

Youngblood Monday Lunch: Episode 8

How Will We Know When the Play Starts

by Lily Houghton & Sofya Levitsky-Weitz

presented by the Ensemble Studio Theatre

[Youngblood Monday Lunch Theme Song Begins]

Singer: [Sung] Lunch in the morning, lunch at night
Lunch whenever you feel that it's right
There's no bad time
For lunch.

Mysterious Voice: [Whispered] Also Time isn't real.

[Theme Song Ends]

RJ Tolan: Hello everybody! Welcome to the Youngblood Monday Lunch. We're so glad to have ya. My name is RJ. Over there, across the lobby of the Ensemble Studio Theatre, is Graeme.

Graeme Gillis: [As if he were a WWE Announcer] Graeme Gillis!

RJ Tolan: [Chuckling] He just violated every social law by being his own...hype man.

Graeme Gillis: [Mimicking a different WWE Announcer with different tone and inflection] Graeme Gillis!

RJ Tolan: [Chuckling] This is a theme...that will come back...

[Graeme chortling in the distance]

RJ Tolan: ...throughout the day. We've - We've been alone for a while

[Distant and close laughing]

RJ Tolan: ...we've been alone for a while everybody. Hasn't everybody?

[More distant laughing]

RJ Tolan: Uhm...

[Uncontrollable laughter]

RJ Tolan: We've spent some of our alone time putting up plays in podcast form from Youngblood, the company of young playwrights at the Ensemble Studio Theatre. Which, the fella hypin' himself in the corner and I happen to co-run. We've had six play episodes and a special Q&A episode. If you haven't heard the Youngblood Monday lunch before now, go back and listen to those plays! They are awesome, if we do say so.

But because everyone's been alone, for a while, we're doing somethin' a little bit different with the next two episodes. You will notice that there are two writers on these episodes, and Graeme's gonna tell you a little bit about why.

Graeme Gillis: The theme for today's play, is togetherness. Togetherness is the thing that we've longed for the most for such a long time. But today, at the Ensemble Studio Theatre, RJ and I are together! Normally when we're recording these podcasts, we're on separate sides of the room wearing masks and staying six feet apart. But today we're rompin' and frolickin' like a couple of pups at the dog run!

[Distant chuckling]

Graeme Gillis: On my way to the theatre today, I was - I was biking through the streets of New York. A lady stopped me to ask me for directions. We were together! And then a guy pulled up in a car and told us to, "GET THE FUCK OUT OF THE ROAD." We were all together! And that's what matters most.

Today's play was written, together by Youngblood's own Lily Houghton and Sofya Levitsky-Weitz. It's called: *How Will We Know When The Play Starts?*

RJ Tolan: Before we get to hearing that play we want to share with you a couple of thoughts, a couple of acknowledgments that we've been making a part of every time that we gather to do a piece of theatre that we want to share with our artists and share with our audiences.

The Ensemble Studio Theatre wants to recognize the labor that has been exploited on our colonized land, it's been forced from enslaved Black and African diasporic peoples. We want to acknowledge the continual forced displacement and systems of oppression of Black, Indigenous, and Peoples of Color in the colonial United States. At EST as a community, and as an institution, we are actively working to restructure the way that we work, the way we create art, and the way we communicate with each other. That's an ongoing process, and we hope you'll be a part of it.

Graeme Gillis: We also want to acknowledge, that the Ensemble Studio Theatre, as well as the rest of New York City is located on Lenapehoking and that is the unceded traditional territory of the Lenni Lenape People. We want to pay respect to the Lenape and to all Indigenous peoples that continue to live, work, create, and contribute here in Lenapehoking.

If you'd like to learn more about the Lenape people, you can go to their website: thelenapecenter.com and also if you've never gone to the website native-land.ca you can go to that site and look up the place where you live, and the place where you grew up and learn about the history and the peoples of those lands. And we recommend you check both those out.

RJ Tolan: And now we could not be happier to share with you our first together Lunch podcast play, *How Will We Know When The Play Starts* by Sofya Levitsky-Weitz and Lily Houghton.

[Footsteps, the sound of voices and a city street fade in]

[Calming synth music plays underneath]

[A door opens and closes, the footsteps ascend a flight of stairs]

[A heavy door closes]

SOFYA: Hi!!

LILY: Hiiii!!! Oh my god hi!!

SOFYA: Oh my god I missed you so much hi hi hi

LILY: Hiiii oh my god me too I *missed* you

SOFYA: I thought I was gonna be late
I'm always almost late or fully late
How does it always take an hour and a half to get here

LILY: Always
I ubered
Even when you uber you're late!

SOFYA: I had it down to a system
Check Citymapper
Get the F at Fort Hamilton, front-to-middle of the train
At Jay-Street look out the window, see if the A or C is coming
See if I can spot the little screen that says how far away it is
If it seems reasonable, under 5 minutes, say
Hopefully grab that A
Take it to 42nd Street
Cross the platform
Hope the C and E are coming
Hope they are running local
Get off after one stop
50th street
Exit North-west
Pass the Dig Inn
Cross at the CVS
Go diagonal, shave off a few seconds
Pass the street by the school
The piles of garbage
The men waiting in their black SUVs in the no parking zone
Wait at the corner with the two bodegas
Where I always run into people
Hurry-walk the rest of the way
People and their little dogs
People eating dinner
People in their luxury buildings

The men arguing outside by the flowers in their plastic packages
I'm not late
Somehow I'm not late
I feel it in my body
And now I'm here, catching my breath

LILY: You look like an angel!

