

LitTea Episode 12: Rebecca Eskildsen

- Sabrina [Upbeat music begins] Hi friends! Welcome to Episode 12 of LitTea! I'm your host, Sabrina Lotfi, and today's special guest is Rebecca Eskildsen, a junior agent at Writers House. And I'm super excited to get started, so...[Upbeat music fades]
- Sabrina Hi.
- Rebecca Hi.
- Sabrina Okay, so one of the first things I like to ask everybody is, what book made you a reader?
- Rebecca Yes! So having listened to your other episodes, I knew this question was coming, and I have been wracking my brain. But the thing is, I have always been a reader. It is so hard. I even asked my mother, I was like, 'What do you think made me a reader?' And she was like, 'I don't know. You and I just used to - you were a toddler. And we'd sit and read books for hours. So I don't even remember.' I'm gonna say tentatively, that one of the first books I remember loving like, that I was reading by myself was the Junie B. Jones series.
- Sabrina Oh, okay, cute.
- Rebecca My whole family loved - my dad still quotes it.
- Sabrina Okay. I don't remember any of the quotes, but I do remember reading them. I don't even remember how many books there are. It's been a really long time, but I do remember loving those too. Yes.
- Rebecca Yeah, they were a good time, but yeah. So I've just literally always been a reader.
- Sabrina Nice. Okay, cool. What book made you want to become an agent? Do you know?
- Rebecca Yeah, I don't think there's any one book there either, but I really like being the man behind the curtain. I love advocating for my clients, and I like helping writers make their projects better.
- Sabrina Okay, we have to talk about your cat, who is on Rebecca's lap as we speak, everybody, if you're curious.
- Rebecca She's behaving right now, which we will see how that goes as we continue talking. [Laughs.] But Violet is - she's about five years old, I think, and she has no teeth. She has one tooth. They missed one when they took out all her teeth.
- Sabrina Oh, my gosh. Okay. Is it in the back or in the front?
- Rebecca It is right in the front. These teeny tiny little tubes.
- Sabrina Oh, my gosh.
- Rebecca Her teeth all had to come out, if this isn't too gross. She had something wrong, and her body was, like, rejecting her teeth, and it was bad, so she had to get them all taken out. And the gums were so swollen that I didn't even see that they missed the tooth for weeks after the surgery, and then they were like, 'Eh, it's fine.' [Laughs.]
- Sabrina Okay. It hung in there, as long as it's not having any problems now.
- Rebecca She seems okay. So she's loving not having painful teeth.
- Sabrina Yes. Oh, my gosh. I'm so glad she got them out and that they're not hurting anymore.
- Rebecca Yeah.

Sabrina Medical stuff with the pets is so scary.

Rebecca Seriously.

Sabrina It's the worst.

Rebecca Turned out fine, but it was alarming. Yeah.

Sabrina Okay, do you have any other hobbies or interests outside of writing and agenting?

Rebecca I wish I could say yes, but no, not really. [Laughs.]

Sabrina We're all home bodies. Everybody on my podcast is home bodies. Every once in a while someone will come here with a cool extra little thing. Usually pretty chill things.

Rebecca Yeah. I watch too much TV. I read books. That's my whole life.

Sabrina I love TV and books. I'm with you. I'm with you. Like, give me my dog, and my bed, and a show, or like an audiobook, and I'm there.

Rebecca Yes.

Sabrina Okay, cool. So, would you like to walk us through your path to becoming an agent?

Rebecca Yeah. I expected that I would want to go into editorial. So, I started out over in Seattle, which is where I'm from, and kind of worked my way through all the internships and the small presses that they had over there. And I was working at two small presses, and editorial very part time, because that's all anybody could afford to hire anybody for. And I was also working at Barnes and Noble, which actually I know this podcast is aimed at writers, so this may not be relevant to most people who listen to this. But if anybody is looking to break into a job in the publishing industry, I highly recommend working at a bookstore. I had five internships, and working for two years at a bookstore taught me more than all of them. It's so much easier to understand what is working in the industry on a really... You can really see what's moving on the shelves.

Sabrina That's cool.

Rebecca Yeah. And you understand what happens to a book if it doesn't sell, and you are the one doing it, getting rid of the book to send back and all of that.

Sabrina Ooh. What exactly does happen?

Rebecca Well, if it's not selling, you have to get it out of the store somehow, eventually. There's like a window of time. It's something like eight weeks, I think, or it was then. I don't know if it's different. And a lot of books you send back to the publisher. And then, some books - mass markets usually - are strip books, which means that it's not worth the money to them, to ship them back to the publisher. So you start stripping the covers off the books, and you collect the covers, and you send the covers in an envelope back to the publisher, but you throw out. [Laughs.]

Sabrina Oh no! Ya'll, this is gonna be a sad episode.

Rebecca I'm sorry. [Sabrina laughs.] Actually, it's so funny. Everybody who starts at the bookstore is horrified when they're first taught this. And then, after a while, it's still retail. So you're still, like, having a rough time because it's retail, and at a certain point, it's some release of some feelings, to do that.

Sabrina Oh, my gosh. Oh, my gosh. Okay.

Rebecca Nothing against the books, though. Nothing against the books.

Sabrina No, I know. That's so sad. All the poor books. Yeah. I didn't know I was gonna learn that today. Okay.

Rebecca I'm sorry. But it does teach you so much to work in bookstores. So then after that, and I moved to New York. I got hired at Jabberwocky, so I ended up not working in editorial, mostly because all the interviews I was getting were in agencies. And then Jabberwocky hired me to work in the Foreign Rights Department, which meant keeping up with all the books that the agency represented, and I'd send them out to our co-agents and to scouts, and then I would negotiate any offers that came in and review contracts at rights deals. They sent me to the London Book Fair, which was actually really funny because everybody was telling me how exhausting and hard this was gonna be. And by the time I got there, I was like, 'This is easier than two Christmases at Barnes and Noble. I get to sit down for this.' [Laughs.]

Sabrina Oh, nice. Okay.

Rebecca It was exhausting, but it was a week, and I got to sit.

Sabrina Okay. You made it. You clearly made it.

Rebecca Yeah. So after Jabberwocky, I moved to Writers House because I actually wanted to work more on the domestic side of agenting. I still very much love foreign rights, but my main focus, I wanted to be domestic agenting, and I wanted to represent my own clients long term. So I started working at Writers House.

Sabrina When did you move to Writers House?

Rebecca I moved over here in 2017.

Sabrina 2017. And you started working with - I'm not even gonna approach how to say it-

Rebecca Merrilee Heifetz. Merrilee Heifetz.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca Yes. And I still work with Merrilee. Agenting is extremely hard to break into, because of the commission only models, which makes it, like, really, really difficult to make a living in the beginning, which I'm sure you've heard from all the other agents you've talked to. So, at Writers House, I have a lot of stability by continuing to support Merrilee, and while I'm building my own list with the goal of eventually agenting as my only focus. So Merrilee has been incredibly supportive of my career, and I've loved working with her, and I love working with her clients. I really enjoy that. Continuing to work with her, means I still get to work with them, while I'm building my own clients' careers. Yes.

