these days as characters and not as people. So, like, they'll pick out something problematic your character has said, and to me, it's like, 'Yes, at this point in her journey, that's how she would talk.' By the end of the book, it is no longer how she would talk. But I am not making her perfect from page one because this is a character arc and she has a journey, and people just do not read that. There's no grace given to the authors, but there's also no grace given to the characters. And that is honestly making a lot of books flat for me these days.

Sabrina I think character arcs are probably one of the most important underlying things of a story overall for me is like, the growth. Yeah.

Dahlia So same. And I think they are deeply suffering by people preempting criticism with their characters. And so all the time I'll read it and I'll be like, 'I know exactly which Twitter thread you're responding to by having your author say this,' or like, 'This reads like Tumblr circa 2018.' And I just - that's the thing I hate most in writing right now. Honestly, in YA books right now, is I see people responding preemptively to criticism on the page, or cutting it off at the pass on the page, instead of giving their characters realistic arcs. And I truly cannot stand that. And part of that is me being terminally online. I am aware what conversation sparked your need to write the situation like this. And other people are not necessarily gonna pick it out like that, but frankly, that's the number one thing plaguing writing right now to me. And so that will make for an unnatural voice. It's really hard to write when you have all these other voices in your head. And I think that used to be something that sort of affected authors more from book two on, because you heard your own reviews and what people were expecting of you based on your first book, and what people hated about your first book, and you heard all those things. And now I think every author feels pre reviewed by all that commentary flying online. And so you don't even get your first book to be outside voice free. And I think that's a really hard thing about writing right now. And it's making really unnatural literature right now. And it's hard for me to tell you, 'Fix that,' because that means I do it at the cost of living with people criticizing who I am as a human for the way that I have written characters. And so, you know, that doesn't feel good. I can't tell you 'Enter a situation that does not feel good.' But there has got to be some, I mean, how would your character genuinely be? And if you're not comfortable with how your character would genuinely be, then maybe that's not the right character for you to be writing at this point in time.

Sabrina That's a good point.

Dahlia But to polish up your character for the internet is like, just don't write it then. Just please stop doing that. That's how I feel about that. This podcast is gonna make me a lot of friends. I can tell already.

Sabrina No, I bet it's gonna... Hey, you're real. I love how real you are and how honest you are with people. I think it's amazing. That's why I asked you to be on this with me.

Dahlia Why, thank you.

Sabrina You're also, you're so good at dialogue. What about for people who have an issue with dialogue?

Dahlia It's the same kind of thing, like how do you talk? Not how do you write, but how do you talk? And so if you find that hard to translate to the page, open up a voice memo or whatever on your phone and write your scene that way. Do it like you're talking, and then transcribe it, and you can polish it a little. Obviously, you're not gonna have 50 'Ums' in your sentence like I would absolutely have if I were talking out loud. But I think that that can be a really helpful way to hear how it's coming out. And on the flip side, if you're worried that your dialogue is coming off stilted and inauthentic, record it. Read it out loud like what you've already written. Does it sound stilted when you say it out loud? Would you never talk that way? Would your character never talk that way? Then the way you're writing is not gonna come off authentic either. And I write my style as much as... I have no literary skills. There are certainly reasons to not write like you talk and authors who have made beautiful books out of that. So this is if you are attempting to write characters who talk like real people, then yeah, I would suggest actually vocalizing your dialogue and see how that comes out. I also watch a lot of media that is the kind of thing I write. So if you're writing teenagers but you're never watching, like, good teen TV, you're not gonna hear so much of it. And especially if you're not surrounded by teens, if you're not around the demographic that you're writing, then watch them participating something in videos online. Just find ways to engage with your target audience, even if it's from a distance, even if it's not interactive, but don't, like, guess.

Sabrina Yes, that's really good advice.

Dahlia I mean, I have a teen niece and nephew who both live in my neighborhood, so I actually see teens all the time, which is helpful, and I know not everyone has that, but they're around in various areas. And one thing is we can access pretty much everything. That sounds so creepy. I just mean, like, for example, when I've written sports romance, like, one thing I do is I will watch actual coverage of high school sports games or college sports games or whatever and see what it's like. That's the kind of thing. And not any teen TV show is gonna work well as research. Make sure it is actually regarded as an authentic experience, like for what you're writing. 'Gossip Girl' was not gonna teach you how to write teens in the Florida panhandle. Much as I love 'Gossip Girl', 'Gossip Girl' will teach you how to write teens growing up who went to high school on the Upper East Side like I did.

