

APL Volumes

Season 3, Episode 5: LOUISE AND LOUISA

*This episode was transcribed by APL volunteer Martha Ladyman.*

BEGIN TRANSCRIPT

MUSIC

Hello, fellow lit lovers, and welcome to Season Three of APL Volumes, coming to you from the very heart of downtown Austin, your Central Library. I'm your host, Genn Mehalik, avid reader and admin senior for the Customer Access Division of APL. This season we are turning the pages to explore the intriguing connections between books and the lives of their authors. Each episode will have a unique theme and guest. All of our guests are fellow staff members, brilliant, passionate folks that I am so lucky to work with. So I'm very excited to hear their hot takes. Whether you are a dedicated bibliophile or just looking to add a new chapter to your podcast playlist, you can go to bed at night knowing APL Volumes, Season Three, was made just for you.

This episode is all about children's books and the people who write them, and I'm talking with Cristina Casas, who is an adult services librarian, ironically, here at the Central Library.

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GENN: Hello.

CRISTINA: Hello.

GENN: Today our episode is about children's authors, although I hesitate to say children's because it could be like Young Adult. That's a whole youth genre. So anybody who writes for people teens or younger.

CRISTINA: It's funny you say that because I was reading about my author, and there is a point where one of the children's books they wrote is meant to be either a children's book or a loving homage to anyone who grew up in that city. Adults would respond to it too.

GENN: Speaking of that, there are like so many books in the library that seem that they are in the wrong place. Like kid's books, they look like kid's books but they are in the adult floors. People are like, they think it is in the wrong place. But a lot of times people write books to look like kid's books that are not kid's books at all.

CRISTINA: Adult.

GENN: Yeah. Or sometimes you'll just find a book in the kid's stuff that's for kids but it doesn't look anything like a picture book. It looks like a novel. It's just the design. I don't know. That made me think of that and how people get confused and put them in the wrong places a lot.

CRISTINA: Oh, yeah, it's such a tricky thing for any cataloguing and collection, like, selection team deciding the call number and where it's going to go ultimately. Especially for those books that are kind of in those gray areas, tween to teen. It's really hard.

GENN: Yeah, and when you have a library like ours, which is so big, and we have rooms for different ages, there is this divide. If you put it in one place, you've decided that's where it goes. And so if an adult wants to read a certain book, like *Mary Poppins* or something, they will have to go to the kid's area to find it.

CRISTINA: Or like, I think the really common thing is when something is Young Adult, and then the author, it's a series and it evolves and suddenly now there are adult themes in the Young Adult. And so suddenly the entire series has to move up to the adult floors.

GENN: Or like it is in J, which is Juvenile, and it has to go to Y, which is older teen.

CRISTINA: And then sometimes we on the fourth floor will get teens looking for the book. And they are just surprised that it is on the adult floor. "Yeah, like the later books are going to have some intense topics, so you've graduated your reading level!"

GENN: And you have to keep the series together. You can't separate them.

CRISTINA: Because then it looks weird.

GENN: And it feels weird.

I will just tell you who I, because it is like suspense, and you don't know who I chose, but I chose Louisa May Alcott. She wrote *Little Women*.

CRISTINA: She did!

GENN: And wow, I had no idea that there is this whole debate, I guess you can say, about whether she was trans or queer at all. Some people think that, there's a lot of people who feel like you can't speak for somebody who's no longer here. But like then if you look at all her letters, she spoke a lot for herself in the letters.

But yeah, we'll talk about, I'll give you some quotes later.

CRISTINA: I'm going to get so emotional. I love Louisa May Alcott. I love *Little Women*. Jo, she was my absolute fave. Like I loved her so much. I reread it, it got to the point where I would reread it, but I would just read the parts with Jo. Like her love story. I was just like, she's amazing. I want to be her.

GENN: Do you know about her dad? In real life, her dad?

CRISTINA: No!

GENN: He was like one of the fathers of transcendentalism. He was part of the start of that whole movement and was friends with Walt Whitman, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and all these famous people. And he was like either considered crazy by a lot of people in the area or really respected also. It could go either way. It was just, he was very different.

This was during times of slavery and he was antislavery. He started schools in his little garage or something and he would teach kids. A lot of parents respected him so they enrolled their kids in his school. They did really well in all this. But then he enrolled a Black student, and then all these parents took their kids out because that was like integration. Yeah, it was still like the 1800s.