Sabrina Okay, cool. What kind of work do you do with her?

Rebecca Kind of everything. I just sort of support her in everything she needs done. And yeah, it also means, like, I get to learn the nitty gritty of anything that I may or may not have already known everything about. So, I work with a lot of contracts for her. I work really hands on editorially with her clients.

Sabrina Cool.

Rebecca Yeah. So I kind of keep everything moving.

Sabrina You're an extra set of eyes and hands. Yeah. That's awesome.

Rebecca Yeah, exactly. And every now and then, I come to a point in the contract where I did not know what it meant, and she gets to tell me. So... [Laughs.]

Sabrina Okay, what's the most recent one of those that you had that you were like, 'What is this?' Do you remember?

Rebecca I was talking to her about what best efforts means, and...

Sabrina Yes! What does that mean? I don't know.

Rebecca It's just a lot stronger language than I had quite realized. So, this is where I am still a learning agent. So, yes, I thought it was a bit more like 'We're gonna do our best here,' but as it turns out, it's like you literally have to exhaust everything possible, legally speaking, if you're promising best efforts.

Sabrina Oh, okay. It's like, okay, that's cool. That's interesting. That's a good one to know. Everybody, you want best efforts in your contracts if you can get it.

Rebecca Or you don't. Depends on what you're looking for. Depends on the thing that you're trying to do. Yeah.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca If you are the one promising that you'll make best efforts, you may not want that.

Sabrina Okay, that's fair. Okay, cool. That's really interesting. Okay, so you had some experience with foreign rights over at Jabberwocky. Do you want to talk to us a little bit more about foreign rights? Because we haven't gotten to do that yet on this thing.

Rebecca Sure.

Sabrina Okay. I don't know much about these, so I have a few questions, and then anything else you'd like to share. So, can you explain the difference to us between world rights and world English rights when you see them on the little book blurb deals, like in Publishers Weekly, and I think there's North American rights. Anyway, I don't know all the different rights. I'm probably missing some.

Rebecca Right! Yeah, so those are the domestic side of when you're selling the domestic rights in the US. Or the UK. But for our purposes, usually we're talking about the US. And so, if you are selling world rights, let's say to Penguin Random House, you are basically giving them the right to sell the book in every territory in the world, and all languages.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca So we don't want to do that, as agents.

Sabrina How does that affect - being real here - your money as an author?

Rebecca Yeah, I mean, you can actually do the math to figure out what it means, because usually if you give the publisher world rights, that means they have, for example, the right to sub-license a German edition to a German publisher. And if they do that, you are usually getting - off the top of my head, I'm blanking what the breakdown is. I think it's usually better than 50-50 for the author. It's more like 75% goes to the author. So 75-25, something like that. Don't quote me on that one, though. So if it's something like that, you're getting that amount when it comes through the publisher. Let's say 75% of the payment gets sent through to you from the publisher. But also first, if you have not earned out your advance, it has to go toward earning out your advance.

Sabrina Oh, okay.

Rebecca Yes. And then once you finally get the money, it still has to filter through your agency, who takes the 15% off of the lump sum that comes from the US publisher. And then, you're usually getting less than if your foreign rights department at an agency is able to sell it directly, in that, for one thing, it does not have to go toward earning back a separate publisher's advance. So you'd get it right away. But also, we have a really aggressive foreign rights department who tends to try to get higher advances. So you're already getting 100% of that. And then the foreign rights standard is usually that you take 20%, rather than 15% in commission, because you also work with a co-agent. So there's like 10% to them, 10% to us. But even so, taking out 20% rather than 15, you're still getting 80%, rather than whatever 75% -15% of probably a smaller advance to begin with.

Sabrina Okay. That makes sense. That was a lot of math for me. I'm not gonna lie.

Rebecca That was a lot. And if I were thinking ahead, I would have created, like, an actual 'If it's \$1,000, then it's...'

Sabrina [Laughs.] Oh, no, that's okay.

Rebecca And you can do that. [Laughs.]

Sabrina Oh my gosh, it was. It was a lot of math but no, that makes a lot of sense. [Rebecca laughs.] Okay, so it's better to not get world rights?

Rebecca Yeah, to not sell world rights. And you want to retain foreign rights, if possible. So that's what North American rights would be, is if you are granting - that's usually just the United States, and Canada, and the Philippines.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca But also there's world English where if you grant world English, that will be they have the right to US, Canada, Philippines, but also the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand. And they can sell English language editions anywhere they want.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca The goal is that, as a writer, as an agent, you want to retain as many rights as you can, and you will. Then you will be able to sell them directly on behalf of the client. And of course, publishers want all the rights, though.

Sabrina Of course they do.

Rebecca Yeah.

Sabrina That's probably fun in negotiations. [Rebecca laughs.] How flexible are publishers on that usually? Are they like...

Rebecca It varies. It really varies. Sometimes, you really have to have leverage - like another publisher interested - to get them to come down on which territory, to limit the territories. But other times they will just offer for North American, as you asked for, if they just listen to you. [Laughs.]

Sabrina Nice. Okay.

Rebecca But it varies.

Sabrina Okay, that's interesting. So, are some books more aggressively pushed for foreign rights than others?

Rebecca No, it's not. I think that sometimes they get - there is something that might get pushed more. Okay, that's not true though. It's not more. It's more just like maybe earlier. If something is a book that is, say, like a hot book, in that it is on a partial, with a big auction in the US. And clearly people are clamoring for it. So it might benefit everybody to just keep the momentum going, send it out immediately, or talk about it. Because usually you don't want to send a partial to foreign publishers. They don't carry it. They want the whole book. And they probably want it a little edited, as well, to know what they're gonna get into also, because translation costs are gonna come down to like, how many pages is it? How many words is it? Especially in a place like Germany where the words are really long and they will sometimes come to us and say, 'This book in English is long. Can we make it two books in Germany, in German, because our words are longer.'

Sabrina Oh, that's cool to know!

And that will come down to a case by case situation. Or they'll say, like, 'Can we cut out a couple of scenes? Because - don't know what that is - Anyway. So they will usually want to see a full book, a full manuscript, rather than seeing just the partial. But if it is a book that's sold in a major auction, then yes, we might push it earlier. But that said, we send out every single book that we retain rights to. So it's not like we're favoring some people over others. Absolutely not! We make sure that they get sent widely everywhere. And from my observations, I really think that we, as an agency, and probably just agents with foreign departments - foreign rights departments - are a little bit more aggressive about this than the publishers are. Which is also why you want to retain rights, so that you make sure that Penguin isn't just sending to Penguin...

