

[00:00:00] **Laurel:** Hi everybody. Welcome to Sapphic Culture Club, where we explore lesbian themes in film, TV, books, music, and anywhere else sapphics roam. We are your hosts. I'm Laurel Hechanova.

[00:00:15] **Audrey:** I'm Audrey Nieh. Oh boy, do we have a special sapphic sandwich of a show for y'all. Today we're taking a little break from the top 10 lesbian films list to talk about three very sapphic things that we've been super excited about. The first one is a little show called *A League of Their Own*. The second also takes place in the mid-century sapphicverse: the book *Last Night at The Telegraph Club* by Malinda Lo.

And finally, Lo's new book, *A Scatter of Light*, which is coming out Tuesday, October 4th in the States and October 6th in the UK. And I don't know about you, Laurel, but I can't think of a better guest to have on the show today than Malinda herself. And oh, my...

[00:01:04] **Laurel:** Oh...

[00:01:04] **Audrey:** Oh my...oh my god. Is that—? Is she here? Is that you Malinda? Oh my god.

[00:01:11] **Malinda:** Hello!

[00:01:11] **Audrey:** Welcome, Malinda! Thanks so much for joining us. We are huge fans of yours. I'm actually super nervous, so, yeah. Thanks for joining us. Would you mind introducing yourself?

[00:01:25] **Malinda:** Hello, everyone. Thank you so much for having me on your podcast. This is so fun. I am Malinda Lo. I am the author of *Last Night at The Telegraph Club*, which won the National Book Award last year, a thing that I never thought could happen to me. I have been writing books about young queer women for many years now. Some of you may know my first novel *Ash*, which was a lesbian retelling. Actually now I call it a *sapphic* retelling of Cinderella.

[00:01:54] **Laurel:** Ooh.

[00:01:55] **Malinda:** When it came out in 2009, we didn't say "sapphic". Language has changed. So, I've written a lot of books. They are published as young adult, but I think my audience of readers actually crosses over into actual young adulthood. I know I have a lot of readers who are, you know, queer women in their 20s and coming out into the world as actual adults.

So I'm very excited to be here to talk with you guys about *Telegraph Club* and *A League of Their Own*, which I really loved.

[00:02:26] **Laurel:** Oh, good.

[00:02:27] **Malinda:** Yeah.

[00:02:30] **Laurel:** Okay, a couple of disclaimers before we jump in. We won't be talking about the show *A League of Their Own* in its entirety, but if you haven't seen the series yet, just pause

us for like eight hours, go watch it and come back. I'm actually not even joking. This is a serious recommendation, and you will be glad that you did that.

And we're gonna be talking about as Malinda and Audrey mentioned *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, including a bunch of spoilers. So you better have read it. So let's dive in.

[00:02:59] **Audrey:** Okay, so before we get started, just a really quick intro to the show that everyone has watched already. Right? It came out on August 12th, so just a little over a month and a half ago on Amazon Prime. Created by Will Graham and Abbi Jacobson, who also stars as Carson Shaw. And it was actually originally pitched as a reboot of Penny Marshall's 1992 film, which was inspired by the 1987 documentary of the same name.

But Will and Abbi decided to expand the premise and topics explored in the original films to include stories of queer players as well as racism in the league. They hired a researcher and consulted with players who were in the league at the time, and it's set in 1943 America.

[00:03:43] **Laurel:** Which is also when around the same time that *Last Night at the Telegraph Club* is set, except *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, takes place a little under a decade later. Is that right?

[00:03:56] **Malinda:** Yeah, well it's set in 1954, but there are also some flashback scenes that are earlier at various times, so, Definitely, it's still in the mid-century time period.

[00:04:07] **Laurel:** Cool. Would you mind talking about the premise for *Last Night* a little bit?

[00:04:10] **Malinda:** Sure. So the novel is about a 17 year old girl named Lily, who lives in San Francisco, Chinatown in 1954, and she's really obsessed with rocket science. Her Aunt Judy is a computer at the Jet Propulsion Lab, and Lily really wants to follow in her footsteps. At the same time, she's starting to suspect that she might be a lesbian, and she and her classmate Kath start visiting a lesbian bar called The Telegraph Club, which is located only like two blocks away from her house in Chinatown.

So the book is about them going to the club. It's about Lily coming of age and coming out to herself and her, you know, first love, which... I guess we're doing all spoilers here, so, uh, her first love with Kath! So it's also a love story,

[00:05:01] **Laurel:** Mm, mm-hmm. I love the way that you dedicated the book, and I feel like this bridges into the *A League of Their Own* stuff, but you said "To all the butches and femmes past, present, and future" which I thought was really lovely. Could you talk a little bit about that before we get into the show stuff? Just the butch and femme dynamic back in the '50s.

[00:05:21] **Malinda:** Yeah, so when I did my research to write *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, one of the big themes that emerged was the butch/femme culture in many lesbian communities at the time, and I wanted to make sure that readers could connect with that through the story. And also—so I did a lot of research, not only about the '50s, but I've been writing about lesbians for a long time.

And so I've done a lot of random research about lesbian history. And I am a lesbian, so, you know, I've been in a lot of lesbian spaces, and one thing that has been very clear to me is that whether or not you use the words butch and femme, those identities, you know, feminine-focused queerness or female masculinity, those kinds of identities have been present in lesbian communities...seems like forever, and they still are today.

You know, we use different language, different words. As I was saying earlier, you know, words change over generations, but I think that the experience of being human and the experience of being queer in certain spaces, Really translates across generations.