CRISTINA: Yeah, that was before .... So my author grew up in the Deep South. And I think the 1960's is when integration happened. And it like, it brushes on how the author was living in New York City at the time, but she was very pro-integration. It had taken too long.

And she was very done with all the people complaining about it. She was like, "This took too long. Y'all are ridiculous. You need to get over it. This was a long time coming." That's so cool.

GENN: The writer of your book?

CRISTINA: The writer of my book. The writer, author, illustrator. She didn't like the South. One, she didn't care for segregation at all. She never did. She thought it was a big injustice.

And then two, because she thought it was a big injustice and she hated the small-town mindset of where she grew up, Tennessee, she moved to New York City as soon as she could. And she had dreams of going to Paris and being a lovely queer lady in Paris doing all the queer things.

GENN: Tell us who it is.

CRISTINA: So I chose Louise Fitzhugh.

GENN: Oh, their names are so close. Louise, Louisa. Although apparently Louisa went by Lou and Louie. Like that's what she chose to go by.

CRISTINA: Just like Jo!

So, Louise Fitzhugh, writer and illustrator for *Harriet the Spy* and also *Suzuki Beane*. She illustrated *Suzuki Beane*. And yeah, she grew up in the Deep South. She was born in Memphis, Tennessee, to little Miss Mary Louise Perkins and Millsaps Fitzhugh.

GENN: Millsaps?

CRISTINA: Millsaps. A very Southern name.

GENN: Wow, I've never heard that name before.

CRISTINA: It's not common anymore. But when I heard it I was like, "Oh, yeah, we're in the Deep South." Millsaps. It's kind of like Fitzwilliam in *Pride and Prejudice*. I think that's Darcy's first name. Fitzwilliam.

GENN: You're speaking my language. Tennessee. I'm from Florida and it's not very far. It's very beautiful actually, but I totally get it. It's very southern and conservative. So she wanted out of there her whole life?

CRISTINA: She wanted out of there her whole life. She, I don't know if she knew, no, yeah, she knew. She like dated guys and it never, from what it sounds like it was never, like, fulfilling. She was also very, not squeamish but like awkward about heterosexual affection with her male partners.

GENN: Like PDA?

CRISTINA: Uh-huh. And like kissing and all that. Like it didn't attract her. And so then she got a crush, as we all do, she got a crush on a girl in high school, and she was like, "Whoa. That's where my brain is going." And so from that point on, she knew she preferred women.

GENN: Was she open about it, even at that age?

CRISTINA: It's interesting. She, because she lived in the Deep South she was, I would say, in the closet. But as soon as she moved to New York City she was like, "I'm done with this."

But she did inherit a large sum of money from her grandmother once her grandmother passed. And her father gave her a monthly allowance. And so the nice thing is, she didn't have to work because she could exist solely on that allowance. But she had to behave just enough that her father would give her the allowance every month.

So I think, you know, he would write letters to her asking how she was doing, she would give some generic response, and he would send her the money. So in that regard.....

GENN: She knew that not behaving, not being herself, basically....

CRISTINA: She didn't talk about the fact that she was frequenting as many lesbian and queer clubs as she could. That she was dating as many women as she could. She didn't mention she had moved on from wearing feminine clothing to exclusively men's clothing and then just having them tailored to fit her body.

GENN: What year, like around when, was she in New York?

CRISTINA: She was in New York from, she moved there as soon as she, she didn't graduate college.

GENN: Gave up?

CRISTINA: She ran away from college. So I would say probably from early twenties. So let's see. Trying to think. 1961 she was around 33, so probably ten years?

GENN: So like the fifties?

CRISTINA: Fifties.

And she lived in Greenwich Village, which is historically a very queer...

GENN: Yeah, Stonewall.

CRISTINA: Yeah. So that's where she was living. And she always had dreams of eventually running away to Paris, because she heard about all the lesbian writers, lesbian artists who were living there and could be out and open and no one cared. And that's what she ultimately wanted.

So she did eventually, because of that inheritance money, she was able to go to Europe. And I have this lovely, like, when I was reading the biography on her:

"She was a fabulous queer woman doing fabulous queer traveling and having fabulous queer coffee with other fabulous queer ladies."