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca ...and nobody else. So the UK is a little bit different. They want to see some, they want to see books earlier than all the other countries, because they need a year lead time in order to have simultaneous publication, which is what they really want. Because if they don't have simultaneous publication, it's hard to keep that momentum going for readers as well.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca It's just how they prefer to do it. So that's also why it's good to retain UK rights on the writer agent side, because we can kind of send it out as early as we feel it's ready to go out. Versus the publisher tends to wait for the contract to be all sewn up.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca Sometimes that pushes us too close to the pub date, or they decide to wait for a round of editing before they send it out, and it's like, 'We are really cutting it too close.' And now no UK publishers will buy it even though it's a good book, just because they don't have time.

Sabrina How do revisions work with that? Do you use the same revisions? Like if you sell rights separately to the UK and you're doing it earlier than all the revisions are done with your domestic, then are they slightly different?

Rebecca No, usually they're not different, but sometimes if you sell UK rights early enough, the UK editor might weigh in and say, like, 'Hey, I have these thoughts.'

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca I've seen a UK editor send notes to the US editor and say, like, 'Hey, do you want to incorporate these?'

Sabrina And then you all kind of weigh in?

Rebecca Yeah, I mean, as the agent, you're not as often involved in the editorial, like nitty gritty at that stage, but sometimes the two editors at different publishers will collaborate. It doesn't always happen.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca It's often just the US publisher, if that's where you sold it first, will do all the heavy lifting. And the UK editor who buys it is pretty much just gonna go through and make sure copy editing gets done for like, UK spelling and grammar.

Sabrina Okay, interesting. Okay. Do you want to jump into some Writers House questions?

Rebecca Sure, go for it.

Sabrina Okay. So what is your favorite thing about working at Writers House, and being an agent there?

Rebecca I think we're such a great agency [Laughs.] and I love my coworkers. I think they're all so great. And there's such a breadth of knowledge across the senior agents, the junior staff, and all our various departments, like our sub-rights department.

Sabrina There's just so many agents there. Like when you go to the website and look at the list, there's so many. Y'all might have the biggest agency.

Rebecca Yeah, we're pretty big. But that's also something that I love, is that I love that we don't feel corporate. It feels very much like I work for a small company, and yet I have all the benefits of working for a big company. Like, I have a full contracts department to work with, things like that.

Sabrina Yeah. That's awesome. And they're all at Writers House, so you're not sitting out. Okay.

Rebecca Right! We're not contracting out.

Sabrina Okay, that's cool. How collaborative are y'all? Are y'all constantly chatting? Do y'all send each other stuff? Do you ask each other for help on submissions or like, if you're having a hard time figuring out where to send something? I don't know.

Rebecca Yeah, we definitely ask and talk to each other a lot. So, I know colleagues will send me queries every now and then say, 'Hey, this wasn't right for me, but I think maybe for you.' And I'll do the same. And absolutely we will ask each other, 'Hey, do you know who would be right at this house for this?' Or, 'Hey, how's this editorial board working right now? Are these two imprints on the same editorial board? Can you remind me?' Because that is very opaque and hard to keep straight. And sometimes they change.

Sabrina There's so much movement, too. Do y'all share all your info on where all the different houses and stuff are, and who's where?

Rebecca We don't really have a centralized system like that. I mean, sort of, but we mostly just share case by case and when things come up. It's pretty informal. There's always somebody to ask.

Sabrina Okay, cool. Yeah, you have so many people to ask with them. [Rebecca laughs.] A myriad of, like, experiences and expertise in different categories and genres. Yeah. Okay, that's fair. I saw this on your website. What is Forensic Royalty and Financial Analysis? [Both laugh.]

Rebecca Okay, so that is something that - obviously you don't really want to need that- but it's nice to have it when you do need it. It's like, if you think that... I mean, there are a lot of reasons why you might need it. But for example, if you think a publisher is not sending you all the royalties they owe you, or something. Or, let's say on a more positive note, it's like, we want to make a new deal for an existing author that has already been with this publisher. And we're trying to figure out, like, 'If they offer this, is that enough?' Based on what we have seen in royalties and sales for our past books with that author, and that publisher. There are various things that they can do, where it's just our accounting department and our CFO. She's really great. She will look through statements, and financial information, and come back to us and say, 'All right, here's the numbers and here's what I've learned. So I think they have offered you something too low or they do not deserve to get world rights if they have not sold any of them.' Which a lot of this is stuff maybe we can see on our own. But sometimes it's good to have somebody who has a more finance background come in and be able to figure out what is going on or what should go on.

Sabrina Look at the numbers. The numbers are important. Numbers people are important for that. Yeah.

Rebecca Yes, absolutely.

Sabrina Okay. That's really cool. I saw forensic down there and I was like, 'Why are we talking about forensics at a literary agency?' I got to figure this out. It's amazing.

Rebecca [Laughs.] Forensic accounting is like a whole other thing. So it's like auditing and things.

Sabrina Yeah. I don't think I've ever seen it worded quite that way before. [Rebecca laughs.] I love it. Okay, so you have - what's a Serial Right?

Rebecca Serial Rights are like, so first serial rights, usually we talk about first serial or second serial, and that'll be like first publication versus second publication, I guess.

Sabrina Is that like printing? Kind of?

Rebecca It can be. I often don't see this actually become relevant for novels, but it's more common, I see, with like, if we license an introduction to somebody, or a short story, and then it'll come down to, well, 'Do they have the right?' If we grant them, for Serial Rights, does that mean that they can, ahead of publishing this story in this anthology, they could publish it on a website, or like license it to a newspaper outlet, or something, magazine, 'The New Yorker' or whatever and say 'This is where it's gonna run first.' And then those are usually pretty favorable terms to the author. It's usually like you get - I think it's like 90% goes to the author. And then, second serial would be like if they did that after the anthology came out, for example.

Sabrina Okay, so if they wanted to publish it on a website or give it to a news thing after it was issued?

Rebecca Yeah.

Sabrina Okay, that's interesting. I'm learning so much of this.

Rebecca Good.

Sabrina How do audio rights typically work through the agency? Is that something y'all try to hold onto, or is that something you try to just get out there to get it done?

Rebecca Oh man, we would hold on to them every time if we could. They really do not let us do that.

Sabrina Do they try to snap 'em up then? [Laughs.]

Rebecca Oh yeah! Oh yeah! They do.

Sabrina They've gotten really big recently, audiobooks. They've become a lot more common, I think.

Rebecca They have. And yeah, the Big Five pretty much will not buy a book without audio rights these days.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca But our sub-rights department has a dedicated person who works on audio as well, in addition to the 18 other things she does because she's a superhero. So, she does a really good job at placing the audio rights of books that are more on backlist, or are sold to smaller publishers that didn't take audio. Or, we also are big on reversion clauses. Writers House, we love our reversion clauses!

Sabrina What's a reversion clause?

Rebecca So, we want to get the rights back if they aren't being utilized well, or at all usually.

Sabrina Oh, okay.

Rebecca Yeah. So if for audio, for example, our reversion language might be something like if they - Obviously we would prefer it to be something like 'If you don't put out, or you don't commit to having a simultaneous audio publication more than two months in advance of publication, then we get the rights back.' That would be our preference. Usually they're gonna be like, I don't know, 'You can have them back if we didn't publish it two years after publication.'