Sabrina That's fair. So, okay. One thing that you mentioned in another interview was that kind of poop period where you know what comes next in your novel and you know everything, but you just don't want to write it and like, you just don't want to sit down and do it. Do you have any advice for people for working through that? or do you just say, embrace the lazy and don't work on it right now?

Dahlia I do a lot of I don't work on it right now. I don't want to write when I absolutely do not want to do it. And I'll find other times it kind of comes to me. You have to figure out what puts you in the mood. A lot of times it's gonna be music, which is why I heavily advocate for making a playlist for each book because I have found sometimes if I really associate this song with this book, then as soon as I hear it, I can get in the mode of writing that book. But yeah, like, what does trigger you to write when you are in that mode? Like, I find if I take a shower, I can often figure out a plot point that has been bugging me, and if that's you get a shower notepad, I wrote a bunch of - I definitely used that for two of my new adult books that were taking a really long time, and that was really helpful. If nothing's working, yeah. And you're not on deadline, take a break. The thing is, eventually you will be on deadline. You will be stuck, and you will have to do it anyway. After my full workday and parenting, I then had to go right to writing every single night to do *Going Bicoastal*. I was certainly not always in the mood. Some nights I was like, 'This just is not gonna happen.' And some nights I was like, 'Doesn't matter. Open your laptop, sit there and figure it out' and...

Sabrina Just do something.

Dahlia Yeah. And that's a fun book. That was not, you know, tons of research. That was not angsty. That was not oh I'm pulling from the depths of my soul. That book is just fun. And still, there are some nights you're like, 'I just can't do it. I can't be in somebody else's head right now. I can't use my brain right now.'

Sabrina Look at more words and... yeah.

Dahlia Yeah, you're not gonna make a satisfactory career for yourself out of beating yourself up for not writing every night. Like, write every day is stupid, frankly, I think. I mean, sometimes I have to do it because I'm on deadline, but this, like, 'You're not a real writer unless you put pen to paper or finger to keystroke or whatever for at least 50 words a day' is like, 'No, just know yourself.' Yeah, give yourself a break sometimes. Your brain needs to reset. That's okay.

Sabrina Yeah, no. That's really good advice. You can. You can get so caught up in the words and the writing.

- Dahlia Well, I will say that one thing if you do, because I'm remembering now what you said about the exact situation you're in. Because I was gonna say also, sometimes watching other media can help inspire you if you're stuck. But you're not even talking about where you're stuck. You're talking about where you know what's coming next. For that, bullet point your scenes. Just write one paragraph for each scene of, like, 'This is what's gonna happen here.' It doesn't matter that you can't sit and write it out. Sometimes while you are sitting and doing that, you'll be like, 'Okay, and I know a line of dialogue that I want to go here, and so I'm gonna do that.' And then sometimes you'll end up writing more just because once you have it down on paper, you will. If you don't, that's fine. Just put down what's gonna go in each scene. And then when you get to the point where you have no choice but to write and it feels like pulling teeth, you have the text there and you just expand it, replace it with the real stuff that's going there. That I find tremendously helpful, to bullet points or summarize each scene, once you know what they're gonna be. Even if you can't write it, that's like the perfect amount of writing for when you can't do it.
- Sabrina That's excellent advice, and I mean, especially in first draft. Do you really need more than that in a first draft?
- Dahlia I'm - not usually. This was the first book I ever turned in that had things that said, 'More will go here.' Or had, like, a one line summary of, like, 'Here's what's gonna happen in the rest of the scene.' Just because I was not gonna make my deadline otherwise. I'm usually not a - I expand as I revise. I write short and then expand. But I am not the person to be like, I don't write draft zeros. I don't write something that could literally not be turned in. There's nothing wrong with... That's, obviously, like, a very valid style. It just happens not to be what I do. I can't do it.
- Sabrina That makes sense.
- Dahlia Yeah. This was such a departure for me, but honestly, it was the best thing that I did for myself. My brain just doesn't work like that or stay comfortable with it.
- Sabrina I'm not good at the zero drafting either. Okay. Do you want to individually talk about all of your novels? Because I'm down for it.
- Dahlia Do you want me to individually talk about all my novels?
- Sabrina I'm always here for - I don't know what your time is like over there. You have the biggest book list of any of the authors that I've actually brought onto the podcast before. So, in the last ones, I'm like talking about two or three other projects before the one that's coming up.
- Dahlia So, you can pick one. You can choose which ones to ask me about.