Literally that's what she was doing. She was making art. I think she helped make some murals in Italy. She dated a woman that she met in America, then they broke up, then she met another lady in like Paris. They briefly dated. She did infamously meet a man who she was very passionate about in Italy and they had a sordid love affair but she ultimately broke it off because she just couldn't stand waking up to a man in her bed. It just felt wrong.

GENN: Wow.

CRISTINA: So she broke it off.

GENN: Like she was like morally opposed or something?

CRISTINA: She was just like, "I can't. I can't do this."

GENN: It's funny, because I cannot picture her and see what she was like in my head. When did she *write Harriet the Spy*? And why?

CRISTINA: She wrote it in her thirties. So *Harriet the Spy* was published after *Suzuki Beane*. I think I have the price. *Suzuki Beane* was published, and a copy cost \$2.50. which is equivalent to \$26.82 today, which is about the price of a hardcover now. So the rates stayed the same.

*Suzuki Beane* is infamously kind of like a parody of the Eloise in the hotel, that style, but *Suzuki Beane* is Louise Fitzhugh and her friend Sandra's response to that rich girl who lives in New York City. We don't want to do that. Ours is going to be like off the beaten path, quite literally. And she is going to be eccentric, and she's going to be wild.

Louise had this idea of *Suzuki Beane*, has wild hair because she doesn't care and kind of does whatever she wants. She's got eccentric parents and all these kind of eccentric kooky characters in her life.

GENN: Huh. I never heard of that book. Or is it a series?

CRISTINA: It's just the one book. It was written by Louise's friend Sandra and then Louise illustrated it. Because, like, it's funny. I think it kind of gets lost. Louise is known for *Harriet the Spy*, for writing it. She wrote a series of one-act plays. But she was also a prolific artist. Apparently her friends would talk about how she was just

constantly sketching, constantly doodling. She would wake up in the morning and doodle. You would be talking to her on the phone, you could hear her sketching something out.

GENN: She sounds cool.

CRISTINA: She was always in motion, it sounds like. So she illustrated *Suzuki Beane*, and so famously I think Sandra wrote it in a lower-case typewriter, which was probably incredible. And she left enough space for Louise to just go all out with the illustrations.

And Louise had this idea of just these girls dancing and frolicking and doing whatever they want. Being very like joyful and energetic. Which is so very cool.

GENN: Which is like free. It sounds probably like nothing nowadays. But that was not how girls were portrayed back then, especially in Louisa May Alcott's time. How Jo was very free. Apparently she herself was also like somebody who couldn't sit still as a kid and was constantly .... Basically, they called her wild. Her dad, both of her parents but especially her dad, he didn't believe in spanking. But he spanked her because she was so rebellious.

CRISTINA: It's like, "I don't believe in spanking but you're the exception."

GENN: Yeah, exactly. One kid out of like four or five. Or six. I can't remember how many there were.

CRISTINA: So a family of six children. You are the one getting spanked. Go, Louisa May Alcott.

GENN: The point being both of them seem to be ...

CRISTINA: In motion.

GENN: Yeah. Like tomboys. I know mine was, just from what I've read. And she always said she felt like she was a boy in a woman's body, or a girl's body when she was young. And she said it all the way up until like right before she died, in letters. That she always felt like she was in the wrong body. Which was interesting.

CRISTINA: Oh, wow. Yeah, that is interesting. Little Miss Louise Fitzhugh, little Miss Hugh-Hugh, I don't think she ever felt like that. But she did feel better dressing masculine. Or as masculine as she could.

But from what it sounds like, it sounds like she loved frequenting like lesbian bars, queer bars.

GENN: It's interesting too that both of our authors, they were not ashamed of these qualities. They both wrote characters that shared the qualities.

CRISTINA: Jo is written with such, you can tell she's written with such compassion in *Little Women*. Louisa May Alcott really took the time to develop Jo.

GENN: It's funny that you say that because apparently she didn't want to write that book and they kind of pressured her to. She didn't want to write about girlhood. She just thought it was boring. She didn't relate to it. She felt like more of a boy. She really thought about that, about herself. And so like writing about girlhood or being a lady or whatever was like *eugh* to her.

But then she did it and like you say she wrote it with such compassion, and I think it was just like based on her. I don't think she tried necessarily.

CRISTINA: I think that carries to Miss Louise. Like, *Suzuki Beane* is illustrated with such compassion. And then *Harriet the Spy*, she is who she is. She doesn't care. She's a tomboy. She has her opinions. She's a very opinionated little girl.