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca So, there's like a range of what you can get.

Sabrina Okay. There's a lot of haggling there probably? Okay.

Rebecca Yeah. And obviously we want it back as soon as possible if they aren't going to exercise those rights.

Sabrina But it's nice to be able to get them back at all, so...

Rebecca Exactly. And like I said, we do a lot of backlist audio sales as well for books that are older, and maybe didn't have audio with the publisher, or for some reason it was a kind of book that the publisher just didn't publish an audio. And we do have that reversion language in there, and we can say, 'Hey, we're triggering that. Please give us the rights back because you didn't do anything.'

Sabrina That's cool. I like that. Reversion clause?

Rebecca Yeah.

Sabrina Reversion clause and best efforts. Okay.

Rebecca We love our reversion clauses in everything! We'll do it if we sell world English.

Sabrina So then, if it doesn't go out to those US speaking others, then you can do it. Okay.

Rebecca Exactly. You usually don't get good reversion language for that. It's gonna be like a year or two later, which may not give you any leverage with the UK publisher, but you might as well get it back.

Sabrina Yeah. It's still better than never.

Rebecca Exactly. Out of print language is really good, too. If the book goes out of print and they don't put it back into print, or they only sold 25 copies in the past year, [Laughs.] then you want the books back so you can sell them to someone else.

Sabrina That's super interesting to know. Okay.

Rebecca Yeah.

Sabrina Is it as soon as something goes out of print that you get those rights back and you can resell? Or, is there like a...

Rebecca It depends on what the language is. Yeah. This is something I do with a lot of slightly older titles that some clients want to be able to self-publish them. If they're like 'I feel like I could push marketing a bit better on this old title that's selling only a few copies. I'm getting \$5 every year from the publisher on it.' Then we'll look at the reversion language and if it's something weird, like 'If it sells less than 250 copies in a twelve month period,' that one is super annoying because then you have to go through every single edition, and every single statement for that, for any twelve month period.

Sabrina Every literal sale. [Laughs.]

Rebecca Yeah. And I'll be plugging that into an Excel sheet, going at the end 'Oh my God, they sold 265 copies in twelve months.' Like, I'm sorry we don't have a leg to stand on, but we should. But we don't.

Sabrina Oh, that's ridiculous.

Rebecca [Laughs.] Yeah.

Sabrina Oh, that's a good one. I mean, you know.

Rebecca Yeah. It looks so small. It's like six copies sold this month in print, and eleven in ebook. And you think it's gonna work out for you, but then they all add up. [Laughs.]

Sabrina And then you do the actual math. It does sound like it would be less than that. It does. [Laughs.] Tricky word smiths. I don't know who writes contracts, but they are - they're all, I don't know, evil geniuses. [Both laugh.]

Rebecca Well, that's why we have a contracts department. So we have some of those evil geniuses on our side.

Sabrina Yes. The evil geniuses can just battle it out against each other.

Rebecca Yes, exactly.

Sabrina Battle of the evil geniuses contract edition. Okay. You want to get into some agenting questions?

Rebecca Sure.

Sabrina So you have everybody. Rebecca has an incredible website with so much information. I'm gonna have links up to everything as well on the Show Notes page. But go check it out. Mention agenting style, very hands on editorial, and you'll learn so much. There's so much. There's a great wish list. There's even, like, beautiful aesthetics with it. It's really well set up, organized by category. It's great. So we're not gonna go into a ton of that because I just did it all right now. [Both laugh.]

Rebecca Well, I'm glad you like it. Thank you.

Sabrina I love it. I love it. It's super helpful in terms of when you're doing research. Some are just like, 'I take young adult' and I'm like, what does that mean?

Rebecca Yeah, I know. [Laughs.]

Sabrina Do you have another page with it? No. You don't? Okay. Are you sure? Do you put anything on Twitter? No. Okay. You take Young Adult. Well, here's my Young Adult book.

Rebecca Yeah. It has made my queries a lot more focused to my tastes, and sometimes that's difficult because then it's harder to pass on things because everything's too exactly what I want. But it's also great.

Sabrina Do you tweak your wish list sometimes, too? Do you add to it when you're thinking of something new or like...

Rebecca Yeah, I do.

Sabrina If you've gotten too much of something, 'Maybe I'm gonna take this off of my wish list for a little bit.'

Rebecca Yeah, I've done that when I said something I was looking for, and then I was getting people coming to me saying, 'I have this thing,' and I was finding that I actually did not want that after all, so I took it off, things like that.

Sabrina Sometimes you don't really know what exactly you want until you see what you don't want.

Rebecca Exactly. Exactly.

Sabrina So, you are very editorial, you say. Typically, like, how long are your edit letters? Do you know?

Rebecca Oh, God, they're so long. I mean, my longest has probably been more like ten pages. I try to keep them under that. I am an overwriter myself, so I will often go back through and make sure that I am cutting out unnecessary details. And I really feel for my clients who are the same, [Both laugh.] because then I am telling them, 'Maybe don't be so repetitive' while I'm doing exactly that. So I try to make them shorter than that. They're probably usually around, like, six or seven pages, though I have very long ones.

Sabrina Hey, that's a lot of info. It's a lot of help for a book. Sometimes that's exactly what we need. So I love it.

Rebecca Yeah, I try to give some details about, like 'You might try fixing it this way,' which I think isn't always a perfect system because sometimes I'm suggesting something that might not actually work. And they have to then figure out if it works and if it doesn't, or if they don't like it, it's then back on the writer to make that decision and figure out what will work instead. But I'm happy for them to always come back to me and say, 'I don't like the thing that you suggested. How about this instead?'

Sabrina I think that's helpful, though. I think it's really helpful to get ideas bouncing and stuff. Like, it's really helpful to see what's not working, but even suggestions that you don't necessarily like, as far as how to fix them, they could really help you better pinpoint what isn't working, I think. And like, 'Well, I don't necessarily want to go that route with it, but what about this? Or what about this?' I think those are really helpful.

Rebecca Yeah, exactly.

Sabrina I love that. Okay.

Rebecca Yeah.

Sabrina So as a very editorial agent - this is probably a hard one - but how there does a book need to be for you? How do you determine between a yes, a no, or a revise and resubmit?

Rebecca I mean, this so depends, and everything is subjective. I know everybody's heard that a million times. I, at least for one, spend a lot of time thinking carefully about whether I have useful advice enough to ask for an R&R and if I want to see the book again, I try to be very cautious about which ones I do. But I do really love it when I can offer R&R feedback and somebody's open to it and when I can see how much the book improves. And that's when I know I want to work with somebody, if not only I love their book and I read it twice and I still love their book, but I also...

Sabrina It's a big ask sometimes!