- Sabrina Okay, well, one thing I wanted to ask you about, as far as your books go, is you do - you write a lot of sports. What kind of research do you have to do? Do you have any experience with this or is this like, 'Okay, I gotta go learn football right now?'
- Dahlia Yeah. Let the record show I'm done writing sports. The funny thing is I did play sports. I loved sports as a kid. I was on the volleyball team for one year of high school. I was sports staff in camp, which is what my story in *Out of Our League* is about. The sports theme happened kind of by accident, and with sports I don't know anything about. So my first time doing it was *Right of First Refusal*, which is my second self published new adult romance. And I didn't know when I wrote the first one *Last Will and Testament* that I was gonna do three books. Like, I was just writing that as a standalone. And so I chose to make Kate a lacrosse player because I was like, 'Oh, that's a fun sport I know nothing about.' Like, it was a throwaway detail. Like, 'Oh, ha ha, lacrosse.' And then I was like, when I realized I was gonna give the other girls their own books, I was like, 'Oh, God, what a terrible idea this was.'
- Sabrina Now I need to go learn about lacrosse.
- Dahlia That is probably the thing I have single most researched other than my short story for *The Radical Element*. I watched so much like college lacrosse. I read so much coverage of college lacrosse. Yeah.
- Sabrina Lacrosse seems pretty complicated, too, because I'm not - To be fair, I don't watch a ton of sports and everything, but it seems like one of them that has a little bit more rules.

Dahlia It was complicated. I hope I did okay with it. I've heard I did. I hope that's true. And I didn't even have lacrosse playing friends to ask questions like, that was all just so much research. Thank God that was at a time in my life I had more time to research. I mean, I was working full time, but I didn't have kids. And that's the hugest difference. *Home Field Advantage* is like, I really knew I wanted to do this plot, and I was like, 'Football? Okay, I don't know much about football. I feel like I know enough to just write this. And then my husband knows football and he'll help me,' but my husband knows professional football, which is very different from high school football. And no New York Jews have experience with high school football. None of us have football teams. We don't have cheerleading squads either. This was all new. So both of those required research. But as much research as I did and as much help as he tried to give me, I was a disaster. And fully 100% all like, I wrote the action and whatever, but everything right about football in *Home Field Advantage* is due to Maggie Hall and Sarah Henning. Buy their books. They're wonderful, but they are both very, very, very knowledgeable about sports. They both wrote fantastic stories for *Out of Our League* that I'm really excited for people to read. I love those stories deeply. But they absolutely went through and just like, corrected, corrected, corrected. And I hate saying that because it feels like, I don't know, there's something weaselly feeling about it, even though that's what books are kind of supposed to be. You're allowed to write things you don't know. But yeah. Oh, man. They did a lot of corrections about - But I thought I had a lot more confidence in my ability to research, but by then I wrote *Home Field Advantage* on maternity leave with my second kid. There was no research time. I mean, not that I did none, but I did what I could and it's just not enough. I mean, high school football is like a religion. You have to really know it. What was great, especially with Sarah is that Sarah has even worked, I think, as a sports reporter in that general area. So she, like, even really specifically knew Florida. I mean, she's just a killer sports romance writer. It was so wonderful to have her looking at it. And Maggie is like my ride or die author friend for a billion years now. She's done book covers for me and like, yeah, we've read all of each other's work except *Going Bicoastal*. Nobody's read *Going Bioastal*, which is very weird for me.

Sabrina Well, you could send it to me. I mean, I'll read it. [Both laugh.]

Dahlia There will be ARCs soon. Like, I just turned in copy edits yesterday, so actually there will be ARCs soon and then people will read it. But I am very, very grateful to them. I mean, there's a lot that I love about sports. I love the passion, I love the drive. I love the ambition of the characters who engage in it.

Sabrina They're so exciting.