GENN: I loved *Harriet the Spy* when I was a kid. The movie came out when I was probably like ten or eleven or something, and I remember the VHS tape was bright orange, because it was like a Nickelodeon-produced movie. And all the VHS tapes were black. So that was like the only one that was a different color and it was really cool.

And after I watched *Harriet the Spy* I started keeping a composition notebook to write all of the things that I spied. I would walk around the neighborhood and like hide in people's bushes and spy. I was like stalking my neighbors, OK? I was like a child Peeping Tom.

CRISTINA: You were Harriet the spy. Spying on alligators in Florida.

GENN: Basically. And I was like, "Drinking coffee." Everything was so suspicious to me. I lived in a trailer park, and I would like look in the trailer windows.

CRISTINA: Harriet the spy. Exclusively in Florida. Spying on alligators.

GENN: Yup. But I never saw anything scandalous. I mean, it all felt very scandalous.

CRISTINA: It always does at that age.

GENN: I had a whole make-believe world where definitely scandals were happening. But luckily I didn't actually do anything horrible or bad, you know. And I didn't destroy any lives or see any X-rated things.

CRISTINA: Your friends didn't steal your composition book?

GENN: No, but I was really worried about that because we've all seen the movie. If I am playing this role, this might happen.

CRISTINA: And I have to apologize to everyone.

GENN: And I had two specific friends in my neighborhood who would play this with me. But nobody was as dedicated as I was.

CRISTINA: How cute!

GENN: They were like, "Oh, spying again?" And I was like, "What do you mean? It's a way of life!"

CRISTINA: That's so adorable! I was reading that so many people played pretend and played the spy and apparently Louise Fitzhugh was adamant that she did not care for pretend. And my conspiracy theory is that she did not care for pretend because she grew up, she was mostly raised by her father, Mr. Millsaps Fitzhugh, and he would play pretend with her but it was always a power trip for him. He would try to win any pretend games.

GENN: That's not fun.

CRISTINA: Yeah. He had to win. Even playing pretend with his daughter.

GENN: Yeah, so she is probably like, "Oh, look at the jam coming from the fairies," and he was like, "That doesn't exist."

CRISTINA: "That doesn't exist. The fairies bow to me." Or something like that.

GENN: Like one-upping her?

CRISTINA: Like constantly having to one-up her. And so it was like, I was reading that and I was like, I think this is the reason why you don't like pretend. Because your father made it extremely not fun.

GENN: And competitive.

CRISTINA: And competitive when it didn't have to be. Pretend should be like doing whatever you want to do.

GENN: Yeah, like nobody is winning the pretend.

CRISTINA: Nobody is winning the pretend. Everyone is winning when everyone is having fun.

GENN: That's funny, because actually this is a fun fact. Louisa May Alcott's dad, his name was ....

CRISTINA: Was it also as interesting as Millsaps Fitzhugh?

GENN: His name was something Bronson Alcott. Like his middle name was Bronson, but everyone called him Bronson. So that's like all I remember right now.

But Bronson was the inventor of recess, apparently.

CRISTINA: That is hilarious.

GENN: Yeah.

CRISTINA: Well, he should have just put a disclaimer for people like Millsaps Fitzhugh a hundred years later. Do not try to make this competitive.

GENN: Yeah, that's true. He should have. Warning. If anyone tries to use this in a competitive way, do not.

CRISTINA: Do not do. That's not how you play recess. Recess is meant to be fun.

GENN: Yes. And you know how I told you he had to open like schools? At various times he like led schools. And he did not believe that children should ever do like work for more than four hours. So that was like their school day. It was like a four-hour school day and then recess somewhere in there. Maybe multiple times. I'm not sure.

But yeah, he was the first one, like an innovator in the educational world.

CRISTINA: In youth education?

GENN: Yeah. And a lot of, like, I was reading something. There's this famous I think psychologist who wrote about child development back when that was like kind of a new thing that was being discussed. His last name was Piaget, he's really famous. I don't remember his first name. But apparently he wrote about Bronson.

CRISTINA: Mr. Bronson Alcott.

GENN: Yeah, like they shared ideas together. You know how there's the Waldorf schools and other movements like that? It's basically he had his own movement.

CRISTINA: The Bronson Movement.

