

### LitTea Episode 15: Mae Coyiuto

- Sabrina Hey friends! It's LitTea time! I'm your host, Sabrina Lotfi, and I'm so excited to be joined today for episode 15 by Mae Coyiuto, debut author of *Chloe and the Kaishao Boys*, which comes out tomorrow! So, let's jump right in!
- Mae Hi, I'm Mae Coyiuto. I'm the author of the upcoming book *Chloe and the Kaishao Boys*. I'm a Chinese-Filipino writer that's also born and raised in the Philippines. And it's also my first book that also stars a Chinese-Filipino girl. I'm so excited for y'all to read it.
- Sabrina I am so excited. We are recording this one a little bit early and I just have to wait. And this is the part that sucks about doing these early as I, like, get so hyped up talking to people on these and I'm like, okay. Okay. So, would you rather read a book with bad writing, but an incredible story, or a book with incredible writing, but an awful story?
- Mae Like I was at first I was like, I would go for, like, the bad writing because I would think about, like, all my favorite, like, you know, those, like, movies that aren't good, but you just love watching them for some reason.
- Sabrina Yes, trash movies.
- Mae Yeah, trash movies. But then, I was thinking, like, would I read like, you know how I like in a singing contest, you think 'Oh, she has a great voice. She could sing from the phone book and I'd listen to it.' I feel like there are some writers and like, if they write, like, the worst story ever, they can still make, like, I would read like. Like it's like if Elizabeth Acevedo writes like a recipe thing, I would read it. Like she'd make it look beautiful. So like, I'm thinking like I might lean towards the incredible writing but bad story.
- Sabrina Okay. Okay honestly I yeah, I listen to everybody answer these and I'm like, I would do both, I am the cheater. So if you could only read one, would you rather read the first page or the last page?
- Mae It's so hard to say if I'm choosing - if that's the way I'm choosing a book, then I'm like yeah first page. But then if it's like the only thing I'm ever going to read from the book, maybe last page. See, I'm not really answering the question.
- Sabrina I already said I wouldn't answer these. So it's fine. Okay that's fair. That's really fair. So what book made you a reader?
- Mae I think honestly, like I was not the biggest reader, because my family is like full of big readers. So I was kind of like the one who actually liked comics more growing up, and like TV shows. But I think the book that really stuck out to me first was *Holes*, by Louis Sachar. I think that's his last name. But yeah and I read it like recently, like a few years ago, and it still holds up. But yeah. I think I just like, like I just remember reading that it was like, so blown away that a book can be that good I think.
- Sabrina Is that also the book that made you a writer or was there another book that made you get into writing?

- Mae I think the one that made me a writer, I think it was either maybe *Perks of Being a Wallflower* and maybe *The Sun is Also a Star*. I think those two are really like super important for me because I wasn't super familiar with what YA was before. And then I think *Perks* was one of the first that I was like, 'Oh, you can write stuff, like, you can write like a high school first experience, and make it feel like as resonant with, like, all age groups. I felt like. And then I think *The Sun is Also a Star* was just like a huge one for me. Because one of the characters there was Korean-American, and then I feel like I never really read from like an Asian main character's perspective before, or like in the YA space. So, and then I found like before, I think I'm so used to like, putting myself in other people's experiences from like, what I've read and watched growing up. And this is the only time I was like, 'Wait, I can actually, like, I don't have to make an effort because I see myself in this person.' So.
- Sabrina You're really able to do it, yeah. When I put in the effort of like, 'Okay, let me just completely change her mindset and totally step into this other character's shoes. Yeah, I love that. Those are both so good. Again, I have not read either of those in a really long time.
- Those books I'm scared of reading again because I'm, like, I loved them so much when I read them. So I'm scared of like, would the experience be not the same if I read them again, so but yeah.
- Sabrina They probably won't be because, I mean, you're older. But like, I bet they're still really good because they're both just incredible books.
- Mae Yeah.
- Sabrina So yeah, that's interesting. There are some that like, I haven't touched again since I was younger just because, like, it is - it's a different experience.
- Mae Uh huh.
- Sabrina Would you like to share some hobbies or interests that you have outside of writing?
- Mae Sure. I think. I think what's the most interesting hobby you have? I'm a huge tennis geek. So like, like right now, it's Australian Open. So like I haven't been, I always tell people. There are like big tournaments, like, four times a year. So like four times a year you can't really, like, I'm going to be so distracted, because I'm just gonna be watching a tennis match while doing stuff.
- Sabrina Okay. Do you play tennis also?
- Mae Yeah, I used to play competitively, but then now it's more just like for fun, yeah.
- Sabrina Oh, wow. Okay, cool. Oh my gosh, Carrie... I was just talking about her being super excited about your book. She's one of my - my best writing buddies. She writes sports YA.
- Mae Oh that's so cool.
- Sabrina Yeah, yeah she's gonna be so excited to hear you say that. Hi Carrie.
- Mae Hi Carrie. I'm such a good big tennis fan but like I never. I don't know how to, like, I think sports YA is so cool and I love reading it, but I'm like, I'm not sure if I can write it, but maybe in the future.
- Sabrina It's hard.
- Mae It's hard, yeah.

Sabrina You have to - you. It's like a whole different... ball game.

Mae Nice pun.