So I wanted to speak to readers from many generations, not just the fifties, with that dedication, and I'm so happy that people have connected with it. I've gotten a lot of people taking pictures of it and sending it back to me and, you know, which is really lovely.

[00:06:50] **Laurel:** When you started to see the butch/femme dynamic show up in *A League of Their Own* did that start to ring bells for you?

[00:06:57] **Malinda:** The only thing I wish about *A League of Their Own* was that it was more. I wanted more butches. Who doesn't want more butches?

[00:07:06] **Laurel:** Right.

[00:07:06] **Malinda:** Like, that is what we all want, okay?

[00:07:09] **Laurel:** Who doesn't want more butches?

[00:07:09] **Audrey:** Especially in a baseball show, right?

[00:07:11] **Laurel:** I know! Oh yeah.

[00:07:12] **Malinda:** Absolutely. I mean, I was very happy that they had some butch representation in the show, which is, you know, leaps beyond what we normally get on TV.

[00:07:22] **Laurel:** Right.

[00:07:24] **Audrey:** Maybe season two will be a hundred percent butches.

[00:07:27] **Malinda:** Yeah! Let's do it.

[00:07:28] **Laurel:** Except that they can't, right? Like I feel like they, with that makeover scene, they really sort of drove home the point that they're trying to enforce these norms. Even in this like women's—in a sports context, which is just, you know, sort of super frustrating, right? Like, was it Jess almost got kicked off the team because she wasn't wearing her makeup properly?

Or like in the—oh, and I wanted to ask you about this, but like in the '92 film, I think it was like Marla Hooch or something was almost sort of carted off the team for the same reasons, but did you have any expectations going in into *A League of Their Own*, based on maybe previous athletic history or your relationship to the the '92 film (if there was one)?

[00:08:12] **Malinda:** Um, I watched the '92 film a really long time ago, maybe like around 92, so...I remember it very vaguely, you know, And the expectations I had going into the Amazon Prime series were mostly, I didn't watch it immediately. I was, I don't know, I was doing something else, but I watched *Paper Girls*. That's what I was watching.

[00:08:34] **Audrey:** Which is just got canceled.

[00:08:36] **Malinda:** I was so sad. I really enjoyed that show.

[00:08:38] **Laurel:** So good, yeah.

[00:08:40] **Malinda:** Yeah. So the expectations I had were from current people who were watching *A League of Their Own* and basically totally loving it on social media, right? So I went in expecting to love it...

[00:08:53] **Laurel:** Oh...

[00:08:54] **Malinda:** And I did love it. I enjoyed it a lot. Yeah.

[00:08:57] **Laurel:** Oh good. That's good. It's dangerous sometimes to walk in thinking like, Oh, I'm gonna love this.

[00:09:01] **Malinda:** Yeah. No, I, It's true. Expectations are hard.

[00:09:03] **Laurel:** Mm-hmm.

[00:09:04] **Audrey:** I heard repeatedly, like, you know, people going into it knowing it's gonna be gay. But it really exceeds everyone's expectation in terms of like the gayness. So I'm, I'm curious, like, maybe not specifically about the gayness, but like, do you feel like it actually exceeded what you were expecting?

[00:09:20] **Malinda:** No, I actually, I was surprised by, um, oh God, I can't remember any of the people's character—the names. This is terrible. The, the trans character.

[00:09:30] **Laurel:** Bert.

[00:09:31] **Malinda:** Bert, I was surprised they went there with Uncle Bert. I thought that was great. You know, I didn't expect that. I think that was not spoiled for me. So I was, that was a surprise and I really enjoyed that.

[00:09:41] **Laurel:** I think I was surprised. I didn't expect it. I saw it pretty early on. I didn't expect it to be quite as gay as it was, and that surprised me. But I can see how like once Twitter picks it up and once queer Twitter picks it up, and it's like, "You're gonna love this!" Those expectations just kind of go through the roof. But yeah, the Uncle Bert storyline really blew my mind. I, I was not expecting that one at all. Yeah.

[00:10:06] **Audrey:** Yeah, I mean, I also feel like just being on Amazon Prime and with the, the sort of like star power behind it, I guess I feel like it was so gay in its DNA in a way that like a lot

of shows aren't, and that really blew me away. Like I can't think of another lesbian show that is that gay on TV? I don't know.

[00:10:25] **Laurel:** When we're sort of used to like, "Oh, this show has a queer character!" And it means like maybe the main person's best friend is gay, and they're in a relationship sometimes, you know? Versus it feels like half or more than half of the cast is gay and maybe all of the main characters are? So yeah, that, that felt like a huge shift.

One of the other parallels that made me think of *Last Night at the Telegraph Club* when I was watching this is this sort of like...the difficulty of figuring out what queerness is or that you yourself are queer or that other people around you are queer if you're living in a time or an environment where queerness is actively censored.

Did that show up for you at all? Like did that sort of ring bells when you were, when you were watching it?

[00:11:13] **Malinda:** Well, that was a main element of *Telegraph Club* because Lily is growing up in the 1940s and '50s, and I wouldn't say that it that gayness is censored at the time. It's not accepted. It's not culturally acceptable to be gay, so no one talks about it and it's very rarely anywhere. So I think that that was a main storyline in *Telegraph Club*, her coming to the realization of who she was without much external assistance, right? Like she couldn't watch *A League of Their Own* on Amazon Prime.

[00:11:47] **Laurel:** Unfortunately.

[00:11:48] **Malinda:** And it definitely kind of reflected some of my experience coming out in the early '90s. Like I also couldn't watch *A League of Their Own* on Amazon Prime and *A League of Their Own* the movie didn't help.