Rebecca ... knowing that I'm still gonna read it, like, six more times. And I can see that they put in the effort, and the work, and that they understand what has to happen, because publishing just has so much revision as part of the process. Even if you're an amazing writer, you still have to revise and some people don't want to do it. Some people have a hard time with it. And it's good to know when somebody not only is open to doing the work, but they also understand how to do it, if that makes sense. So, I love it if I don't offer rep until the R&R comes through. That - that's honestly kind of my ideal situation. But if there's like an offer in hand from somebody else, that is something I will have to factor in.

Sabrina Okay, yeah, no that makes sense. I've never gotten an R&R before, and yeah, I don't know, it'd be interesting to see how you decide stuff on it.

Rebecca Some people just, oh, my God. Some people just run with it. And I think it's also important to take the time you need to do that feedback and you can tell the agent upfront. Like, 'I think it's gonna take me three months.' or whatever. Take as long as you need. I at least think that, please take all the time you need.

Sabrina Yeah. Especially early, before you're on any deadlines. Like, this is your chance to just chill with your book and your characters and figure them out and like, yes, we're all in a hurry, but are you actually in a hurry in this industry because it's so slow? It's okay.

Rebecca Exactly.

Sabrina I also get the urgency too. Okay, so how quickly can your clients expect to hear from you?

Rebecca I usually respond to my clients the same day on email, even if it's just to say, like, 'Hey, I got this. I know this is gonna take a little more research. I'll get back to you on the details, but I got this.' Most of my clients don't love calls, so I don't have a lot of calls with them. But if we do need to schedule a call or a Zoom or something, it's usually gonna be within a week of deciding we need one.

Sabrina And then, about how long does it take you on feedback?

Rebecca If I'm reading a manuscript that they've sent me, it's usually gonna take me, like, probably one to two months based on how long the manuscript is. I have a couple of partials in my inbox right now that I mean, I hopefully will not be more than like a week and a half on those. But if it's a full manuscript, it's probably got to go in my queue of all the things I have to read, which does add some time and then just basic what time I have in my life.

Sabrina Well, and then I like to mull some things over. I like to think about what's the best feedback, and sometimes there's some tricky spots.

Rebecca Exactly. I'm usually taking notes as I go, and every time I have a brainwave of something like, 'Oh, this will make it better,' I'll write that down in my notes, and then I have like half the battle is done by the time I sit down to organize my thoughts and then write an edit letter. My notes are usually so much more big picture, though to be honest, it's usually less like, 'You use this word too many times' and it's more like, 'Hey, this character doesn't really make sense. What if you made them the villain's daughter?' [Laughs.]

Sabrina Okay, cool. So you do real big picture notes. Okay, cool. So you said you have some partials. Are those for clients? You read partials for clients?

Rebecca I do, yeah. I mean, it's largely up to them when and how much they want to share with me, but I love being involved at all the steps, so I'm usually talking to them about outlines and if they're outliners and they'll share, like a chapter with me or a short partial to see, like, 'Am I going in the right direction? What do you think?'

Sabrina Cool. Do you want to jump into some querying questions?

Rebecca Sure.

Sabrina Do you have any stats over there you'd like to share? Do you know how many, generally speaking, queries you get a month?

Rebecca Yeah, I think I get about 200 to 300 in a month, maybe more sometimes, but it's usually about that many. You're only allowed to query one person at Writers House at a time, which I think helps, because then I'm not getting every single children's query. I'm getting, [Laughs.] like I'm sharing that across a few people.

Sabrina Okay, so of those, about how many do you request, do you think?

Rebecca I don't know what my percent of requests is.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca I'm perpetually behind on reading requested materials because that always requires me to sit down and focus on it, rather than quickly look through a handful of queries. So I try not to request too many, because I don't want people waiting on me for months, which sometimes they're doing anyway. But obviously that's when I'll close the queries if I feel like I have too much of a backlog.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca And of course, I can't not request something just because I already have a backlog. If it's good. [Laughs.]

Sabrina Yeah. And do you know how many clients you have right now? I was gonna ask about how many you offer on, but...

Rebecca The client list is growing, so it's pretty small right now.

Sabrina Okay, well, yeah. You only recently started agenting on your own.

Rebecca Yeah, a couple of years ago. And I've been very slow and intentional in who I've taken on as a client, which, working with Merrilee, of course, has helped me have the space to be very intentional about this, so that I am taking on people I really, really care and feel strongly, and I believe in their ability to sell books and write good things. I only offer rep, like, maybe three to four times a year.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca I'm very slow about it and being very conscientious about what I want.

Sabrina I feel like you have to be. There's so many books out there.

Rebecca There are, yes.

Sabrina And so many different people, and it sounds like you're trying to cultivate real relationships.

Rebecca Yeah.

Sabrina Okay. So in terms of, for you personally, I know everybody has different stuff out there, so I like to ask these for my agents so anybody who's listening can kind of tailor it if they want to. And probably like - everybody - there's no pressure on these, y'all. It's okay. Just do your best. What do you like to see in terms of personalizations, and also in terms of a bio, if you don't have a lot of publishing credits?

Rebecca Okay, so for personalization, it's nice to know why you might think that I would be a good fit for a project, but I don't need a ton of that. Some people quote heavily from my website, and sometimes that's really nice and maybe a lot of them really mean it. They're like, 'I really love this, this, this, and this, and this other thing that you said on your website. So I think we would be perfect.' And I'm like, you know, honestly, sometimes those are hard because I read them and I go, 'Oh, but your book isn't right for me, but I really wish it was. I really wish that you were right too.'

Sabrina 'I'm sending you a mental hug right now.' [Laughs.]

Rebecca Yeah, exactly. Those are hard sometimes, but I appreciate it if you mean it. But if you don't mean it, if you're just saying it because you think that's what I want to hear, you don't have to do that. As for Bios. Credentials is actually something I think is often misunderstood. Obviously, if you have publishing credits, you should absolutely tell agents that. But beyond that, we really just want to know what makes you the right person to tell this story. And it's nice to know a little bit about you, like, who you are, so we can Google you and figure out that you're a real person.

Sabrina Right.

Rebecca But, yeah, I think that people - I've seen people agonize over, 'Well, I don't have anything published. How can I prove that I'm publishable?' And that's not really important. We are totally fine with debuts. We're totally fine with somebody who doesn't have a history. And that, just honestly, is a nice blank slate for us to work with sometimes.

Sabrina Yes, exactly. You get to build a career together.

Rebecca Exactly. So that's not hugely important. I think it's much more important to tell me why this book could only be told by you.

Sabrina Okay. Do you always read all the way through a sample in a query?

Rebecca Honestly, no. The query letter in the first few paragraphs almost always tell me if this is going to be a book that I'm interested in. And if I am, then I read all the pages to see if I want to request more. But I also tend to stop after about, like, one page if the voice isn't working for me.

Sabrina Okay, so is it typically just a voice thing that'll make you stop outside of things that are like, this is not a genre I want? This is just clearly not a book that's right from my list, in terms of fit.