Dahlia Yeah. I love the teamwork, and the sisterhood, or brotherhood, or siblinghood. There's so much about it I think is great and makes a really great theme for fiction. And I love reading it and I love writing it, but I don't know it. It is not my expertise. I think the dynamics I can do, but the technicalities I can't. And how many times am I gonna have somebody else come in and clean up my sports knowledge?

- Sabrina Yeah, it's so interesting. I mean, every single sport you go to, they have a different name for all the different things. You have to learn the language. Training is usually different.
- Dahlia And it's also like a lot of them have very different rules between high school, college, and pro. And so football, whatever football I knew was pro football, so that makes a really big difference. And it's so funny because I know people, like, when you see football books, everyone's like, 'Oh, you must love 'Friday Night Lights'. I have never gotten past, like, episode three of 'Friday Night Lights'. Frankly, it probably would have been helpful if I had. Nothing against the show. It's lit very darkly and I have a hard time watching shows that are lit darkly. Yeah. And that alone is the reason I cannot get through it.
- Sabrina Okay, so while we're talking about sports, you have another anthology that you're editing with Jennifer... I'm probably gonna totally murder her last name.
- Dahlia Iacopelli. A lot of people do, yeah.
- Sabrina In 2024. Yes? And okay, obviously you can't tell us all the details about that, but can you tell us some of the sports we can look forward to?
- Dahlia Yes, I definitely can. So I did volleyball, but the levels of, like, sports, heaviness vary a lot, which I really like because I think that's people's experiences with sports.
- Sabrina No, that's great.
- Dahlia So mine is pretty light on volleyball, whereas you mentioned reading Carrie's, which, you know, is very heavy on hockey. Jen did her story on baseball, which anybody who has heard her talk about *A League of Their Own* can guess exactly what she wrote. There is football, there is rowing, there is golf, there is archery. There is boxing, there is wrestling. It's a really, really fun collection of sports, and I really like the mix of individual sports and team sports. There's wheelchair tennis. There's - I don't know why I'm drawing such a blank now, but I mean, that was a lot.
- Sabrina And remind me again, how many stories are in this one?
- Dahlia 16. This is actually the biggest anthology I've done.
- Sabrina Oh, okay, cool. Well, these don't have the originals in the back either, so you have a little bit more leeway on probably page count too, maybe.

- Dahlia Page count isn't the issue. The problem when you're looking at numbers of contributors for anthologies is that the advance you get, you're gonna split half. The traditional split for anthologies is half for the editor or editors, and then half gets divided up evenly among the contributors. So let's say you get \$20,000 for an anthology, \$10,000 is going to the editor and then \$10,000 is getting divided up. If you have ten contributors for an anthology for which you've got \$20,000, they each get \$1,000. That's a perfectly respectable anthology advance. If you have 20 contributors, they each get \$500. And not everyone's gonna write a short story for an anthology for \$500. So that's something that you really have to take into account as you are coming up with your line up. And that's also I think some people are like 'Just take as many people as want to write for this', and it's like 'You really can't because then you'll be paying no money.' I mean, page count isn't not a thing, but I haven't bumped up against it. I mean, page count will affect the price of a book.
- Sabrina Okay, let's back up because *At Midnight* comes out tomorrow and it's so good. Okay, so we kind of talked about this a little bit earlier, but do you want to give us another, or a little bit more of a peek at some of the other fairy tales that we'll encounter?
- Dahlia Yeah, *At Midnight* is a really fun mix. There are so many fairy tales, so I get a little hung up on the ones that weren't included, because they are really popular ones that are not included. And I kind of wish I could do like a second volume, but I think it is just such a cool collection. So it opens with 'The Nutcracker' done by Anna-Marie McLemore, and then like 'Fitcher's Bird', for example, is a lesser known one done by Gita Trelease. That story is awesome. I mean that is magical. I did 'Rumpelstiltskin'. There is 'Snow White' and 'Sleeping Beauty' and 'Cinderella'. Because I really feel like if you're saying you're doing a fairy tale anthology, those really have to be in there. And there is 'Little Red Riding Hood' where the hood is a hijab. I love that detail. I thought that was awesome. As soon as I saw that, I was like, 'Oh, brilliant!' I thought that was really cool.
- Sabrina No, that's super perfect.
- Dahlia Yeah. 'The Robber Bridegroom' is the one it ends on, just because it had the most perfect ending line for the whole collection. 'Little Matchstick Girl'.
- Sabrina I loved that one. That was really cool. Taking the historical from the fire at the opera house and then tying it into the fairy tale, altogether. I really loved that. That was really cool.
- Dahlia So a really fun fact that makes me much less impressive. I did not know that that was based on a real historical event. And I looked it up while I was editing Stacey's story, and I was like, 'Oh, my God.'
- Sabrina I didn't either. I had to have the note. For the record, I had to have the note in the book that you included.