[00:12:01] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:12:02] **Audrey:** No. No.

[00:12:03] **Malinda:** Yeah, so I think that that's an experience that has been very common for almost all of human history.

So certainly there are parallels there. It's hard! It's so much better now to be able to watch *A League of Their Own* on Amazon Prime or *Paper Girls*. Very sad that it has been canceled.

[00:12:20] **Laurel:** Yeah. Yeah, I love the way that you had Lily pull queerness out of sort of, not the ether, but you know, like she would even in...I think it was the prologue, right? She sees someone who's dressed masculinely, a woman who's dressed masculinely, and she's like, *Hmm*. It's just like a ping, right? And then she sees the book cover, right?

And so you start to piece it together for yourself. And I feel like Carson had not as extensive a journey because it's, she's kissed like in a storage room and that is like, *Hey, maybe you like this, uh, and if you do, you're queer*. But it seems sort of terrifying to have to find out about this mysterious thing by piecing it together yourself, you know, sort of by yourself for a while.

[00:13:04] **Audrey:** I think the way that you write. Knowing without knowing that, like you said, I also, I discovered my queerness in the, in like the mid '90s. And what did I have? Like I had, you know, I think Melissa Etheridge made, I don't think even Melissa Etheridge was out, but you know, she...

[00:13:21] **Malinda:** came out in 1993.

[00:13:23] **Audrey:** So she was barely out.

[00:13:24] **Malinda:** Yeah, barely.

[00:13:25] **Audrey:** But it's like, I also didn't have *A League of Their Own*. There's so much about the way you write it, I think is timeless because even if you don't have a name for it, you feel it. And I, I remember this line you wrote about when Lily sees the picture of the women pilots that she finds in like a magazine you wrote, "She knew she shouldn't, but she had needed to have the picture in a way she didn't consciously understand."

And I feel like that sums up everything I felt as, you know, like a preteen. And I wanted to touch on something you mentioned earlier. When you were introducing yourself, you said, you know, your audience kind of transcends YA, and I consider myself an elder gay, and I feel like your book resonated with me in a way that was like kind of shocking.

I was like, if I only had this when I was, you know, Lily's age, like it probably would've changed my life. And maybe it's because like, it's an amazing book, but it's like, also, you know, I actually grew up in LA and spent some time in Pasadena. My dad worked for JPL and like I've lived in San Francisco for the last 13 years.

Like, I spent a lot of time in Chinatown. I actually went to Thrifty Drugstore a bunch after high school every day. So I was like, What's going on here? Get outta my head, Malinda!

[00:14:32] **Malinda:** That's amazing!

[00:14:33] **Audrey:** So anyway, I don't, Yeah. I don't wanna make this about me, but I just wanted to gush a little bit at you.

[00:14:37] **Malinda:** That's amazing. I'm so happy to hear that.

[00:14:40] **Audrey:** On the topic of parallels, I think something else that kind of struck us was the way that social norms for women are expressed in both *A League of Their Own* and *Telegraph Club*.

So in *A League of Their Own*, of course, there's that makeover scene. I mean, I think you see it kind of like strewn throughout the show. And then in *Telegraph Club* there's the Miss Chinatown pageant. And then something that Laurel noticed earlier was that in both of these pieces there are Shirleys who are like policing the social norms.

[00:15:11] **Malinda:** Yeah.

[00:15:13] **Laurel:** Shirleys, come on!

[00:15:15] **Malinda:** I don't know what it is with that name. I noticed that too. It was funny.

[00:15:20] **Audrey:** It did make me wonder though, like in working on the show, like if people had maybe read your book, I don't know.

[00:15:26] **Malinda:** The creator of the show has read it.

[00:15:27] **Laurel:** Yeah, I think Will Graham, right? Tweeted back that he loved it. Yeah.

[00:15:31] **Malinda:** He said that he enjoyed it, so I don't know *when* he read my book...

[All laugh]

[00:15:38] **Malinda:** ...but that's wonderful to hear, obvi—it's always wonderful.

[00:15:42] **Laurel:** I think another one, maybe the last one that we'll get to before we dive into lesbian bars is this idea of safe spaces and found family. Could you talk a little bit about how you incorporated both of those elements into *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*. I found that the way that you had Lily enter not only Tommy and Lana's world but then also their intimate world was really a really sweet, sort of warm place for her to shelter for a while.

[00:16:16] **Malinda:** So the idea of found family is so interesting that, and I think that today's young people...so I'm—uh, Audrey, if you think of yourself as an elder gay, I'm like ancient, okay? So I'm, like, I'm really old. So, the concept of found family, I have noticed in recent years is really popular among younger readers, teens and people in their twenties, especially when it comes to queer stories.

And you see how much they love it in books. Like, *One Last Stop* by Casey McQuiston, Right? Which I think is genuinely set amongst a found family. So in my book in *Telegraph*, there is absolutely a community of queer women that Lily finds her way to, I wouldn't actually describe them as her found family.

You know, she, it's a little bit, she's not there yet. They're willing to help her out because they see her for who she is and they wanna help her out because they used to be in her position. And I think that that reflects the incredible kindness that I have felt in queer communities to newcomers. I mean, it's not always, I mean, we're also human beings, right?

Sometimes we make bad choices, but in Lily's experience, I wanted her to come into a community that welcomed her even though they didn't understand all of who she was in her Chinese American background. So reading the book, that's how I approached the idea of found family. It's kind of like I...I didn't really approach it.

Lana and Tommy have their community, you know, and Lily's entering it temporarily. I think that the book ends at a certain point in Lily's life, and I imagine that Lily continues on in her life, and she has time to create her own community and her own found family in the future.