GENN: Yeah, but it didn't have a name.

CRISTINA: Well, we'll just call it the Bronson Movement. Approved by Harriet the spy. Only spend four hours in school. Then playtime for the rest.

GENN: Yeah.

CRISTINA: And if you are a Harriet in Florida, you are going to spy on alligators drinking coffee.

GENN: There are tannins in coffee and in the water where alligators live, which is brown.

CRISTINA: So an alligator could drink coffee?

GENN: It's like tea basically, if you think about it. It's all those leaves that have fallen and they turn the water brown. It's basically tea.

CRISTINA: That's so cute.

GENN: Alligator tea. I'm going to write my own children's book called *Alligator Tea*.

CRISTINA: And you can educate on the tannins. That could be so cute.

GENN: Yes. I can spill the tea, the actual gossip.

CRISTINA: Like spill the tea.

GENN: Yes.

CRISTINA: Because they are doing the spying on the Harriet's who are doing the spying on the alligators.

GENN: Oh my goodness, this is a conception. This is too much.

CRISTINA: It's like bam, boom! All that from playing pretend. It's great.

GENN: OK, something else I wanted to talk about because I think it is cool.

So I told you that her dad basically started the transcendentalist movement. They lived in the Boston area.

CRISTINA: Which is pretty cool.

GENN: Which is where it started, with people such as Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman. They were all friends. She wrote letters to them all her life. So a lot of the quotes, historians have a lot of material from Louisa May Alcott because she wrote so many letters.

And so some of the quotes that I wanted to tell you earlier... so in letters she called herself "a man of all work" and "a gentleman at large." She called herself "someone with a boy's spirit" and "who should have been born a boy." And she called herself a Papa to her nephews, which is so cute. And even her dad called her his only son. Which is like so good.

And I was thinking about it, I was reading about how there were all these arguments between historians, and feminists are diehard, some feminists are diehard against saying that she was trans or just saying anything about her sexuality because you can't speak for somebody who is not here. And then there are all the other people who are like, she spoke for herself, it's written everywhere. You are denying it if you don't accept it, basically.

That's not the point of anything I'm saying. I find it all fascinating, regardless of what arguments people make. I notice this connection between trans sexuality and transcendentalism. And so basically the reason I think it was so normal in her family, it wasn't weird or crazy for her dad to call her his only son and for her to live her whole life pretty, from what we know, she never said she felt uncomfortable in her body.

CRISTINA: She was never in the closet, like in the historical closet.

GENN: Yeah. And like some people now will say that when she said that she felt like she was in the wrong body, they will say that's like body dysmorphia. They didn't have the language back then but it seems like that's how she felt. But then if you think about it, transcendentalists believed that we are all just souls and we are just here. Our body didn't even really matter. We were meant to grow our souls. It was a personal responsibility to grow your soul. That was really who you were, not like this body, right?

So I think for her dad, who founded this movement practically, and she grew up with him, and they really believed this stuff. Like that was just their beliefs. So I don't think it was weird for them to say, they didn't have the



language of nonbinary or trans or whatever. But it was like, that was the core. I am just a soul, and I feel more masculine than feminine. But that's just like a worldly thing and that's not as important as my soul.

But apparently right before she died she wrote in a letter, "I am more than half persuaded that I am a man's soul put by some freak of nature into a woman's body." I think she meant by freak of nature like some freak accident?

CRISTINA: Some cosmic thing.

Well, wow. OK. That's pretty, I don't know. That's interesting. We can't speak for her, but it sounds like it's not that hard to come to the conclusion that she was deeply uncomfortable with the body she was in.

GENN: I don't know. Yeah, you could say that. And I get it.

CRISTINA: I think just like the whole freak of nature part. That's a statement.

GENN: Also we don't know how they used the slang back then. She could have been trying, she could have been dramatic to illustrate a point. You know what I mean? Like sometimes I talk really dramatic, but I'm just being funny. I'm making a point, yeah. I think she was making a point.

CRISTINA: Miss Fitzhugh was dramatic.

GENN: Yeah, both of them seem so similar. They would get along.

CRISTINA: I think so. It's interesting that she struggled with that because Miss Fitzhugh infamously, once she moved to New York City, I think I already said, was never in the closet. And she had a relationship with a casting director, a woman, and they lived in Greenwich Village, and they had an entire brownstone to themselves.