Sabrina I'm so sorry everybody. [Both laugh.] Okay, what else? Were you gonna? You don't have to add to that. I just wanted to make sure that I'm not jumping into anything else before you were done.

Mae I guess I just fan girl over like pop music in general. I think, like, I've been listening to this new K-Pop group like the past couple of weeks. They're called NewJeans and I can't get that song, of theirs out of my head. Yeah, I think those are most of the things like when I'm not writing, I'm like watching stuff or listening to stuff, yeah.

Sabrina Do you listen to music when you're writing?

Mae It depends.

Sabrina Okay.

Mae I think, like if I'm really, like, I know where the story's kind of going then, I like listening to music. But like if it's like if I'm really stuck, then sometimes I need like silence to just, like, 'Where are we going with this?' And then, yeah.

Sabrina And let your brain work itself out.

Mae Yeah.

Sabrina Gotcha.

Mae It's weird when I'm like in a coffee shop, or anything, like, I like the background noise, and it doesn't register to me as like noise I guess. But then when I'm by myself, with like, just my earphones? I'm like wait, this is too loud sometimes. But yes.

Sabrina It's too much. Yeah, yeah, it's weird because yeah, when you've got that background noise, it kind of all muffles together and turns into a white noise. But when you're like, in the quiet, and then there's like that one thing making sound, like, it can be really loud.

Mae I do like listening to - if it's like a scene that has like a song in it - or like they're listening to a song. I like listening to that song while writing, like now because I'm like 'This fits the mood of the scene.'

Sabrina Okay. Yeah. That's really good. Yeah. Do you do that a lot? You have a lot of music in your book?

Mae There's like a big moment where, like, a couple in the book where they listened to, like, a performance, like, a school variety show. And then, so the it's like a song that they kind of - resonates with them. Like it's all building up to, like, Chloe's 18th birthday party and then there's like a dance number there, and there's a song for that.

Sabrina Okay, cool.

Mae Yeah.

Sabrina Yeah. Okay, cool, I love that. And you have real music in it?

Mae Yeah.

- Sabrina That's cool. Okay, cool. That's always super fun to me.
- Mae Yeah, honestly, like, I think I reference, I do a lot of Pop Culture references in my writing, that I have to, like, scale back when I revise something, like, I have mentioned this artist too many times in this one chapter.
- Sabrina Yeah, I'll find myself doing that sometimes too. And I'm like, this is not even gonna be relevant in 20 years.
- Mae Oh my God, but I had, so I asked like one of, I knew like someone younger and I asked her to read the book and then she's more like for like really, like, the readership and stuff like that. And then I think there was a part where the character mentions that she had a crush on like Justin Bieber and then this girl messaged me like 'Mae, I think, like, people my age don't really like Justin Bieber anymore. Maybe you can try someone younger,' and I was like, 'Oh okay.'
- Sabrina [Laughs.] Called out.
- Sabrina [Laughs.] Yeah I know. I probably have a Justin Bieber somewhere. I want to watch. High five.
- Mae At least they know him. I guess they don't imagine themselves being with him anymore, but they still know him. Yeah.
- Sabrina Yeah, he's got popular enough to be recognized.
- Mae Yeah.
- Sabrina Do you want to jump into some querying questions?
- Mae Sure. Yeah.
- Sabrina Do you want to walk us through your path to getting an agent, and like you're welcome to share whatever you're comfortable sharing?
- Mae Sure. So before all of this I was really just familiar with how it worked in Philippine publishing. And I think the Korean process is so different. So I just remember being, like, I was in college and then - I think it was my junior year - and then I was basically just searching, like, how do you get published, basically, in the US. And then, I think, I - at the same time - I think #DVPit was happening, so..
- Sabrina Oh, cool.
- Mae I thought that was just really cool because like I was like, 'Oh, so I didn't know Twitter pitches were a thing, and then it was open to like, marginalized authors. So, I didn't pitch at that point. But then I was like, I just took a note like, 'Oh, maybe when this is happening again, I'm going to try for it.' So I think that was like, around 2015, and then for the next few years. I don't recommend this, but like, any agent I found online, I would send the query. I'm pretty sure my query wasn't even like... Like, it was like, I think I spent more time, like, pitching myself than the actual book and then...
- Sabrina It was your first query. We all make some kind of mistake on our first query.

Mae It was, it was bad though. I think that from 2015 to, like, 2018, I think I was just, like, querying different projects and everything. And it wasn't until - I think it was like about three different projects, those years. And then I started writing, what would become *Chloe and the Kaishao Boys* in 2017. And then in late 2018, I got, like, I had a pretty, not super polished, but something like a draft that I was, like, 'I feel like I could show it to other people.' And then I remember being more, I think I listened to more people, looked up more websites and been like, okay, I need to find when I look for an agent it should be someone in their present stuff that are similar to what I write, and hopefully have like a good like reputation or like they've been like around for a while and stuff like that. So I made, like, an actual list of people I wanted to query. And then I remember like seeing - so Thao, my agent now, has been on my radar since like, since I started querying, and then I was always so fond of her because, like, she was one of the people who, like, back then, like if I got like, even just a reply from the agent, I'm like, 'Oh my God, I was almost there.' Even if it was like a form rejection, I'm like 'She noticed me in the trenches,' and then I remembered Thao from for my very first project. I queried her and then she replied with like it didn't seem...I'm not sure if it was a form rejection but it seemed like a very like... she mentioned, like, 'Oh, I like the title.' So I'm like, 'She actually read something there.' So, I took note.