[00:18:09] **Laurel:** That's a really good distinction. Yeah, cuz even Lana makes it clear that like you can stay here for a while, but this is not your new home, basically. Yeah, that makes sense.

All right. Can we dive into bars a little bit? Is that cool with everybody?

[00:18:28] **Audrey:** Yeah. Let me just, uh, pour a shot for myself first.

[00:18:33] **Laurel:** So I wanted to recap the *League of Their Own* scene a little bit just to set it up. And then I would love it if Malinda, you could recap the scene in *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*?

So in *A League of Their Own*, we've got the Peaches have actually just won a very sort of important game against the Comets, which gets them in the playoffs. So this is like high celebration. They're celebrating at home, and Greta and Carson and Lupe and Jess are in the living room and they're trying to convince Jo to go with them and celebrate at the bar, Vi's bar. And Jo was really hesitant, but eventually they convince her.

And from there we actually, it's interesting how they interplay these two scenes, but we cut to Max, who's getting ready to go to her Uncle Bert's house for a party there. And she's also nervous about the party too. So that's like sort of parallel emotions. We follow Max until she gets to the party. She opens the door to the party, and it's this really warm, like yellow tones, orange tones. It's a scene of like queer Black joy and just like all types of queerness, all types of just people having fun.

And then we cut back to Greta and Carson who are holding hands, right? And they're walking into Vi's bar, and Jo was walking behind them. Greta has like a huge smile on her face. She's looking around, and her smile makes Carson smile. Jo's *Great. I'm the third wheel*. But eventually she gets approached by Flo, and then at this point we cut back to Max, who starts talking to Esther.

And then we cut back to Carson who asks Greta to dance. And then Max asks Esther to dance. And then Flo tells Jo that she's the most beautiful person she's ever seen. And all the while what is playing is Tina Turner's song, "I've Loved You Too Long", I think is the name of the title. And the line in the chorus that's happening right now is like, *Please don't make me stop*.

And so Carson is like, *What would happen if I came to California with you?* And Greta's like, *I think a lot would happen*. And they kiss, and then Max and Esther kiss and everyone's dancing, and they're big open smiles. And then all of a sudden...there's banging at the door, right? Vi and Edie, the bars owners, hold the door closed.

Everyone's yelling and screaming, and Jo and Greta get separated. The door gets pushed open. People start pouring into the dark alley. Carson and Greta end up in a showing of *The Wizard of Oz*, kind of trying to like hide and catch their breath, and you see so many scenes of violence. I won't go into all of 'em, but you cut back to Max and Esther kissing, and then one final cut to Carson trying to hold Greta's hand, and Greta pulls her hand away.

So that was *A League of Their Own*.

[00:21:19] **Malinda:** Very excellent recap. That was great.

[00:21:21] **Laurel:** Ugh, I just like, I really wanted to, like, hopefully everyone's seen it if you're listening to this, but like, I really wanted to emphasize how like it was so much joy, right? And then so much terror, like literal terror, the way that they intersplice those two scenes. But then also I, I do appreciate that they at least kept like Max's happiness intact, cuz I don't think I could have survived.

But yeah. Uh, Malinda, could you take us through *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*?

[00:21:48] **Malinda:** So in the *Telegraph Club*, Lily and Kath, Go to the Telegraph Club often, and I don't think Lily really understands the danger in it. She's very naive. So this one night they go to the Telegraph Club. It's after she and Kath have started their romantic relationship. And, it's interrupted by a bar raid. I'm just gonna read about one page.

Kath grabbed hold of a stranger's arm and asked, "What happened?"

The woman was in a suit; she dragged her arm away and called over her shoulder, "Cops! The club's being raided!"

Lily was still holding Kath's hand, and Kath squeezed her fingers as she peered down the hall of the door. It was a back exit. "Come on," Kath said she tugged Lily into the hallway, joining the exodus. Lily could smell the fog seeping inside.

Kath abruptly halted and dragged her out of the way. "Wait—I left my coat."

The panic of the crowd was contagious, and Lily's only thought now was escape. "Can't you leave it?"

Kath shook her head. "My identification's in the pocket. You go ahead. I'll meet you out there."

"Isn't it fake? Just leave it!" Lily wouldn't let go of her hand.

"I forgot to leave my real one at home. I have to get it. You go—meet me on our corner, okay?" Kath squeezed Lily's hand once more, and then Kath went back down the hall going against the tide of women leaving Lily alone.

A woman brushed past her advising, "You better get outta here unless you wanna get caught."

Heart pounding, Lily followed everyone else outside and into a narrow alley. It was very dark and it smelled like urine. Up above, the buildings loomed black against a cloud-covered night sky. Only a few windows were lit, and Lily was reminded of how late it was. Everyone emerging from the Telegraph Club seemed to be heading to one or the other end of the alley, and Lily went to the left—she thought that way was Columbus Avenue—but when she emerged onto a side street she didn't recognize, she stopped. She looked back down the alley. The open door cast a rectangle of yellow light onto the ground, illuminating a puddle of rank liquid that several women splashed through as they ran out of the building. There was no sign of Kath. Voices came now, loud and insistent. Men's voices—and then men in uniform, wielding flashlights.

[00:24:15] **Audrey:** Oh, that was so good. Thank you. Are you sure you were ready for that?

[00:24:18] **Laurel:** I was not ready for that.

[00:24:20] **Malinda:** I used to do speech competition a long time ago. I mean, I was a theater kid, so...

[00:24:26] **Audrey:** Okay.