Rebecca Voice really is huge for me. If I'm on the fence about a premise, and I look at the pages, I quickly know if the voice is right for me based on the first sentence or, like, the first page. First sentences. Honestly, I'm really into first sentences.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca For me, I know this isn't a recommendation that is like, 'You should all definitely follow this,' but for my personal preference, I recommend starting a book with an opinion, or something with personality, or something that immediately makes us go, 'I wonder why they said that.'

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca One of the ones I always think of is, like, the first sentence of *Ella Enchanted* is something like, 'That fool of a fairy Lucinda didn't mean to lay a curse on me.' And it's like, there's so much going on there, [Laughs.] you immediately want to know what she's talking about.

Sabrina I haven't read that one in, like, forever. Ah, *Ella*.

Rebecca I also tend to memorize first lines that I like. [Laughs.]

Sabrina Okay, that's cool.

Rebecca Yeah. So for me, personally, I don't really like, seeing straightforward description or like, too many adjectives in the opening line.

Sabrina Okay. So I'm assuming if you don't read all the way through samples that you probably don't read all the way through a full request.

Rebecca Obviously, if I'm gonna offer, or ask for an RnR, I definitely read the whole thing. But I mean, sometimes if I am just having a great time reading something that I know isn't quite gonna be right for me as an agent, but I'm still enjoying it, I might read the whole thing.

Sabrina Oh, that's cute.

Rebecca Yeah. But actually, one of the exact reasons that I tend to stop the first page gets the most eyes, it gets the most polished.

Sabrina It's true. It does. Yes, it does. And the first chapters... [Laughs.]

Rebecca And the first, like, 50 pages, and then you get past that. And sometimes people have not spent the time they should have with the rest of the book. And I don't know, I would just really recommend spending the same amount of time and care with the whole book because we need to see if you can stick the landing. Sometimes you can edit that. You can see that there's revision potential here. And that may not be enough for me to say no, but I can often tell. If books start stumbling a lot, or they're just not as polished all the way through, it can be discouraging. We feel like, 'Oh, I have such high hopes, but I don't know if I can...'

Sabrina They didn't follow through.

Rebecca Yeah. I don't know if I can risk my time by taking on something that clearly is not ready, if that makes sense.

Sabrina No, that makes a lot of sense. The other thing about that is, like, I even do this when I send it to readers. Like, if I know that something's not quite there yet, I don't like to send it to them ahead of time and be like, 'Oh, I'm gonna fix this later.' I want to fix it before I send it to them, so that they don't have to focus on those things. They can focus on the other things that I didn't know were issues, so that I could see what else is wrong.

Rebecca Right. Yeah. If you know how to fix it, go ahead. [Both laugh.]

Sabrina Yeah, exactly. Y'all know, when you're reading, what reads naturally and what doesn't. I know you've read your books a million times, and if those first couple of chapters are written so smooth and then the others aren't, like, just go do a little polishing, and have somebody other than you do a full read of the entire book that gives feedback on bigger picture or like, what was confusing. Get extra eyes on everything.

Rebecca Yeah. And if you're struggling with the voice, or you don't understand why people aren't connecting with your voice, read it out loud or have somebody else read it out loud. Because if somebody else reads it, you know how it's supposed to sound. You know how your own book is supposed to sound in your head, but if somebody else starts reading it, and they're not getting the cues you thought were there, that will tell you something.

Sabrina It is. It's interesting to see how people put words together in their heads versus out loud. Honestly, I love reading in my head. I hate reading out loud. I'm the worst talker ever. [Laughs.]

Rebecca Oh, my God, I'm such an out loud reader. I'm always just talking to myself. Like I'm walking around my apartment talking to my cat, or that's what I say I'm doing. 'I'm talking to my cat.' I'm talking to myself.

Sabrina I love it. I do talk to my pets a lot. But yeah, when I'm reading, I don't know, I get so - that was my least favorite thing in school. It was like, well, you had to read the different parts around the classroom or the teacher would be like, 'Read this.' And I would just be like, 'I'm just gonna go die now.' Like, 'Don't make me do it.' [Laughs.]

Rebecca I don't know. Whenever I'm really enjoying something, I find myself just naturally slipping into reading it out loud to myself.

Sabrina Okay, that's cute. I've never tried it before, but there's a way through - maybe Word. Isn't there a thing where you can get it to read it back to you, if you're having a hard time reading it yourself?

Rebecca So people say that.

Sabrina I know. I don't know how to do it. [Laughs.]

Rebecca I'm too scared to try it because I think it would mess up the voice that's so important to me.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca Like, if it sounds like a robot, I need it to sound like it's supposed to sound. If that makes sense. It has to sound like a person.

Sabrina This is why I love audiobooks. It's a person and they do like all the emotions. They do the right pauses and sometimes if you get a really good one, they'll like giggle in the right spots or like the breaths and stuff. It's great. I love audiobooks. [Laughs.]

Rebecca Those are good. Wish I could have that for unpublished manuscripts. I would get back to people so much faster. [Laughs.]

Sabrina I know, I wish I could have it too. Sometimes I'm like, 'I just want to listen to it.'

Rebecca Same.

Sabrina Okay, what is your best advice for querying writers?

Rebecca As far as, like what to make sure you're putting in the query? Please sign your name.

Sabrina Oh! [Laughs.]

Rebecca I know that sounds really obvious, but the number of times I scour through an email and it's not even in the email address or something, and I'm just, like, I want to personalize all my responses and say 'Dear so and so.' But if I can't find your name

Sabrina Oh my Gosh.

Rebecca If it's not there, I don't know you. I don't know what your name is. I'm doing my best here. [Laughs.]

Sabrina That's so funny. I've heard of agents say it won't be personalized to them. Like Dear Agent.

Rebecca Yeah, people do get my name wrong a lot, which is honestly really funny. I mostly just laugh at it. But I will say that it does make me wonder - if you don't even know what my name is, why do you think you want me to be your agent? But then okay, so beyond that advice for queries, also, I would say make it obvious what your book is called. Industry Standard is like all caps your title. And I know that's not intuitive and that's fine, but it's just sometimes I'm also looking really hard to find what the title is, and then just don't be condescending toward your own genre. If you are writing for YA, don't tell me about how all YA books usually suck, but mine's good. Why are you writing YA? You think they all suck, you know?

Sabrina Yes. Fully agree. Okay, so I'm not gonna ask you every little detail and nuance of your wish list. Do you want to give everybody, just who's listening, like, a brief, like, 'I take these categories.'

Rebecca Sure. So I am looking for middle grade YA and a small section of adults, like primarily up market coming of age for adults and then like rom-coms.

Sabrina And then in the YA and middle grade space, are there any genres that you aren't looking for, or that are never up your alley, or is it kind of any genre of those?

Rebecca It's tough because I don't really want to shut out anything great just because I don't think it would be for me. I'm not especially into hard science fiction, but like that said, I pulled Allyson Dahlin's *Cake Eater* out of Merrilee's query box and went, 'This is amazing. We should represent this.' And - and I loved it. And you know, that has robots and technology and...

Sabrina Hard Sci-Fi. Yeah. [Laughs.]