Sabrina Yeah. It's nice when they're personalized. Yeah.

Mae Yeah. I mean, now I'm like I just have no idea how they get to all the queries that they must receive but then it's always really nice... I think just hearing back for me at that point was just like reassurance like 'Okay, I may be a rejection away from getting that yes one day.' And then I saw Thao was closing to queries. I think this was a weekend. So like by Monday she was going to close to queries, and then I was thinking like my query wasn't like super polished yet, but then like I'm gonna regret this, if I don't, like, send it to her. So I just remember, like, sending out I think was like a form for her. Like, when you query Thao, I'm not sure it's the same at this point, and then once I sent it, I realized like I made a typo to like one of the comp titles that were like one of the books she represented. So I'm like, 'Okay, that's done. Like she's not going to like... I messed up like I can't even name one of her books correctly.' So I'm like, 'This isn't gonna work out.'

Sabrina No. We all make typos.

Yeah, I was just like, 'Oh no.' Like and then but like a month later I remember hearing back from her. And then, another agent also, like there's another agent who also expressed interest. But then, so I told my sister everything when this was all happening, and then she was telling me, like, 'You're gonna pick Thao, like, she's been someone you've been talking about since forever.' But then I remember like, people are saying like 'Don't have a dream agent.' Just like 'That's not realistic' and stuff. So I was like, no, I'm like, weighing both options and then... But when I had the call with Thao, it's just like, it just felt like, right, if that makes sense.

Sabrina Oh yeah, totally.

Mae And then she, like there are some parts in the book that I feel like, that mean a lot to me, but I feel like someone who reads it might be like a really small thing. But then Thao pointed out things that I'm like, 'Hey, these are my favorite things about the book too that I didn't think people would really point out.' So I think I just knew, and thank God she was interested. So yeah, that's a very long story, but that's basically how it got there. Yeah.

Sabrina No, that's awesome. So she really connected with your book. And that's honestly, that's what we all want. We just want that person to connect. Anybody can try and sell anything.

Mae Yeah.

Sabrina But yeah to have that actual connection with it is so important, I think. Oh I love hearing that. So when was that, when did you sign?

- Mae 2018. I think it was September 2018.
- Sabrina This industry. It's ridiculous, yeah. How long did it take you to go through revisions and everything with her?
- Mae At that point, honestly, I thought like getting like the agent of saying, 'Okay, I did it. Like this is gonna be like smooth sailing from there.' It was like, that was like, I think this industry is not that transparent, I feel like. The main thing people talk about is how we to get an agent is, like, there's any late info out there. So I thought, like 'Okay, this is the one step that everyone talks about', so after this, like, publishing might be like a bit closer but then I remember we - So, I signed with Thao, like, September 2018, and then I think I revised for, like, the next couple of months. So it's funny cause like I remember like sending her a draft, and then she messaged with, like, a sub list of editors and I'm like 'Okay we're doing this.' and then so we went into submission until, I think, April 2019 was when we heard like the the final pass from, like, it was like a list of editors. And at that point I think a couple of them were saying like really similar feedback. So Thao was telling me, like, 'Would you rather like revise according to, like, what they're saying, or would you want to work on a new project that you can try for again?'
- Sabrina Okay.
- Mae So yeah, I think I took some time to be like, 'Oh no, this isn't gonna get published,' and then, 'Oh no, I don't really know what project to start with. And how long would that take?' And then I think when I hear feedback like that, sometimes I need to like sit with it because at first...
- Sabrina Oh, totally!
- Mae ...when you hear something because I'm not sure if you've experienced the same thing, when someone gives you like feedback for that, 'Quit? No, that doesn't work.' But then, when I think about it and they quit, that makes a lot of sense and it just takes like a lot of like, it would just take a lot of time to like revise everything and stuff. So that was April 2019. So I remember telling Thao that like, 'Oh, I think I still have, like, faith in this story, in this concept. And then, I think I can revise it according to, like, what some editors were saying.' So, that was until - that took me awhile. I remember when lockdown... that the pandemic happened, I was still revising. So I think that was until like a year, like April, 2020 and then I turned the draft to Thao and then we kind of went back and forth until I think like August 2020. I'm not sure if I'm getting than one right?
- Sabrina That's okay.
- Mae Yeah and then we went into another round of submissions and then it was we heard back from editors who were interested. I think around December 2020. So yeah.
- Sabrina Cool. What is your best advice for making a query letter stand out?
- Mae I think with YA contemporary, or from what I've experienced, I think they're also looking for like kind of like a hooky pitch. So, it doesn't have to be like super out there. Like, I think for mine it's like basically like a girl gets match made by her dad and aunt. It's like, if someone asks you what your book is about to have like that one thing that kind of like, hooks people in because, like, before I think I would say pitch stories. Like, 'Oh, it's about this girl, who spends like a summer finding herself, and then grows by the end of it.' So, I think that's something that I've been working on with my recent project as well.
- Sabrina Yeah, something that just gets your attention in a short amount of time. Yeah, you're doing better than me. When someone asks me what my books about I'm like 'It's a book. There's words in it. On a page. And characters.'