[00:24:27] **Laurel:** Oh, that's why that worked. Oh, great. Okay. Yeah. Oh man. So I know that you've done so much research on lesbian bars, especially at that time. Could you talk about the bar raids and what that was about?

[00:24:41] **Malinda:** Yeah, so San Francisco in the early 1950s was actually kind of a hotspot for gay nightlife. There was a California Supreme Court decision, I think in 1951, *Stoumen v. Reilly*, which legalized the public assembly of homosexuals, which means you could assemble at a bar. You could go to a bar, however, homosexual behavior was still illegal.

So for a few years the police kind of held off on raids. They certainly raided many bars before. I mean, that's what led to that California Supreme Court decision, but after that decision, they had to figure out new ways to justify a bar raid. And that happened during the change of the political administration.

I think around 1954, a new mayor was elected and he was more conservative than the previous mayor. And bar raids started to ramp up again. And in this time period, starting in the mid '50s, you would have cops going undercover to bars, like pretending that they were gay so they could entrap someone.

And that became much more prevalent in the mid 1950s. So the bar raid in *Telegraph Club* is inspired by a real one that happened in 1954 at a place called Tommy's Place, and it was raided by the cops, and they supposedly found heroin in the bathroom. Many reports out of the gay community afterward and through historians believed that those drugs were planted by the cops, and they actually ended up arresting a Black man for dealing marijuana.

It was a very messed up situation. I mean, it was incredibly racist, incredibly homophobic, and incredibly transphobic. So it was not a good situation. Um, the bar owners were arrested. I think one of them was in jail for quite a while. The owner of Tommy's Place, Tommy Vasu, who was a well known lesbian-about-town at the time, didn't get arrested that night and continued operating a couple of bars, but later Tommy was arrested for drugs, and I'm really curious what happened to Tommy Vasu. The story behind Tommy's life is fascinating and also very murky. Like it's not really clear what happened, but they were murdered later. Anyway, I went off on a tangent!

[00:27:02] **Laurel:** No, that's...

[00:27:03] **Audrey:** Oh my god.

[00:27:04] **Malinda:** True crime.

[00:27:06] **Audrey:** I feel like we could have an entire season just dedicated to like bars of yore.

[00:27:11] **Malinda:** Yeah, yeah. And so you can still visit Tommy's place in San Francisco, Like, it doesn't exist as Tommy's place anymore. It's now Spec's. It's on Columbus Avenue. You can go in there. It's just a regular old bar and uh, you can hang out there and feel the vibes.

[00:27:29] **Audrey:** I swear this is just a coincidence, but I just realized I'm wearing a Stud sweatshirt, which is another historic—I mean, I think it was established in maybe like the '60s, so a little bit later.

[00:27:40] **Malinda:** Is it gone now? I can't remember.

[00:27:42] **Audrey:** So the physical location is gone sadly, but a cooperative has formed and so they are selling sweaters.

[00:27:49] **Malinda:** I've been to The Stud.

[00:27:52] **Audrey:** I feel like the parallels between the book and the show, especially with the spar scene, are so interesting cuz they're both huge turning points in the story. Right? In the book, Lily and Kath get separated. In the show, Greta and Jo get separated. But then I think maybe more importantly, like something big and important is taken away from the protagonist after the, the bar raid, right?

Like, I mean we've been spoiling the book so I'm just gonna say it, but Lily doesn't get to see Kath again until the epilogue after that point, right?

[00:28:22] **Malinda:** I know that was very sad. I wrestled a lot with what to do there because I knew there had to be a consequence. I mean, Lily had to understand that this is a dangerous thing for her to be doing, and that's where the story was going. Yeah. But it made me very sad too.

[00:28:39] **Laurel:** Well, that's actually something that we kind of wanted to touch on because I think this is another parallel too, but this notion of endings that aren't necessarily happy, but are hopeful, and it sounds like that's what you were, you were kind of aiming for there. How did you, how did you end up going that direction?

[00:28:55] **Malinda:** It seemed very clear to me what needed to happen because, because of Lily's family, she's a Chinese American girl and a Chinese American family. It's 1954. They're not okay with her being gay, like they're just not. So they're not homophobic in the way that some people would think. I mean, they, they don't wanna convert her or anything.

They just want that to be quieted. They don't want anyone to know, and they want to remove her from what they see as the source of the problem.

[00:29:24] **Laurel:** Right.

[00:29:24] **Malinda:** So I felt like that was a very Chinese way to deal with it. They just take her away from San Francisco, and I knew that that's what had to happen. And so it was sad, but it could have been worse.

[00:29:39] **Laurel:** It could have been worse.

[00:29:40] **Audrey:** It could have been way worse.

[00:29:41] **Laurel:** And then we got that really sweet reunion scene. So that was really nice.

[00:29:44] **Malinda:** That's right! Because I wanted to make it clear that, you know, at the time in the book, she's under the control of her parents. She's a minor, she's 17. She doesn't have financial independence, so she has to do what they want. But you know what happens? Time passes! She does become an adult, and she starts to gain her own independence. And when she has that, she can make her own choices. And so I wanted to show some of that.

[00:30:12] **Audrey:** When you started writing the book, did you have that epilogue in mind? Like did you know that you were gonna end there?

[00:30:17] **Malinda:** No, I had no idea because the first draft of the book, there was no romance in it. I mean, they were just, she and Lily and Kath were just friends. Yeah, I didn't intend to write a romance because I thought, *Oh, that's just totally unrealistic for you to like fall in love with the very first lesbian you ever meet?*

[All laugh]

[00:30:37] **Laurel:** Yeah...