Dahlia So I asked her to add it, because I thought it was such an interesting fact. And I, living in New York, had no idea. So I thought that was such an interesting note that I asked her to add it, because I wanted people to know that. That was very cool. I am obsessed with Stacey Lee's historical fiction. There's no one doing it like her. I just think she's phenomenal at that. And I'm so happy she did a historical story.

Sabrina I liked her interpretation of that. That was so much less depressing than the original.

Dahlia It was very cool. And that was one of my favorite fairy tales growing up, so it was really nice to have a version of that that I really love. There's 'The Little Mermaid'. I can only think of the title now. It's like 'The Nightingale', but I feel like I am messing up that title and it's actually longer. What's the original?

Sabrina Oh, my gosh. Hang on.

Dahlia Now I have to look it up. Oh, it is 'The Nightingale'.

Sabrina Okay. It is just 'The Nightingale'?

Dahlia Yeah.

Sabrina It does seem like it should have a longer title, though.

Dahlia Yeah, because she has a longer title for the actual story, which was my title. Yeah. 'The Nightingale'. Is that all of them? And then Melissa Albert has an original story in the collection, which was very cool.

Sabrina Which is super cool!

Dahlia Yeah, it's a great story, and I love how it illustrates that these are not things that have to stay relegated to the past. Like, you can still make next generation fairy tales. And she is, I mean, absolutely one of the masters of doing that. If you've read *The Hazel Wood* or *Tales From the Hinterland*, I mean, feel very lucky to have had her for that.

Sabrina Good person to pick for that. Yeah.

Dahlia So she's one of the authors who works with Sarah Barley, who's the editor of the anthology. Yeah. So we definitely discussed that and the idea of her doing - I didn't make her do an original one, but we did suggest we thought it would be cool. Yeah. And it's funny because she's also the editor for Stephanie Garber, who does these tremendously successful fairy tale books right now. But we were like, 'She's literally in the middle of doing that. She's not gonna also do a short story.' So I would love to work with Stephanie for something else, but for this, we were like, 'That's a little silly.' Also probably does not have time. But yeah. So now Sarah is, like, fully entrenched in fairy tales.

Sabrina Oh my gosh. Okay. You also have two standalone YAs that are just you, not anthologies coming out, and they will look so good. Okay, *Going Bicoastal* is first. It's, I think, June 13, 2023 so far currently. Okay, tell us about it. What can we look forward to? Like, all the things?

Dahlia *Going Bicoastal* was really fun to write because it's, like, pulled from a million things in my life, and it's also just the most low stakes, just fun book. So it's a Sliding Doors YA, which for anybody not familiar, that just means, like, alternate timelines. So it's about a bi Jewish girl named Natalia who lives in New York City, and her parents have given her 24 hours to decide whether she's staying in Manhattan with her dad, and spending her summer there, or doing something radically different and spending the summer in LA with her mom, as a marketing intern. And she and her mom are basically estranged, so that would be a huge leap. But she is very stuck right now. She's very much at a crossroads where she's about to be a senior. She kind of doesn't know what she wants to do with her life. She doesn't know where she wants to go to school. Her romantic prospects are so far just in her head. She has a big crush on this girl, the redhead who she keeps bumping into around town but has never had the courage to talk to. So, she just has to decide which of those things she's gonna do, and she can't decide, so we get to see both of them play out. So it alternates between what if she had stayed in New York with her dad, and what if she had gone to LA with her mom? And in both storylines, there's a romance that I really deeply love, and there are friend groups that I really deeply love. And the New York timeline is very music centric because the love interest, Ellie, is an aspiring rock journalist, as I was when I was in high school. Although Ellie, unlike me, actually does something with it. And she, like, writes articles, but also her parents were in the industry, and she's from a very big rock royalty family, rock media family. So she's constantly going to concerts and writing about them, and she really pulls Natalia into that world. And then, on the other coast, the love interest is Adam, who is her fellow marketing intern, and who in the beginning, sucks as a human. But they sort of quickly grow to like each other. Like, that would have been a fun thing to drag out. A little more like enemies to lovers ish. But you don't have that much time because each love story only gets half a book. So I had to pull him out of that pretty quickly. And that timeline is really food centric, because he helps his brother on a taco truck, and all the friends there are different taco - are different food truck operators. And then the first friend she makes there is a barista. So it's, like, very foodie. So it alternates. I mean, they're both a little foodie. So the Jewish element is much bigger in *Going Bicoastal* than it was in *Cool For the Summer* because Natalia is a little more observant. She keeps a level of kosher. She is very into Shabbat dinner, and so there are Shabbat dinners in both timelines. So that was really fun and nice for me to be able to write and get in there, because the response to *Cool For the Summer* was so nice, and I was like, I feel like I barely even put it on the page, and people responded to it so well.