- Mae No, I'm horrible at pitching. I think it took like other people reading it, to be like 'Oh, this is what your story's about.' Ah, yes, thank you.
- Sabrina I love getting feedback. I'm pretty terrible, I think, on my own stuff. I'm really good at looking at other people's stuff, and helping them, but when I'm sitting down for my own query, I'm like 'Wait.'
- Mae Yeah, it's so helpful. That's one thing that really helped me, too, is like asking, or showing it to other people, and getting their take on the queries, and stuff. There are so many writers - like I'm usually on Twitter - that are so nice, to offer critiques and stuff like that, and that super helped me when I was working on my query.
- Sabrina Yes, getting feedback is so important. I love getting feedback from people who've read it, so they can be 'This is so not what happened in your book.' And also, people who haven't, because they can be 'Is it about this?' And you can be 'Where did you get that from?' [Both laugh.]
- Sabrina OK, what's your best advice for querying authors?
- Mae I think, so, from my past experience, of querying like, every single agent in the world, I think, like any search Google search for any book I found, as I could query this person. I think it's helpful to do it in batches. I think it helped my mental health. When I was doing it, just like I think I grouped it by like ten agents at a time, so I guess it helps to also, like, if you get feedback from some of them and then they return with something that you can use for like your next batch of querying, that's super helpful. I did not do this, but I wish I did. But then my friends were because I was constantly checking my email, like waking up and just like seeing an alert. So I think it's helpful to like, have, like a separate writer email, if you have one. I will try to do this as well because like, I'm still the worst at like, if I'm waiting for something, I'm just like, checking all the time.
- Sabrina I'm so bad about that too.
- Mae Yeah.
- Sabrina It's hard not to.
- Mae It's so hard.
- Sabrina I get so antsy for a response, any response.
- Mae With the time difference here, too, usually everything happens like while I'm asleep, so...
- Sabrina Oh my gosh, so they all just pop in when you wake up?
- Mae Yeah. And, oh I think, at first, I think I was kind of like shy of sharing anything about the querying and stuff with like people I knew, because like it's hard to like be super vulnerable and be like seeing that you submitted to all these people and then get like a bunch of rejections. But then, it was so helpful to me to have, like, I didn't tell everyone, but I had, like, really close friends who I feel like secure enough to sharing like - like they're very supportive of what I do. So, it was just, like, even if I'm not in publishing, just like having someone to like, if you're bummed about getting a rejection, I have someone to like message saying, 'Hey this person like sent me a note', and then it's just like, yeah, I think you should have like a support group, or like a safe space to just like kind of like process everything that's happening. And also be sad about, if you're going through rejections, and then having some someone say like 'Oh it will get better' or like, even if they don't understand that, to say, 'Yeah, your writing's good', stuff like that, so...
- Sabrina Someone there to give me a big hug! Yeah. We all just need a big hug sometimes.

- Mae            Yeah, I remember the last - when I got that last rejection from, like the first time we went on sub, I messaged my friend who - she's not in publishing - but she like, just knows how I think. I told her about the whole process and everything, and then she just came to like my place with like, ice cream later that day.
- Sabrina        Yeah, so that was super helpful. Good bestie!
- Mae            Yeah. [Laughs.]
- Sabrina        Yeah. We all need those people who will bring you ice cream after a rejection. That's great!
- Mae            There was one point though, I would, I think I forgot that site QueryTracker where you can see...
- Sabrina        Oh, where you can see their lists and they can put comments?
- Mae            Yeah, and then people see like this agent replies within a day. And then, sometimes I would just pitch to those agents, who like, just getting an answer, even if it's a no, just means that I'm doing something....
- Sabrina        Immediately.
- Mae            Yeah.
- Sabrina        Yeah. Yeah, I feel that. Okay. Do you want to get into some writing and revising questions?
- Mae            Sure.
- Sabrina        Do you want to kind of share your writing process with us?
- Mae            So, I was - I've always been a pantsier, even before, I knew what that term meant. I think it's like especially with, with *Chloe*, I like started writing it with, like no idea it was going to be anything or like a no-pressure, like, a deadline or stuff like that. So, I just remember, like, when I was writing it, like things kind of just come to me as I'm writing stuff, sometimes. So the problem with that is, like, when I was revise - when I had to revise and everything - that's when I was like 'Wait, I'm not sure if I'm hitting like the beats and like a typical story,' and so I think that's why our vision took a while for *Chloe* too because like everything was like just kind of like pantsing the whole thing and then afterwards, that's when I was like, 'Wait, maybe I should like figure out like the outline of like where I wanted this to go.' But yet now, and like my next project, I'm kind of like combining or trying to combine both, because I just realized how much time it took to like pants everything and outline after. So now I'm like, I'm gonna try to outline some sort of thing now and then. But I also realized like when - my writing process like a lot of scenes come to me as I like write the scenes that come before, so that's her. I wish I could be more like organized and but, no. I think my process is just like, 'Let's see where it goes.'
- Sabrina        Chaos drafter over there. I love that!
- Mae            Yeah.
- Sabrina        Okay, well you - it sounds like you write chronologically?