[00:30:37] **Malinda:** Exactly, there's plenty of precedence for this. Yeah, there's plenty of precedence. So when I wrote the first draft, I realized at the end of it they really liked each other, like they had come to life through the writing of the book, and they really liked each other. And I realized it would be a much better story if I allowed them to act on their feelings.

[00:31:00] **Laurel:** I totally cannot relate to someone falling in love with their high school best friend either, like, that's so weird.

[00:31:07] **Malinda:** Totally unrealistic.

[00:31:09] **Audrey:** Never. It never happens.

[00:31:10] **Malinda:** No.

[00:31:11] **Laurel:** I actually feel like we have time for something that's not related to *A League of Their Own*. Audrey, do you wanna talk about food?

[00:31:21] **Audrey:** I do, I have a very important question about food. So this really caught my attention when I first read last night at the Telegraph Club. The way that you talk about food and like the way that you describe food. I think it jumped out at me, but then it also strangely like pulled me deeper into the story.

And I think it has to do with partially because of like my familiarity with the food. It's stuff that I grew up eating too. I was talking to Laurel about it yesterday and she found this blog post that you made about Chinese food in 1950s America. I think it was part of the research that you

were doing where you described food as thi part of world building, and I was like, *Oh my god, of course*. Like it totally clicked and that, that made a lot of sense. But I love how you, you also bookend your book with food, like literally on page five you're talking about eating crispy chicken and then towards the end, I think right before the epilogue you end on steam buns.

Yeah. I would just love to hear, hear you talk about food cuz I just, I love food.

[00:32:15] **Malinda:** Oh, well I love food too. I mean, I have to put food in everything cuz I love it. I love to cook. I wrote my master's thesis on Chinese food.

[00:32:22] **Laurel:** Whoa.

[00:32:23] **Audrey:** Oh, really? No way.

[00:32:25] **Malinda:** If anyone's really interested they could read it. Extremely academic paper I wrote about Chinese cookbooks in America. It is on my website. Yeah.

[00:32:34] **Audrey:** That's amazing.

[00:32:36] **Laurel:** That sounds amazing actually. Yeah.

[00:32:38] **Malinda:** It's very academic.

[00:32:40] **Audrey:** Okay.

[00:32:40] **Malinda:** I will warn you. There's a lot of jargon in it. But yeah, I love food and I, I love to use it to create, to do world building, you know, And it's also great fun to research the food , which I also did. I mostly researched it by emailing my parents, to be honest, because. My parents were, um, they were in China in the 1950s, not in the US but Chinese food changes over decades.

You know, for example, there was no general toast chicken in the 1950s that didn't exist until the 1970s. So I wanted to make sure that the kind of food that Lily was eating was accurate to the time period and also accurate to her family's cultures. So yeah, I did a lot of interviewing my parents and, um, I dug up my cookbook research and I found.

Cookbook from the 19, late 1940s, early 1950s to see what recipes were in there. And it's really fascinating because there were no dumplings in those cookbooks.

[00:33:38] **Laurel:** Blew my mind.

[00:33:39] **Malinda:** Yeah. Yeah, isn't that crazy? It's like they didn't, I mean that people ate dumplings in China, but in the US so much of American Chinese food came from Southern China.

And um, Cantonese cuisine doesn't have the same kind of dumplings that we think of today when we think of Chinese dumplings. So it was different kind of food and it was really interesting to learn that

[00:34:01] **Laurel:** Does it feel like extra vindicating to have your own research resurface and like other, like more of your own work? It's like, yes.

[00:34:09] **Audrey:** It's like you're new.

[00:34:10] **Malinda:** Well, that's the weird thing, like I've been collecting books my whole life, right? Like I pick up books that I'm interested in, a lot of nonfiction, and I don't really know why I'm interested in it. You know, I find myself, as I continue to write books, I realize I got that book like 15 years ago because I'm gonna write a book that uses it

[00:34:30] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:34:31] **Audrey:** Mm.

[00:34:31] **Malinda:** it's so strange, and I think it's just speaks to how much my subconscious has to do with the writing process. Like I think I control it, but I don't really, It's, yeah,

[00:34:43] **Audrey:** It's just constant inception over there,

[00:34:46] **Malinda:** it's,

[00:34:46] **Laurel:** good that you keep following, following those signals too. Just like, All right, I'll get it. I don't, I don't know why, but I'm picking up this

[00:34:53] **Malinda:** yeah. No, seriously, it's happened several times now and it's fascinating. So when I'm interested in a, in a book that I want to. Now I just get it cuz who knows. It'll probably come up like 10 years from now,

[00:35:04] **Laurel:** I feel like I've never like regretted purchasing a book. It's like, Oh, I'm so glad that I have this, you know, Or I'm so mad that I have this. It's like, Nope, as long I can.

[00:35:12] **Malinda:** Yeah. That's.

[00:35:14] **Audrey:** last thing I'd love to ask before we move into, um, a scattered flight is, we know your book has resonated with a large swath of, you know, people like from like probably baby to adulthood. But I'm really curious, like if you've gotten any feedback from queer women who were actually around during this time.

I'm sure you, it was part of your research, but I'm, I'm curious, like if you've actually heard from, you know, anyone who was like Lily's age during that time?

[00:35:38] **Malinda:** I don't know if I have, other than the people that I talked to when I was researching the book, they have now read it and they really appreciate the connections and I thought that that was very fulfilling to me. I've definitely heard from older readers. I have heard from people who had family members who grew up in the Bay Area at the time, and I've heard their family stories, you know, and then they write to me and say that they're gonna give it to their aunt or whatever, and yeah.