Infamously, I guess, the casting director would not go out to the gay clubs and whatnot because she was terrified of being seen and then it affecting her career. But Louise didn't care. And so part of that is the privilege of the fact that she had her inheritance that she could rely on. She never really had to work.

And then Louise didn't feel like it made any sense. She was like, "I'm here in New York City. I'm not in the South. I'm going to like go out and do what I want and wear men's clothes specifically tailored to me."

Which is pretty ....

GENN: Pretty fly.

CRISTINA: I wish I could afford that.

GENN: I know. Right.

So you love *Little Women*. I don't know if this is like the first one in the book or just somewhere in the first page, but it says, "I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy." I think that might be like the first line in the book. That's what Jo says.

CRISTINA: That is what Jo says.

GENN: That also is quite interesting. The character is based on her. Everybody knows that.

CRISTINA: I was a huge tomboy when I was little. And I've definitely thought about if I had the terminology back then I probably would have identified as nonbinary. Because I really didn't feel comfortable identifying as a girl. I felt more comfortable being called a tomboy, removing the girl from it entirely.

And I remember that line. I don't remember if it is the first line, but it is definitely in *Little Women*. And I remember I was like, "Yes, Jo gets it." I'm not a girl. I'm a tomboy. That's what it is.

GENN: It's crazy to me how there's so much, like, we did a whole episode about book banning. There are a whole lot of books, this is like a huge issue right now. There's like a lot of book banning. It's a lot of, they don't want this language in front of their kid's eyes. But even if we didn't have the language, if you look back at Louisa May Alcott's time, she was saying other things without these specific words about nonbinary or trans or whatever.

I don't know. It just shows that people just feel the way they feel, and you don't have to find it in a book and be just like brainwashed because you saw it in a book.

CRISTINA: People will come up with the language. Or they will gravitate towards that language if they hear it or experience it in a book or not.

GENN: And they are going to run away from where they are not accepted. Which is how your author left for New York and then wanted to leave the country. It's just like, if you are not accepting your kids, they are probably not going to want to be around you.

CRISTINA: And I think *Harriet the Spy* was controversial in its time. Some people wanted to ban it because Harriet is so independent and doesn't really want to listen or pay attention to the rules of adults.

And it's like, well, she was written by an author who at a young age had this very controlling, protective father who didn't listen to her, who made play pretend competitive. He was kind of a, what do they call it? A wet cloth?

GENN: Oh, like a wet blanket.

CRISTINA: Yeah. He was just a wet blanket. And so yeah, it was like, and then Louise was surrounded by other queer women, lesbians, other queer people, other people of different races and ethnicities like there in Greenwich Village. They probably discussed this, how they grew up and adults wouldn't listen to them or wouldn't really try to understand them. And I think that you see that in Harriet. Like she's very outspoken and does not care, and has kind of like a *laissez faire*.

GENN: Yeah. And her parents are very absent in that story.

CRISTINA: Very absent. And I think in *Suzuki Beane*, which she wrote with Sandra, I think the reason the parents are so present is because Sandra had a good relationship with her parents. But I think because Louise Fitzhugh wrote *Harriet the Spy* on her own, and she was like, for better or for worse her parents didn't quite understand her. Her mother tried to understand her. I think once Louise kind of settled down in New York City in her thirties, just before she wrote *Harriet the Spy*, she picked up her relationship with her mom. And her mom would visit her in New York City a lot.

So it's like she tried to cultivate the mother/daughter relationship later in life. But yeah, like absent in the child.

And I don't know, I feel like sometimes that's how you feel as a kid. Your parents are there, but they are also not there. Like they get it, but they don't.

GENN: That makes me, I thought about it at some point Louisa felt very alone a lot, even though she had a lot of siblings and her parents were involved in her life. But I think when you are queer you are just automatically end up having a part of you that feels alone. Just because it doesn't feel accepted or there's this automatic shame imposed on you. Like you are supposed to feel shame or something.

And so there's this whole part of your life until you come out or whatever if you do that's like a secret. And so secrets make you feel lonely if you are not sharing them, and so it's like part of every queer person's life.

CRISTINA: Yeah. You definitely feel that with Jo in *Little Women*.

GENN: And I think it's interesting how Harriet is going around trying to find other people's secrets.