- Mae            Yeah. With *Chloe* I did, but now I'm thinking maybe I should try... It's funny, but with *Chloe* I think, when we revised, from like the first draft, I basically had to scrap like the first quarter of the book, because everybody was saying it kind of starts from the scene, like Chapter 10, or something like that. So, that became like the first numbered chapter.
- Sabrina        Oh, okay.
- Mae            Yeah, yeah. So I think it's - I don't know. Sometimes I think there are scenes that I know are like - You have scenes that you kind of look forward to when you're writing.
- Sabrina        Yeah!
- Mae            So, like when it gets the middle, I'm like 'I have no idea where this is going', sometimes I think that maybe I should try writing the scene that I'm so excited about, and then see where it goes. I might experiment with that, actually, going way forward.
- Sabrina        Usually, what I'll do, when I have scenes like that is they don't leave me alone. So, I'll just take a bunch of notes as they come, and I'll just stick em in a, like, 'Here's for this scene later,' and there'll be like a stack this high of little notes. [Both laugh.] Do you have any fun writing routines?
- Mae            So, I've been working from home since the pandemic happened. It's like one area that's working for me. I kind of like, blame it on, not myself, because...
- Sabrina        You're perfect. I get it.
- Mae            So, I think, maybe if I try, like, my sister's room, maybe I can get more productive there. Or, if I'm stuck, I'm like, maybe I can just switch something up a bit, or like, I have a monitor, but sometimes I want to write from just my laptop, or something like that. And, I really like using Pacemaker, which is just like where you just count your word count for the day. And, I think, even if I wrote just like a hundred words that day, just knowing that, at the end of the day, 'Oh, I wrote something.' But then, it just helps me keep motivated for the next time I'm drafting, or something.
- Sabrina        Yeah. I like that, especially on the days where you do write a lot, and then you look at it the next day, and you're like 'I have to delete it all!'
- Mae            Yes! I've been there, yeah.
- Sabrina        Yeah, but I've got the word count in, and it didn't go away.
- Mae            Yeah.
- Sabrina        Do you want to share how you reward yourself with your accomplishments, both big & small. That's always so fun to talk about.

- Mae Yeah. I think it's something I learned too, because publishing takes so long. And then, it's also, like, nothing happens for, like, months. And then, everything happens in a few weeks, so I think it's really important to just have stamina for the industry I guess just to like celebrate even the small stuff just. I think, like same, I always think tell like my sister or a friend about like what's happening and then like you would like have dinner that day or something like that. Like, it was kind of rough cuz when it happened everything during the lockdown here was when I first got like the editor was interested in the manuscript. So I think I just remember like it was like 4:00 a.m. here. So I like everyone was asleep but like I just went to my sister and was like 'Hi. Hi, I got like' It wasn't even, like I think it was just like an editor wanting to have a call. I was like, 'Oh my God, someone might read the manuscript' and then she said, 'What do you mean might read the manuscript?' I was like, 'I don't know. It might mean something.' I guess I just like sharing it with someone else. I guess, it's something happens, and also just taking time to be like, 'Remember how far you've come from a certain point?' Like right now, like my best friend is also like 'I'm working on a new project now' and then she's basically, she's like 'We can hang out once you hit play this number of words in your manuscript.' and I think, 'Oh, that's so - I need tough love, but there's too tough.' But yeah.
- Sabrina Yeah, yeah, I think it's really important to take that time and celebrate. And I love what you said about taking to time to remember how far you've come. That can be forgotten really easily, I think. Yeah, it's really important to remember all your little milestones, because they're so important!
- Mae Yeah. Like even the, I feel like nothing's too small to celebrate, as well. Because I...
- Sabrina Yeah.
- Mae I remember, like, freaking out when you become a Goodreads author. That's like so cool. And then, at the back of my mind, I'm like 'Wait. This isn't something that gets you further published.' And I'm like 'No, it's still cool!' I feel like whatever makes you happy. I feel like it's like cool to just geek out about things too, so yeah.
- Sabrina Yeah. And even things that's like, that's not gonna get announced, like you finished a new revision on your draft. That's awesome! So, what is your favorite tip for battling writer's block?
- Mae Oh, I feel like I need help with that. I think, for me, what's helped me, like I'm also not great with writer's block, but then I think what helps me is like taking in content if you're kind of, like, stuck with your own stuff. And I really like reading like YA as well, just like getting myself familiar with like, what's out there. And there's so many, like, I'm super frustrated. I'm kind of a slow reader. Like I can't get through all the good books I want to read. But yeah, I think just like reading other stories or like, even like movies and TV shows, and just reminding myself what creative work looks like, kind of, like, inspires me as well. But yeah. I think watching stuff that's usually like... it's kind of like television that's like my project and ignore everything around me. So yeah I think that's just being open to like getting inspiration from like everything around you. I feel like this is good.
- Sabrina Yeah, you mentioned watching stuff a couple of times.
- Mae I like to watch so much TV growing up, like to a point, like, I worry like I was the type of kid who like my parents have to like don't sit. I feel like I learned so much from making a good story from TV. Or I think maybe that's why my writing is kind of like, I guess, I really love dialogue. Like, dialogue is one of my favorite thing. So, I think it's because I just like, watching a bunch of movie and shows, and then like dialogue is like when it hits something, it really clicks for me. So, yeah, I think I learned a lot about storytelling through movies, but maybe kids shouldn't watch that much TV, looking back.
- Sabrina Yeah. You know, but movies and TV, they can, they can be their own master class in dialogue. Even in pacing and stuff. it's not necessarily the same pacing that you can see in, like, a story, but it's there. You can get a feel for stuff.