So I hope that they liked it. Yeah. So I, I'm sure that there are some people who are, For who grew up at that time period, who may have found it or who may be finding it. I don't think I've heard from anyone directly, but definitely from their descendants who find my website and email me. Right . It's really incredible.

[00:36:22] **Audrey:** So great.

[00:36:24] **Laurel:** Um, okay. Let's get into *A Scatter of Light*. Could you talk to us a little bit about what people can expect? And I know I have a sense of it because I subscribe to your newsletter and you've been teasing out teasers and they've been great. But yeah. Could you tell us a little bit about your upcoming book?

[00:36:41] **Malinda:** Sure. So *A Scatter of Light* is set in 2013. It's built as a companion novel to last night at The Telegraph Club. And I do think it is a companion novel, but I will not tell you how, uh, It's not about Lily. Okay. There's a new character. It's about an 18 year old girl named Aria Tang West. And Aria is spending the summer between high school and college at her grandmother's house in Northern California, in Marin County, and she is there.

She doesn't really wanna be there. She thought she would be somewhere else during the summer, but. There was a last minute unfortunate change in plans. So she's spending the summer with her grandmother, and that's where she meets her grandmother's gardener. This woman named Steph, and she's immediately attracted to Steph. Aira has never been attracted to women before. This is totally new to her. She's really into Steph. Unfortunately, Steph has a girlfriend. So there's um, some complicated things happening in a scatter of light. It's about coming of age. It's about complicated, like messy first love. And it's also about art. Aria's grandmother is an artist and Aria starts to just explore some aspects of her own desire to create art as well during the summer.

So I would warn everyone that it is not happily ever after romance. I'm just gonna warn you right there.

[00:38:04] **Laurel:** Do people come up to you if you don't do that, and it's like, Hey, wait a second. I thought this was a...

[00:38:08] **Malinda:** I just know that people have read *Telegraph Club* and they think many people think of it as a happily ever after romance. So I just want you all to know that *A Scatter of Light* is not a romance, and it is a difficult, messy novel that I actually think is quite sad in some parts. So it's, yeah, just a warning.

But I love this book. It was a difficult book for me to write, and I'm, I'm nervous for it to come out because it is quite different from *Telegraph Club*. But at the same time, you will find out more of what happens to Lily and Kath.

[00:38:41] **Laurel:** Cool.

[00:38:41] **Audrey:** Ooh, okay.

[00:38:43] **Malinda:** So you will find out, it will become clear to you why it is a companion novel if you read it. But I cannot spoil that for you.

[00:38:50] **Laurel:** Can I ask, you said it's a, it was a difficult book to write. Can I ask, um, in what ways?

[00:38:54] **Malinda:** Well, the publishing journey of it was very hard.

[00:38:57] **Laurel:** What were you wearing your national book award medal at the time? Like, *I don't know if you noticed the medal.*

[00:39:03] **Malinda:** No, because I first wrote *A Scatter of Light* in 2013. That's why it said in

[00:39:08] **Laurel:** cool. Yeah. Yeah.

[00:39:09] **Audrey:** Oh,

[00:39:10] **Laurel:** So it was contemporary at the time. Interesting. Yeah.

[00:39:12] **Malinda:** Yeah, it was a contemporary at the time. I'm not sure that 2013 counts as historic yet.

[00:39:15] **Laurel:** Right. Yeah.

[00:39:16] **Malinda:** You think it does like.

[00:39:19] **Audrey:** The way that things move...

[00:39:20] **Laurel:** The way that time is moving, especially right now. Yeah.

[00:39:22] **Malinda:** Yeah, no, in 2013 it was, I wrote it and it was, I think that young adult publishing was not ready for this book at the time.

[00:39:30] **Laurel:** Oh wow, yeah.

[00:39:31] **Malinda:** It was rejected by basically everybody in the business. And then, two books later, my editor that I work with now wanted to buy it, so then I revised it after *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*.

There was this weird, convoluted publishing journey, but it was also hard to write because there's a lot of hard feelings in it. There's a lot of difficult emotions. And I mean, when I wrote *Telegraph Club*, parts of that were very difficult too, especially the ending scenes with Lily and her mom. Like I had a headache the entire time I worked on it.

[00:40:05] **Laurel:** Oh man.

[00:40:06] **Malinda:** Every time I went back through them, I felt pain.

[00:40:11] **Audrey:** I mean, you were probably experiencing her trauma like over and over again.

[00:40:15] **Malinda:** Exactly. It's a hazard. It's truly a hazard of writing. Yeah, so I don't know. I keep writing these books that are hard to write. I guess I should write a fun, happy, fluffy novel so I can just be in a good mood.

[00:40:32] **Laurel:** Just like a gay cooking reality show novel. I don't know.

[00:40:38] **Audrey:** I'm curious, do you consider the ending of *Telegraph Club* to be happily ever after? It sounds like we know what your audience thinks, but what do you think?

[00:40:46] **Malinda:** You know, I'm not sure that I do because I don't think that I think of *Telegraph Club* as a romance novel, and I think that if you read it as a romance novel, then sure it does have kind of a happy ending. But I wrote it as a coming of age novel. You know, the central conflict is with Lily and her identity and her family to some extent, like the romance with Kath is part of her coming of age, but it is... I would say it's not the primary plot of the book, so that is why I think, I don't think of it as a, as a happy romance ending.

[00:41:24] **Laurel:** That makes sense.

[00:41:25] **Audrey:** Yeah. Yeah, I can see that.

[00:41:26] **Malinda:** But you could read it that way if you want!