Sabrina It wasn't a ton, but it was so well done when it was in there. I did. I loved the Jewish rep in there.

Dahlia Thank you. So I just really wanted to, like, really push it out onto the page and make people feel as seen as possible, and I really hope that it does. So that was really fun. And then, as I have mentioned a bunch of times and I hope people like it, Laura and Jasmine appear repeatedly in *Going Bicoastal*.

Sabrina No. Yay!. That's so exciting!

Dahlia They do in the New York timeline. So I won't say anything about how or whatever, but if you've been wondering how things ended up with them, you'll find out.

Sabrina Oh, yay. I love them so much. I actually, I don't know if I told you this, but to prep for our interview and have them fresh in my head, I just did an audiobook reread of *Cool for the Summer*, and then I didn't do a reread of *Home Field Advantage* because I read that, like, a month ago. But I just love the voices of it, and I don't know, they're just so great.

Dahlia Thank you. It was really, really fun to have them back. And actually, in *Going Bicoastal*, the big difference is that Jasmine is more of the protagonist, where she appears like Laura, you see a little more. She's a little more off scene, but this is - Jasmine and Natalia interact a bunch.

Sabrina Oh, cool. Okay, cool.

Dahlia Yeah. I mean, Laura is there. There's no scene she's not in. But that Jasmine is.

Sabrina Is that hard or fun? I bet it's a little bit of both. But you spent the whole book of *Cool For the Summer* with Laura, and now she's a side character, and you're not in her head anymore.

Dahlia But you know her. You get to know what she'd be like as a side character, too, and that's kind of fun. This is the most self indulgent book I have ever written and probably will ever write. There are callbacks to other characters from other books, which I haven't mentioned, but they're much smaller mentions, but I feel like they're fun surprises. But, yeah, I feel like I know her. I know what she'd be like from an outside perspective and where she'd be. No, I think getting to include your characters again, however you include them, is just the most fun. I would keep doing that forever if I could. It does not make any sense for the book that I have next, but if I did future books, I would absolutely include my old characters as much as I could now.

Sabrina Yes. I love that. Okay. You also have. *My Name is Everett* and that's 2024. Okay, go.

Dahlia [Big sigh.] So, first of all, there's no way it's keeping that title. I know, but I wrote this book. This is the book that I first seriously queried with. So this was, like, 2009, 2010.

Sabrina Okay. And then I guess it obviously didn't go anywhere at the time.

Dahlia And it shouldn't have.

Sabrina Did you dust it off?

Dahlia It was a mess.

Sabrina I guess you reworked it.