CRISTINA: Yeah, she's very interested in that. Like kind of finding out the secrets and writing them very loudly, very prominently, in her book. Very hilarious.

GENN: Yeah. But it's not her that goes ....

CRISTINA: Public.

GENN: Yeah. Other people find the book.

CRISTINA: They steal it.

GENN: And then they are like, tell everyone. They kind of make her seem like the bad guy for writing all these bad things, but she was just writing the truth. She wasn't going to go and use it against everyone either.

CRISTINA: It's funny that you mention that because it does lead us to the infamous line, said by the nanny, which I think she writes a letter. And it says, "Sometimes you have to lie. Sometimes you have to say a little white lie to keep the peace between you and your friends."

I think that is definitely like Louise Fitzhugh.

GENN: That's the title of the book?

CRISTINA: That's the title of the biography. *Sometimes You Have to Lie*. Because Louise, she was so outspoken throughout her life. She had to either begrudgingly apologize to someone because she had to admit that she made a mistake, or she had to keep the peace with her father just enough that she would get her monthly allowance.

Yeah, sometimes you have to lie just enough, including when.

GENN: I think we can all relate to that.

There's another line that the nanny says, I don't remember exactly what it is, but it's something like, "We are all kind of the same." That's the point of the quote. At the end of the day we all have our secrets, but we are all very similar.

CRISTINA: And I think that's a response to Louise's feelings about segregation. Like if we want to bring it all back. She didn't agree with it, and she was like, we are all equal.

I think that's, like the 'sometimes you have to lie', I think that's just part of the human condition. Sometimes you have to lie to keep the peace. And then 'we are all equal' is in response to the mindset of a lot of people that she grew up with in the South that protested integration.

GENN: OK, just because you love *Little Women* so much, and this is a good ending, is like what's the one sentence that you would use about *Little Women*, sort of like the lesson or whatever. Like how you were saying ....

CRISTINA: The older I get, the more I identify with Jo in the sense of like she was very true to herself, even when she rejected ... I always forget his name because I didn't care for him, the one who ends up getting with the sister. Amy? Something like that?

And she has this like moment of doubt where she's really doubting herself. And she's also really doubting herself as a writer. Which incidentally Louse Fitzhugh also had. She doubted herself as a writer. And her future love interest is kind of telling her that we all go through that, we all go through stages of doubt. You just have to keep pushing forward.

And she does, and ultimately gets published by the end of the book. I really resonate with that. Like the older I get the more I realize that you're going to make mistakes and you can't see how it's going to turn out. You have to

stick to the decision you made in your past and just keep pushing forward. And you'll likely find a new opportunity or a similar opportunity.

GENN: That's so hopeful. I love that. And it's true. I would agree with it. It's definitely true. You can't change the past so you might as well, it's almost like you were saying, to find the positive. You're going to be going forward, so you might as well.

CRISTINA: Jo rejects what's-his-name, I always forget. I think it's Theo?

But she rejects him. She like starts feeling doubt about it. And little Miss Harriet gets ousted by her classmate. And it's like there's nothing they can do about these decisions. They've made those decisions. They have to go forward and learn what they can and do what they can.

GENN: So find the lesson.

Well, this was fun.

Wait, last question. Who would you, from both characters and both authors, who would you rather eat dinner with?

CRISTINA: That's really hard.

GENN: You have to pick one.

CRISTINA: I don't know. I feel like seven-year-old me would pick Harriet one thousand percent. Thirty-year-old me is like, I'd have dinner with Jo and we'd talk about writing.

GENN: I think that's cool that both of those are the characters. I don't know.

I feel like I would pick Miss Fitzhugh just because I know a lot about Louisa May Alcott. I was going to go author or author.

CRISTINA: See, I was thinking characters. I'm a little intimidated by Miss Fitzhugh.

GENN: That's why I'm fascinated. I'm like, ooh, I want to talk with her.

CRISTINA: She had things to say and she was not afraid to say them.

GENN: It would be a good time.

CRISTINA: It would be a good time. Many people said it was always a good time when they went out with Louise. So.

GENN: This was also a good time. Thank you for coming.

CRISTINA: Thank you for having me. This was great.

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Thanks for listening to this episode of APL Volumes, Season Three. A huge thanks to my guest Cristina Casas, who wants you to stop into your local branch, attend a library event, and meet new people with similar interests.

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END TRANSCRIPT