Rebecca Yeah. But I will say that, like, if you read that one, it feels more like social commentary to me than, like, science fiction.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca So it just happens to be with the cyberpunk bent. [Laughs.] For middle grade, I am primarily interested in contemporary middle grade just because I feel like that is where kids can immediately see themselves. It's, you know, you have to remember that your audience of kids is they were born in the past decade or two. So I find a lot of adult writers, which is most writers who are writing for kids, they want to write about the decades that they were children. And I understand that impulse, I totally do, but I think that it's really hard to make that play well to a modern day children's audience. I'm not gonna say I will never take historical, but I'm not especially drawn to it. And I think the only time I would really go for a middle grade historical is if it is focused on a little known piece of history, particularly featuring marginalized people. I know when I was a kid, I read a lot of historical fiction, and it taught me a lot of things, in that I was never gonna read the nonfiction version, [Both laugh.] but I still learned plenty just about how life might have been like at X time. And I read a lot about World War II. We don't need more of that. At least I do not. And I read a lot about all the wives of King Henry the 8th. But again, those are like very mainstream periods of history that have been written about to death by now. So if somebody has a small something that'll maybe teach us something, but also it's just a really good story, I would consider it. But beyond that, I am generally more drawn to contemporary.

Sabrina And that's just in the middle grade space.

Rebecca It's in middle grade, but I will say the same thing is pretty true of YA. Like, again, I'm not gonna say no historical because one of my favorite books that I've read in the past several years has been *The Light Between Worlds*, which is set during World War II. But again... [Laughs.]

Sabrina There's an exception to everything.

Rebecca Yeah, there's an exception.

Sabrina There really is.

Rebecca There is, but beyond that, I don't read a lot of historical even in my personal life. And that one, I feel like, had very little to do with this historical is why I loved it. It's just that it was a take on what is it? The Problem of Susan is the idea, the concept of after *Narnia*. And that's what that book is. And it's like, how do we all move on after we've come back from that book's version of *Narnia*? So, that was fascinating to me and I do not think the World War II angle had very much to do with it for me personally.

Sabrina Okay, and are you open to fantasy and lighter Sci-Fi in the YA space?

Rebecca Yeah, so I'm definitely open to fantasy, but again, more contemporary fantasy than high fantasy.

Sabrina So like, more modern day in our real world, kind of...

Rebecca Yeah, that's more my preference. I do still read in my personal life some, like, YA high fantasy. I tend to stay away from fantasy in adult, unless it's like light, magical realism. But I have a hard time working with high fantasy. It's just like, it's so much. Sometimes it's really cool and really fun, but sometimes it's just you already have to make the characters good and the plot good. And now you also have to focus on making the world fleshed out and make sense.

Sabrina It's hard, it's so hard.

Rebecca And that just seems like too many things to me. Yeah. So on a personal level, I tend to be like, I don't know if I want to be the one to go through many, many drafts of 100,000 words of high fantasy.

Sabrina Yeah. World building is no joke.

Rebecca But again, exceptions, I'm sure there are exceptions where I would adore a high fantasy of some sort, but science fiction, again, like *Cake Eater* was an exception. I really like speculative.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca So that kind of really light side of you could maybe put it under the science fiction umbrella, but it's more speculative fiction is what I prefer.

Sabrina Okay. And do your tastes tend to lean more literary or commercial? Both in terms of content and in terms of writing style?

Rebecca Definitely commercial.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca Yeah, definitely commercial on both of those.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca Yeah, I think I love pretty writing, but it's not gonna be the selling point for me.

Sabrina Okay. What are you especially hungry for right now? Like, what are you just super greedy for over there?

Rebecca Okay, so a couple of things for YA. I would really like something that sounds weird, but like a gross contemporary fantasy with like a light horror bent. I'm thinking like *House of Hollow* or *Wilder Girls*.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca Just kind of like you really get into it. Why is this weird? Why is this world and horrific and fantastical but weird? I'd love a YA contemporary along the lines of *Do Revenge*. Did you watch *Do Revenge*? The Netflix movie?

Sabrina I didn't. I'm super behind on everything right now. [Rebecca laughs.] I've tried to finish revisions right now and it's just kicking my butt. So I think I've watched like three shows the entire month.

Rebecca Well, this one is a movie, so it's a lot faster.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca But I loved it.

Sabrina *Do Revenge*?

Rebecca *Do Revenge* which they commented on immediately that they're like, 'This isn't even grammatically a thing.'

Sabrina It sounds fun. I want to go do some revenge now after just saying the title. So I don't know who I'm coming to revenge. [Both laugh.]

Rebecca Yeah, I mean, it's just like a very twisty kind of friendship revenge story. [Laughs.]

Sabrina Is it kind of thrillery?

Rebecca Like, lightly, yeah.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca There's some unreliable stuff going on.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca I'll leave it at that. So anybody who hasn't seen it is not spoiled, but I loved it. And then, for either YA or middle grade, I would love a good speculative contemporary book. And so what I mean by that is, like, I want it to be basically our world, but one thing is different, or like a couple of small things are different, and then how do the characters react to that? So I don't really mean Dystopian, like, I don't mean necessarily, like a big authoritarian situation, and like a chosen one. Not like that exactly. More like *Never Let Me Go*. Or *Station Eleven*. But for a younger audience

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca In a middle grade, for something really specific, I would love a reverse *Parent Trap*. [Laughs.] Divorced parents who might be reconciling, and the kids are like, 'We cannot let this happen.'

Sabrina Oh, cute.

Rebecca Anyway, that's basically what I would really love to see in my inbox these days. But that's just a little snapshot. My website has a lot more on it.

Sabrina Okay. You mentioned earlier that you love first lines, and you did mention the *Ella Enchanted* first line. Are there any other books that just off the top of your head you're like, 'These are some of my favorite first lines to go check out.'

Rebecca Oh, my God. I don't know if you're familiar with Amanda Panitch, who has started writing adult romcoms under the name of Amanda Elliot. She's one of Merrilee's clients. The first line of I'm just gonna read it because I don't remember what it is exactly, but...

Sabrina Yes, do it!

Rebecca *Sadie On a Plate*. The first line is, "My life has this irritating habit of throwing its biggest changes at me while I'm completely in the nude."

Sabrina Yes.

Rebecca And I think that's amazing. [Laughs.]

Sabrina That's a good one. That's a good one. I do. I have lots of questions, so I need to know more already.

Rebecca And you know something about the character.

Sabrina Yeah, you can already tell just on that first line. A little bit about personality, too.

Rebecca Yeah, exactly.

Sabrina I like that a lot.

Rebecca I will leave it at that one. But I definitely love first lines, and they will grab me and make me read more if I think they're really good.

Sabrina Who are some of your favorite characters, like main characters in a book?

Rebecca I will say, like, I really love, like, girl protagonists who are, like, tough and ambitious, but I do think that I'm often misunderstood about that, so I will clarify. So basically, I love Jude Duarte, from *The Cruel Prince*.