Dahlia So I haven't done it yet. That's what's next. That's what I'm working on now. But yes, so I will be reworking it. There's a very dark storyline in it that's coming out. Well, that's being reworked to be less dark, but the core of *My Name Is Everett* is, like, what it means to be good and bad and a nice guy and a bad girl and all of it being kind of crap. [Both Laugh] But from a comp perspective, we sold it as *Beach Read* meets *Foolish Hearts*, which is like, it's set up boarding school. So it's about a girl named Everett who - Evie - who just really struggles with being in her sister's shadow, and her sister kind of essentially ruining her life. And she's like, 'I got to go somewhere else and just be away from her for a while.' So she begs her parents to go to boarding school, and she does, and it's like a mess from the get go, and she just kind of snaps and is tired of being the good girl, and she decides she wants to be more like her sister and see what it's like to actually get what you want. And so she tries to be bad, and she meets this boy - who goes by Salem - which is sort of like this joke nickname because his sister's a witch and her name is Sabrina, which, like, once upon a time, was a very outdated joke. And then the show came back, and now I was like, 'Oh, if I ever publish this, I probably have to redo their names.' And now I'm like, 'No, I don't, because everything old is new again. By the way, anything I say is subject to change because this has been through no one.

Sabrina Gotcha.

Dahlia I'm telling you my plan. There will be some editing, and he is there for reasons you will find out, and he is trying to be good. So he helps her try to be bad, and she helps him try to be good. And they're - kind of each help each other pursue their own romances, only to discover the real romance all along is between them.

Sabrina Ooooh.

Dahlia Yeah. Which is a really big spoiler for the original version, but I guess it's not a spoiler for the 2024 version. In the original one, I don't think it's clear that they were gonna get together, but maybe that's part of the problem with it. It was very poorly paced. Yeah. Anyway, I love them. They are probably my favorite. Certainly in YA. I think they might be my favorite couple that I have written. I just find their dynamic really fun. Yeah, it's sort of if you've read my new adult books, like, the closest to Lizzie and Connor. Not really. I don't know. Yeah. I don't know who to really compare them to. Nobody. They're my first loves, so I can't believe I get to do this. Basically that I get to try to bring them back and I just hope that it works and that everybody loves how it comes out.

Sabrina That's been sitting for a long time, too. That's so awesome.

- Dahlia It's been sitting for a really long time. The writing is bad. The pacing is worse. So this is an adventure.
- Sabrina But I'm sure you've grown miles between 2000 - what did you say? Nine and what year is it? 2022?
- Dahlia Yeah, no. And I've already come up with new plot points that I am obsessed with. Time is hard. I would love to not have this be another book I squeeze into, like, the 09:00 p. m. to midnight window every night, but it's just what it's gonna be. Yeah, I know. I'm very envious of people's writer retreats, but that is just not in the cards for me.
- Sabrina Who was your favorite overall? Out of every character ever written, who was your favorite character to write?
- Dahlia In YA or overall overall?
- Sabrina You can do both if you would like to do both, or overall overall.
- Dahlia Lizzie in *Last Will and Testament* was probably my favorite to write. Overall overall. She's just like she's a mess. But like, my favorite kind of mess. Lizzie and Connor. As a pair, I loved writing them so much. They are definitely the closest to me and my husband also of any pair I've written. Which people who know me well have pointed out. I'm like, 'Shut up! It's not,' but it is. I love them. In YA I have a very soft spot for all my characters, really, but I made a much more conscious effort of not writing myself these last few books. So there are elements of me in Laura, in Jasmine, in Amber, in Jack, but they are very intentionally not me. And it's harder for me to feel as close to characters when I've put that distance in. I specifically wrote characters who are cool, who get attention, who are super athletic, who are hot. This was just not my high school experience. So as much as I love them, and I love writing them, there is that distance that they're at, intentionally, because I feel like you usually get the more wall flowerish, very internal YA main characters. And I very specifically didn't want that for these characters, which I think is also why Evie and Salem speak to me, because they come back to feeling more like me. Which isn't to say that I don't love writing characters who are not like me, but it's a different kind of comfort zone. But, like, don't get me wrong, I protect all of them with my life.
- Sabrina Oh yeah.
- Dahlia And I love them very much, and I feel like I could write seven more books about any of them. But it's a different experience writing characters you are very intentionally writing unlike you, and in situations in high school you would never, ever have found yourself in, at least for me. So it puts this distance in that doesn't make me love writing them quite as much as characters, where I'm just like, 'I'm just gonna put myself in here.'