- Mae            Yeah.
- Sabrina        Okay. Do you have any favorite craft, or blog books, or... I don't think that - I don't think blog books are a thing... [Laughs.]
- Mae            I think people have maybe started books from blogs. Maybe that's a blog book.
- Sabrina        That's true! Maybe. Okay, we'll go with that, we'll go with that.
- Mae            If pantsers became a thing, I think blog books can become a thing.
- [Both laugh.]
- Mae            Ah, I think a podcast - one of the first writing podcasts I got into was 'First Draft' by Sarah Enni. I think that's what it's called. But I think that, sometimes I had no idea, like, a lot of things about the industry. Just like, listening to what you're doing, like, talking to writers who've done it, and also getting their background story. It's crazy how every writer has a different journey about how they got there.
- Sabrina        It's so cool.
- Mae            Yeah, so just listening to that, and hearing about those things teaches you so much. And, it's also so cool that there are all the writers and the fans of their work, and just hearing their own personal stories. I really like listening to it. What helped me a lot, too, I remember like, Gloria Chao, I think she wrote *American Panda*. She has a new book coming out, too, this year, *When You Wish Upon a Lantern*. I remember she has just a tab, just for like, tips on querying and submissions, and then, I found her like, I think she had a common mistake she saw in query letters, in an article like that. So, that was super helpful, because like, when I read it, I was like, 'Oh, I'm doing all of these mistakes. Maybe I should revise my query.' I think there are so many writers who offer so many resources, like, just from the goodness of their hearts. I feel like it's cool to like, seek them out.
- Sabrina        Honestly, without the blog posts, and the craft books, and the people willing to do...
- Mae            The blog books.
- Sabrina        Posts! That's what they're called. [Both laugh.] And like, people being willing to come on and be guests on like, my podcast, and stuff.
- Mae            Yeah.
- Sabrina        I don't know how anybody figures out anything about writing, or this industry, without that. Like, everything I learned about querying was from peoples' blog posts. [Laughs.]
- Mae            Yeah, same.
- Sabrina        Thank you, internet! Oh my gosh!
- Mae            Like, I had no idea how people did this, like before. Like internet was like the main thing, so.
- Sabrina        We're so reliant on the internet. Okay. My favorite part. We're to my favorite part, and it's time to talk about your book. So, whatever you're comfortable sharing. Would you like to tell us all about *Chloe and the Kaishao Boys*?

- Mae            Yeah. So, *Chloe and the Kaishao Boys* is a YA rom-com about a Chinese-Filipino girl in Manila whose dad and aunt set her up on these, like, a lot of arranged dates to convince her to stay home for college, instead of going abroad.
- Sabrina        Oh my gosh! It sounds amazing! This is so up my alley of rom-coms. We've got, like, meddling family, mixed with 'Bachelor' vibes. I kinda hate the 'Bachelor', but I love books with 'Bachelor' vibes.
- [Mae laughs.]
- Sabrina        So, like, where did your inspiration come from?
- Mae            So, actually, it was a funny story. So, I was in a writing program when I first started writing *Chloe*. And then, we were given an assignment to write, like, a fantasy, a YA fantasy, basically. I love YA fantasy. So much respect to others who do that, but my mind can't wrap around writing fantasy. I think I just really, there's this idea, this like prom chapter that came into my head. And, I never wrote about, like, I think I always wrote about either Filipinos in the Philippines, or Asian people in the US, or Americans. And never, really like, specifically the Chinese-Filipino culture, which is my own ethnicity. And so, I think for the longest time they kept emphasizing in that program that first, you need to write what you know before you can write other things, so. Yeah, so instead of writing a fantasy chapter, I was like 'I kinda want to write this, like, prom chapter.' And I ended up emailing the professor, 'This isn't fantasy, I can't even spin it to be fantasy. There's nothing fantasy about it.' And thankfully, they still workshopped it during the class. And then, I think they were very drawn to the setting as well. I think that not a lot of people knew that there were different cultures within the Philippines, as well. So, after that chapter, I was - that chapter doesn't exist in the final book anymore. But, still like, I kinda kept on building on that chapter, and got really into it. And, while I was, like, working, and like, doing other things, I would always like, just write another chapter, or another page for this project. And then, it eventually became that book. But....
- Sabrina        Cool. What were you gonna say: but what?
- Mae            Oh, I was gonna say, I think that Kaishao, like that concept. So, it's a Hokkien term for. It's like, sort of when you're being set up. Before, it was like, more traditional that like, with the connotation of like arranged marriages, and stuff like that. But, now it's very chill. It's mostly like if your parents are like 'Oh, this person knows a person who'd be perfect', or not really perfect for you, but just a nice person that you would want to meet. Then, they would kind of like set you up to meet, or it could be through friends, as well.
- Sabrina        Okay.
- Mae            But, it was like, I just found it like, really cool, to be like, specifically a Chinese-Filipino thing. And, my parents did it to me for awhile, and whenever I would tell my friends about it they would just get so entertained by all the stories. And I was like, what if I did it like, anything happens when you're in your 20s or 30s. So I was like 'Wait, it would be so awkward if it happened when you were still in high school.'
- Sabrina        Oh my gosh, yes!
- Mae            And so that's also how the concept came to be.
- Sabrina        Honestly, just reading your little hook on the blurb. God, my brain today... Your book blurb. [Laughs.] I saw about the dad matching her, and I was just like, 'Yes! Oh my God!' Like this is one of the books that like, it's not a concept I've ever like, would've thought of myself. As soon as I saw it, I was like, 'I need this in my brain right now!' Like, this is amazing! So good!