[00:41:30] **Audrey:** Yeah. I think I've, I've always thought of it as like, as Laurel like alluded to earlier, like defiantly hopeful, which I think is very different and defiant in the sense that, you know, it sort of subverts the classic lesbian period drama trope, right? Where people have to like really suffer or oftentimes die, you know, in the end.

[00:41:48] **Laurel:** One of them is like, institutionalized or something like,

[00:41:51] **Audrey:** Exactly. Yeah.

[00:41:52] **Malinda:** I wasn't gonna do that.

[00:41:53] **Laurel:** Yeah. Okay. I like that Lily reads the ending finally to that book that she saw in the drugstore, and it's like she wants to throw it across the room.

[00:42:03] **Audrey:** Yeah.

[00:42:04] **Malinda:** Yeah, that was definitely based on a real pulp novel and you know, they had to end that way due to obscenity laws at the time. So I'm sure the writers didn't necessarily want to make it a terrible ending, but they were forced to.

[00:42:17] **Audrey:** Yeah, I think that's probably why, and we haven't really talked about this at all, even though it fits into the mid-century sapphic universe or multiverse, but that's why I feel like *The Price of Salt / Carol* also kind of stood out for the time, cuz it was probably one of the only books that didn't end that way.

[00:42:32] **Malinda:** Absolutely, yeah. And that book was definitely a big influence on me when I was writing *Telegraph Club*. So I know you've all discussed *Carol* many times on this podcast.

[00:42:43] **Audrey:** And that I think will continue. So before we wrap up, as we mentioned in the beginning, *A Scatter of Light* is coming out very soon. Can you tell our listeners where they can pre-order your book?

[00:43:02] **Laurel:** That is something that I did wanna ask you about. Yes, please tell us where you can pre-order it, but then also if you wouldn't mind, like I think our listeners would be really interested in hearing why preorders are kind of so important for novels that are coming out.

[00:43:15] **Malinda:** Well, I think preorders are great because they show the publisher that there's interest in the book and that's always very helpful. We want the publisher to think people actually wanna read it, so that's the main reason that pre-orders are so helpful, and I am very fortunate that *A Scatter of Light* is coming out in several exciting, exclusive editions.

Like you can order the regular one, which is still beautiful and wonderful and I can sign it and personalize it for you and give you a bookmark. And you can order that from my local independent bookstore, Porter Square Books. Or you can order the Barnes & Noble exclusive edition, which has a different color cover and fancy endpapers, and I wrote a special essay for it. And you can order that from Barnes & Noble.

And then there's also for UK folks, or for people who want to pay for shipping from the UK, you can order the Illumicrate hardcover edition of *A Scatter of Light*.

[00:44:15] **Audrey:** Illumicrate!

[00:44:16] **Malinda:** Yes, Illumicrate. And they did a thing, They have it as a set, so you get both *A Scatter of Light* and *Last Night at the Telegraph Club* as a set. And they both have special endpapers and fancy sprayed edges. And I signed those.

[00:44:32] **Laurel:** Whoa.

[00:44:33] **Malinda:** There are many ways to get it, and they're all listed on my website at malindalo.com/scatter. So you can go there and find them all, or you can order it from your local independent bookstore as well.

[00:44:47] **Laurel:** We will link to that in the show notes. I did want to point out, I looked at, I think, one of the more recent editions of *Last Night at the Telegraph Club*, and you can almost not see the cover because of all the awards that are on it.

[00:44:59] **Malinda:** A lot of stickers on it.

[00:45:00] **Laurel:** It's really, it's really cool, but also like wow.

[00:45:04] **Malinda:** That doesn't now. It's not something you ever think is gonna happen for you, amazing.

[00:45:10] **Laurel:** You didn't tell the illustrator to just...

[00:45:11] **Audrey:** ...*Just makes some room here for all these awards that are gonna show up.*

[00:45:16] **Malinda:** The cover is so great, and so

[00:45:18] **Audrey:** It's beautiful. I love the cover.

[00:45:20] **Laurel:** Yeah.

[00:45:21] **Malinda:** large part of it is obscured by the stickers. And I'm, I'm, I'm kind of both. Uh, I have mixed feelings about this. You.

[00:45:30] **Audrey:** Stop winning awards, Malinda, Like just

[00:45:33] **Malinda:** Oh, well, award season is over for *Telegraph Club*, so I'm done. There's no more.

[00:45:37] **Laurel:** Okay. The stickers aren't covering like Kath and Lily in the door.

[00:45:43] **Malinda:** They're not. They shrink the stickers so that they would not cover Lily and Kath.

[00:45:49] **Audrey:** I'm like looking at this now. I wanna...I don't think I have the latest one. I think there's only one sticker on mine.

[00:45:55] **Laurel:** Yeah, I've got the, I've got the one. All right. Well, thank you so much, Malinda, for taking the time to talk to us. It was really great hearing more insights on the book and what you thought about the show. If our discussions sparked any new thoughts or feelings about *Last Night at the Telegraph Club* or *A League of Their Own*, you can post a comment on Instagram @SapphicCultureClub.

You can tweet your opinions at us @SapphicPodcast, or you can email us at SapphicCultureClub@Gmail.com.

[00:46:22] **Audrey:** And finally you can find a link to the episode transcript. Thanks to other things we've mentioned and Malinda has mentioned in the description of the episode, wherever you're listening to this podcast. Thank you once again, Malinda. Such an honor to have you here.

[00:46:38] **Malinda:** Oh, thank you so much. You guys are great. was fun.

[00:46:42] **Laurel:** Talk to you later everybody. Bye.