Sabrina Oh, I love I just did a *Cruel Prince*. It took me forever. I finally read it. I loved it. This is good. [Laughs.]

Rebecca Yes. I just love that series, and I just think of her as, like, the ultimate layered, quote, unquote, unlikable girl. And I know that's all over my website that I want, like, ambitious, unlikable girls. And people do seem to really - that seems to resonate with them. But it doesn't mean that I want assassins. I don't want somebody who's just tough and mean, and that's their whole personality. I want somebody who has all the layers, who also has compassion. And I think that's what I love so much about Jude, is that she's tough and she's driven, but she also has this, like, deep compassion, even for people she has reason to hate. She's so forgiving. Like, people close to her keep betraying her, and she finds it in her heart to forgive them when she should. And I just think she has such amazing depth to her. So, Holly Black. What an amazing writer.

Sabrina Yes. Royalty right there. [Laughs.]

Rebecca So that's the kind of character I would love to see more of is somebody who, yes, is, like, an ambitious girl, has goals, has drive, but that doesn't mean that she's, like, going to stomp all over people, necessarily. It's, you know, give us some depth, give us some layers. One of the things I thought was so cool about Jude is that she loved people who she didn't have reason to. Like her father. Well, the one she calls her father who has raised her is somebody who literally murdered her parents, but somehow she's like, 'I don't know. Our relationship is just complex.'

Sabrina Yeah.

Rebecca And I think that kind of exact dynamic is unlikely to work in almost any other story. It's just like the fact that she had an open heart despite having such a traumatic life. It was a really interesting set of layers to her character.

Sabrina I just did it, but now that's making me want to go do another reread. [Laughs.]

Rebecca I've reread those books so many times.

Sabrina I just did the audiobook, and I highly recommend it if you haven't done it yet. It was super good.

Rebecca The very first time I read the first book was audiobook, and I was on a train when that one scene with the 'Jude, Jude, Jude, Jude.'

Sabrina Oh my gosh!

You know what I'm talking about? I was on a train with the volume turned all the way up and just going like, 'What is happening?'

Sabrina [Laughs.] Oh, that's funny. I love that scene. You know, speaking of interesting, what's a really interesting one on audiobook is *Shatter Me*. Have you done that?

Rebecca No, I haven't.

Sabrina Yeah, there's a lot of . It took me a minute to like but yeah, that's a good one too. I was really impressed by the quality of the video. I also really love - I didn't mean to go off on an audio thing - but I love Full Cast too. Those are so fun!

Rebecca But fun fact, that's another rights thing that like Full Cast Audio is a whole separate rights deal than single voice audio, which is usually what we sell.

Sabrina Can you ask for that? I mean, obviously you wouldn't need it probably for a lot of books. [Laughs.]

Rebecca It varies, but I think that you'd want to talk to your agent about it and see whether it makes sense to ask for this, or push for this, or whatever. It's often different. Like, some books have a single voice audio, and they also have a multivoice audio license.

Sabrina Oh, that's interesting.

Rebecca Yeah.

Sabrina Okay. Would you like to do a shout out for any upcoming client books?

Rebecca Sure. Andrea Beatriz Arango's *Iveliz Explains it All*. It came out in English in September of this year. Well, of 2022. So I think this this is coming out in January.

Sabrina It is.

Rebecca So the book came out in September of 2022 in English, but the Spanish edition, the North American Spanish edition, which we also sold, will be published in February of 2023.

Sabrina Oh, cool.

Rebecca Yeah. So if you are somebody who reads in Spanish instead of English or prefers that, then you can go get that copy or you can look up the English one.

Sabrina That's so exciting.

Rebecca Yeah. And, Andrea is Puerto Rican, and it was really important to her to have a Spanish edition available as well. So I am very happy that we got to make that happen.

Sabrina I love that.

Rebecca Yeah. It's a gorgeous middle grade in verse, about Iveliz navigating her mental health and learning to speak up for herself. And I love it. Obviously. And I think everybody else would too. Yeah.

Sabrina Yay.

Rebecca And then also, I was not directly involved in these, but my client, Hannah Yang, has a bunch of excellent short stories that everybody should go read.

Sabrina Oh, cool. Okay. I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to do this to you. So you just said your client's book comes out in verse. What's up with in verse on like, a word count?

Rebecca It is very short.

Sabrina I've been so curious about that. Do you look at word count for that or is it more about how they lay out on the page when it comes to in verse?

Rebecca So Andrea is a very special case where she is an under writer. I don't think she would mind me saying this, but she's an under writer. And then when I or her editor gives her notes, she goes and incorporates them beautifully and adds more words. And I think between the time that she first sent me her book and the very first edition of it that I read, first draft that I read, and the time it went to publication, it probably doubled in length.

Sabrina Oh, wow.

Rebecca And by that I mean that it is still probably only like 25,000 words at the end.

Sabrina Okay. Oh, wow. In verse. Blows my mind. [Laughs.]

Rebecca I don't know how she does it. I mean, like I said, I'm an over writer. I could not do what she does, but she packs a real punch.

Sabrina How do you get - what is submissions look like for that? Is it the same kind of layout that you would see in a novel, or do they make it pretty on the page?

Rebecca I mean, I think they do their best. It varies. Hers weren't quite so - like some people do more stylizing of the layout. I don't think hers were like that. In the first draft that she sent me, it was probably just like 15 pages of how many words that was.

Sabrina Okay.

Rebecca She and I connected through #DVPit, and she - she is somebody who did an R&R for me. And I was so shocked when I got her book back and it was so good. I mean, I already thought it was good, which is why I asked for an R&R, but she took it to the next level and so, of course I had to offer rep and yeah, no, she's brilliant at revising and brilliant at getting so much emotion into so few words. I don't know how she does it, but it's amazing. Highly recommend.

Sabrina That's amazing. That is amazing. My mind is blown.

Rebecca Yeah, I mean, prose is just so different.

Sabrina It's super different. It's so different. Okay, do you want to tell everyone where we can find you?

Rebecca Yeah, I mean, I'm on Twitter. If it still exists when this podcast comes out.

Sabrina People keep saying that. I think it's still gonna be there.

Rebecca Probably. We will see. I'm @rleskildsen. I did make a Hive account, but I'm not really using yet. But it's there. It's @rebeccaesk. My website: rebeccaeskildsen.com. And of course you can find me through the Writers House website, or Publishers Marketplace.

Sabrina Okay. This was so fun. Oh, my gosh. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you so much. Oh, my gosh. I had so much fun.

Rebecca Well, this has been so great. Thank you so much for having me on your podcast. I hope this was helpful.

Sabrina Oh, my God. So helpful. Thank you so much.

Rebecca Thanks. Bye.

Sabrina Okay. Bye.

Sabrina [Upbeat music begins] Okay everyone! That's it for Episode 12 of LitTea! You can find a content list and all the Rebecca links in the show notes page of my website, linked below, and if you're enjoying the podcast, don't forget to tell your writing buddies! Okay Ginny. Say goodbye!

Ginny barks

[Upbeat music fades out]