- Mae Thanks! I think. I was - it's not super new, like parents match making, and stuff like that. But, I think all the editors, when they were interested, when they would talk about the book, they'd say it's different, in that it's rooted in a specific culture, so...
- Sabrina I don't know. It was just the way you set it up, in the blurb I think, too, that I was just 'Yes!' It was so cutely done. I love it! I'm so excited!
- Mae I think before that I was just like, so caught up in like, so many great stories have been told already in NY, or in any field of literature, I feel like. And so, before, I was like 'How do I come up with an original story?' Like, that's so hard. Like something that no one has ever done before. Now, I think, I just approach it to, like, I could tell. Like there are so many ways to tell the same story, if that makes sense, so...
- Sabrina Even just taking like, a book blurb, or like, a paragraph about a book. If you were to give it - the exact same thing - to five different authors, and told them to go write a novel about it, they would all be different.
- Mae Yeah. My favorite, is I found out about like, book packaging, like a few years ago. And then, someone was telling me that basically like, *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*, started as just a concept, and then that writer just made it what it was. So, I was thinking, if someone told me the concept of like, pants that would fit anyone, like I would not come up with the same story.
- Sabrina Yeah, yeah, I would probably not come up with that one, either.  
Yeah, I would love to do an experiment like that. But, I mean, you'll see stuff like that, you'll see movies and shows doing that a lot, where it'll be like the same exact concept, but it'll be two completely different movies. Or, you'll see like, book trends, and stuff. Were there any unique, or fun research you got to do while you were writing?
- Mae So, Chole's big thing is that she wants to be an animator, so I have a cousin who's into animation. I didn't really ask her for the specific book, but I witnessed like, how she does her work, and stuff like that. So, I think she just has so much passion for what she does. And, I remember when she was in high school. It's all based on her, like being in high school, and having this big dream, being so scared of like, declaring it to the world. But, also like wanting it more than like anything in the world, so. It was fun to tap into that. And then, I think I just watched a bunch of like, she wants to go to USC, so there are so many videos online. I just went on college tour online. Because of the pandemic, I think they have like, all these resources.
- Sabrina Oh, that's so smart! That is so smart!
- Mae Yeah, Oh, and then, so, and then so I'm trying to help, you know. But then I feel like I've never studied. Like there was never like a... I went to a school that was catered to like mostly Chinese-Filipino people, as well. But then we were never taught like our history. There's no like, history or stuff like that. So there's this video series, I think it's from, it's called CNiNOY TV. That did like, kind of like just interviewing different people who influence a community throughout the years. And so like my book doesn't, it's like not something that's teaching you anything about history or anything. But then, I remember watching some of those videos and then I would. Oh sorry, that's like my dog. But I remember there was this video that this woman was telling about like how she didn't have - like before Chinese people here, couldn't get citizenship in the Philippines. And that's why a lot of people went into, like, businesses, because, like, that's like you couldn't get a license to be like a doctor anything. So like the safer option was to go into business. So just getting that like tidbit and like, 'Oh, I never knew that.' Like I just knew like a lot of people here had family businesses, but like I didn't know that that was part of the history. So yeah, I can't, I found it cool that I got to like, learn a bit more about where I came from as well because it's not. Because it's like such a small circle here, so like you kind of, don't yeah, get to get that in for it.
- Sabrina That's so cool. Okay, okay, yeah. You did a lot of research. That's fun.

- Mae I'm trying to think. I feel like it's a rom-com. I feel like I just wrote a love story, and then got deep into research, but then it goes more afterwards where I kind of felt the pressure of like, oh, I'm like, representing this, like, this small community. I should make sure I get stuff right. Like I'm not the best at, I'm not fluent in Hokkien so like I had to ask other people, like, 'Is this how you write things, even the goal of it had to be like, 'Wait, I'm not sure if this is correct', right? So I just like, I think it's more fact checking? Or like, I'm not sure fact check is the right word, but making sure that the things I wrote down are kind of like, kind of authentic in a way, I guess.
- Sabrina No. That makes perfect sense.
- Mae Yeah.
- Sabrina Okay. I hate asking this question, because I know it puts a lot of pressure on you. Who is your favorite character to write outside of Chloe?
- Mae I think it would be so she has a cousin. Yeah, she has a cousin named Peter in the book, and so he originally just, he was just in like the first chapter, that crumb like an earlier draft. We see, Peter is like, Tanzic, the perfect cousin. Or like I think everyone has like the perfect sibling, or like the perfect family member that everyone kind of compares you to. So that was Peter for Chloe, and they see the first chapters just spent like, it's a whole chunk of her just being like, 'Oh my God, Peter's here again. Like what, like, what are they gonna say about, basically him compared to me, this time?' And then I just remember, like, I think both the editor and agent were like, 'Wait, you built Peter up so much in this first chapter, and he basically vanishes throughout the whole thing. And then I was like, 'Wait, yeah, that's true.' So he's just, I don't know, he's so quirky but then he has such a good heart. So, it was like, really fun writing someone like him.
- Sabrina Those are the best surprises.
- Mae Yeah.
- Sabrina When it's a character that like you didn't give a lot of attention to, and then you're like 'Oh I have to bring you out now'. And then you do and they just steal the show.
- Mae I think like, for all the guys in this book there. Well, I feel like all guys are better in the quiet fiction usually.
- Sabrina Yeah, they are, or they're worse. It really depends on what you're going for.
- Mae I just realized, that all three of them are really good guys. They were just really fun to write. Oh, and also all the aunts, and stuff. I liked writing the family members, as well.
- Sabrina Oh, I'm so excited to finally read, everybody. Would you like to read an excerpt?
- Mae Sure. Let me find my copy.
- Sabrina Yay!
- Mae Okay, this is the book, or the ARC I have of it.
- Sabrina Oh my gosh! It's so pretty! How was that, holding it the first time, and getting to unbox it, and everything? Was it amazing?