- Sabrina Yeah, well, you have to really think when you're doing the ones that are less like you, too, because their responses don't necessarily always come naturally.
- Dahlia One big thing is I didn't really want to write characters these last few books who were, like, deeply insecure. I wanted to write more secure and confident characters. But that, to me, is just like, that's not me. So I think that's the other little break there. So Natalia does feel a little bit more like me, but that one just has so much going on with her all over the place. I mean, the whole book was super fun to write, but there's also just like, that's more her running around all over the place doing fun things than feeling like I got super close to her. I don't want to say these things and make it sound like I don't like, love or care about or feel these characters.
- Sabrina No, that was the nature of the question. We know you love all your characters immensely. I don't think you can spend as much time as you do on a book and writing if you don't have some love there.
- Dahlia Yeah. Maybe Reagan. I think maybe my favorite was Reagan from *Just Visiting*, now that I think about it, because truly Ally from *Behind the Scenes* is the one who's the most like me. And I would not say she was my favorite to write because it was too much. Other than that she lands a hot Hollywood star as her boyfriend. That was too much me. Reagan is not like me, but she is a really - I really love writing the balance of tough and vulnerable. And I think Lizzie is that, and Reagan is that, and Evie is that, and I'm just realizing this now as I say it. So I think that is my favorite thing to write in a character. Yeah, maybe Reagan from *Just Visiting*.
- Sabrina Okay, cool. Do you want to tell us where we can find you?
- Dahlia Sure. If you go to daliaadler.com, which is my website, there's a blogging page and that links to all different places that I blog. So you can find my old posts on Barnes and Noble Teen Blog, which is no longer operable. But currently actively I run a site called LGBTQ Reads, which is curated queer book recommendations for all categories and genres, and I blog most frequently for BuzzFeed Books, so you can find a link to my posts there as well. I blog about - now I blog about pretty much anything I'm reading there, which is fun. But I also do like seasonal queer YA posts there. Romance roundups. YA romance roundups. So that's fun. And then I could not figure out how to link it to an icon on that page. But I also blog for Open Road media sites, which are 'A Love So True' is the romance one. And then Early Bird Books has my YA posts, so I have a bunch there as well. I have one post @parents.com and one post @tour.com, but they're good posts, so check them out.
- Sabrina And then do you want to tell everyone where we can find you on social media?

Dahlia Yes. I am everywhere as @missdahlelama. And by everywhere, I really just mean Twitter and Instagram, but missdahlelama. I am on TikTok badly and embarrassingly @daliaadler, because that's the only place where I could get my own name. It was already taken everywhere else, but I was very excited it was available there. Don't follow me on TikTok, though, or follow me, but don't ever look at anything I do. Thank you. No, mostly Twitter and Instagram, especially Twitter is like, where I'm the most active. And if you're interested in LGBTQ Reads, that's just at LGBTQ Reads everywhere. And that's most active on Twitter, Instagram and Tumblr is where you can ask me for book recommendations anonymously if you need to. I think that's everywhere, I think.

Sabrina I will have links to socials and Dahlia's website as well on the Show Notes page for everybody. Okay. I'm like watching my clock tick down. Thank you.

Dahlia Thank you. This was great. And it's so nice that you really, like, read my stuff and listened to my interviews. I really appreciate that. It's nice not to answer the same things over and over.

Sabrina Seriously, I appreciate you so much for getting on with me and letting me chat.

Dahlia Thank you for having me. This was great.

Sabrina It was so fun.

Dahlia It was me talking a lot.

Sabrina I know, we really did.

Dahlia But I will say, by the way, we didn't even end up making time for book recommendations.

Sabrina I know. I didn't realize the time was so...

Dahlia And I even wrote on a Post It so I wouldn't forget.

Sabrina Oh, my God. Do you want to send me it? And I'll put some extra on the Show Notes.

Dahlia That's okay. My book recommendations are everywhere. If they're going to my blog post, they're gonna see my book recommendations on BuzzFeed anyway.

Sabrina I literally have a note in here. Give her 30 minutes for book reqs. Okay. It's eleven. Hang up on me right now.

Dahlia Okay. Yes, I do. I am gonna go. But thank you so much.

Sabrina Yes. Okay. Thank you.

Sabrina Okay friends! That's all for episode 8! I've got a content list and all the Dahlia links on my show notes page at www.sabrinalotfi.com. Don't forget to rate and review and tell all your writing buddies! Thanks so much for joining us!

Okay Ginny, say goodbye!

Ginny Barks.