- Mae It was so cool. Because, it was like, actually my birthday, like the night before my birthday when I found out I had the package. I don't know why it didn't register with me that the ARCs were gonna look like books. For some reason, I thought they were gonna be, kinda like paper, bound together with a paper clip. I don't know. So, when I saw it, I was like 'It's an actual book.' I feel like it's still not sinking in, I feel like it's being given to other people, because now it still feels like something kind of private and stuff.
- Sabrina So yeah, yeah, I've heard that a few times, about like even when the ARCs go out, it's still not to a ton of people yet, so it's not fully sunk in, because it's not everywhere, but it'll be real when I get mine.
- Mae I'm not sure. Should I read just the first part?
- Sabrina Yeah, if you wanta - whatever you're comfortable with. Like the first page or two, or whatever you're comfy with.
- Mae Well, this is the first chapter. Well, it was, I'm not sure what. It was Chapter 10 from my very first draft. [Laughs.]
- Mae "The Liang family lunch is far from the ideal setting to celebrate my dream coming true. Unless you're abroad or on your death bed, attendance at Sunday lunch is mandatory. When my cousin Peter got his wisdom teeth pulled out, Auntie Queenie still brought him to the same Chinese restaurant our family has been going to since the beginning of time. So, when I tried asking Pa if I could sit this one out, he gave me his go-to answer. 'If Peter can make it to the restaurant with cheeks as swollen as tennis balls, you can, too.' Things would be more bearable if Pa hadn't already broken the news about USC to my Aunties. I begged him not to post anything after I told him that I got off the waitlist. He stayed off Instagram, but I completely forgot about the Liang family group chat. His photo series went like this. A picture of my USC waitlist letter, me frowning. My acceptance letter, me smiling. All the photos had accompanying hash tags. Hash tag from Waitlist to the X List. Hash tag: Can't Go Lowie With Chloe." That's the first page.
- Sabrina Yay! Oh my gosh! Okay. I am already getting a feel for voice, and everything. I cannot wait to keep going. Okay, well that was awesome, and I'm super excited to continue. Are there any upcoming or recently released books you'd like to recommend to people?
- Mae Oh, I'm super excited to read *The Fraud Squad*. And then, also *This is Not a Personal Statement* by Tracy Badua. I'm not sure if that's how you pronounce her name, but Tracy if you're listening, I'm so sorry. I really love college stories. I feel like it's so cool that she, like I think the main character is like a high schooler who sneaks her into college, or something, so like whenever there's like, college content on TV, even the few books we have on it. I feel like there's so many books set in high school and reading about high school characters. I feel like college, there's so much there, since it's the first time kids are without their parents, and just on their own, so. Yeah, super excited for that.
- Sabrina It's a fun time. It's definitely a different setting. I love college set books, as well. Yeah, those are a lot of fun.
- Mae Ooh, and I read Tiffany Jackson's latest book recently. Uh *The Weight of Blood*, I think that's the title. It's like a *Carrie* retelling.
- Sabrina I didn't realize it's an actual *Carrie* retelling. Oh my gosh. Okay.
- Mae I think so, yeah. And like, her stories are far from like the stuff I read. I don't know, I just really love, all the twists in her books just always get me, and they're the types of books I always think about days after I read them. I'm a big fan.

- Sabrina Oh my gosh. Okay. And, do you want to tell us where we can find you and *Chloe and the Kaishao Boys*?
- Mae Sure, I'm on Twitter, Instagram. I'm on TikTok, but I'm not the best at TikTok. All my handles are @maecoyiuto. And *Chloe and the Kaishao Boys* will be available at, I think, most bookstores, on March 7th, which is a Tuesday.
- Sabrina Which will be tomorrow, everybody who is listening to this on Day 1! Oh my gosh. Oh my gosh. Thank you so much for joining me for this. I had such a good time.
- Mae Well, thank you! This was so much fun!
- Sabrina Okay everyone! That's it for Episode 15! You can find all the Mae links and the Content List in the Show Notes page of my website, linked below. Thanks so much for joining us!
- Sabrina Okay Ginny, say goodbye!
- Ginny Barks.