SOFYA: A sweaty angel

LILY: A sweaty perfect angel!

SOFYA: *You're* an angel

LILY: No you're an angel

SOFYA: Where is everyone

LILY: What

SOFYA: Where is everyone?
Did it already start?

LILY: Oh
Shit
Maybe it did?

SOFYA: But we still have time
Don't we?
It never starts on time
And we're right on time

LILY: That would be crazy if it started on time

SOFYA: Crazy

LILY: Oh god!
Is it on the 6th floor

SOFYA: No I'm pretty sure it's here
I read it on the website
I can trust my memory still, can't I?

LILY: I can trust my memory still, can't I?

[A door opens]

[Silence]

SOFYA: What?

LILY: What?

SOFYA: It's just that time hasn't made sense for awhile
And now it's everything-all-at-once

LILY: Totally

SOFYA: Hold on I need to drink water
It is either really hot or really cold
I can't tell

[Water is drank long and loud]

SOFYA: Recently a man on the computer said to me "you drink water really loudly"
And now I'm self conscious about it
Was that loud

LILY: No it was perfect
Do you want me to get you some more?
There is the sink in the bathroom-
With the paint on it.
I feel like it has purple paint on it.
From a set?

SOFYA: Oh, yeah.
No, I'm okay.

LILY: I think I just got a really scary feeling.
Yeah, a really scary feeling.

SOFYA: What is it?

LILY: I think we are really, really, really early.

SOFYA: Oh god.

LILY: Yeah like early in a clumsy way-
Not clumsy in a hot way-
But clumsy in a really embarrassing way.

SOFYA: I hate being early
I hate it more than anything
I avoid it at all costs
It's why I'm always late

LILY: But don't you think that's why no one is here

SOFYA: I had a scary thought

LILY: Yeah?

SOFYA: It's like your scary feeling
But it's a thought

[the eerie sound of wind begins underneath]

LILY: Okay don't tell me
Okay actually tell me

SOFYA: What if no one shows up?

LILY: What?

SOFYA: What if no one wants to come back?
Come back home?

LILY: I need to tell you something.

SOFYA: What?

LILY: I had this gut feeling.

SOFYA: A thought or a feeling?

LILY: A feeling

SOFYA: Okay I'm sorry
Tell me

LILY: Yeah um.

I think all theaters might just be portals now.

Infinite black holes.

We left them for too long.

Magical little places.

No more gravity left.

If you leave something that is haunted alone for too long it just swallows it whole.

A new universe.

Galaxy-

SOFYA: You know-

This actually goes with something I had a gut feeling about.

LILY: Really?

SOFYA: Yeah I have gut feelings too

You're a Scorpio and I'm a Virgo I'm also a Cancer moon

I think Earth and Water signs feel first and then think

LILY: I love this theory

I love you

SOFYA: I love you so much

But okay sorry yeah

yeah so my gut feeling-

It was-

When I saw you again.

In a space like this.

A theater?

A theater.

That we would become one another.

Like-

The space wouldn't have enough gravity left to hold us as two different beings.

Or-

OR it could be a Freaky Friday thing.

LILY: We become one another?

SOFYA: Yes.

LILY: Oh

Oh wow

SOFYA: Do you think people would notice?

LILY: If we were each other?

SOFYA: Do you think we would notice?

LILY: I hope this happens before the curtain goes up.
Would be a cool way to watch a play.

SOFYA: There is no curtain here.

LILY: What?
No red velvet?

SOFYA: No.

LILY: How will we know when the play starts?

[A sharp eerie noise]

SOFYA: People come and tell us it's time to start

[The sound of a door opening]

SOFYA: and/or the light dims
and/or the amazing human brain thing happens where everyone just sort of knows
And quiets
And waits for the thing

[The wind has returned, louder now]

LILY: I kind of wish there was a curtain

SOFYA: Yeah

LILY: I love velvet

SOFYA: I know
I remember when we wore velvet together
Here
Velvet robes

LILY: We wore robes here?

[The wind fades]

SOFYA: We're wearing them now

[The distinct rustling of velvet robes]

LILY: Oh yeah!
Oh wow I love your robe

SOFYA: I love *your* robe

LILY: It's so cool that we wore robes to this
I hope it's okay

SOFYA: Of course it's okay

LILY: Is it?

SOFYA: I just had a scary thought

LILY: Tell me

SOFYA: What if we became each other
But we didn't know that we had
We just felt this sinking feeling
That something was wrong
That something wasn't quite right
We just felt this intense *missing*
This little hole
That got ever-wider
Or worse
Ever-smaller
But just itched at us
Itched at us every night
Because we didn't know what had changed
For the rest of our lives

[A short silence]

LILY: That is a scary thought
I kind of feel like I already feel that though?
The little missing
The little constant missing
What does it mean
That I already feel that?

SOFYA: I don't know
I'm not sure

LILY: Do you still want more water?

SOFYA: No, I'm okay
Is there wine here?
Sometimes there's wine

LILY: I wanted wine too
But I can't find anyone to give it to me

SOFYA: I could make you wine.

LILY: From grapes?

SOFYA: Yes, from grapes.
I could stomp on grapes.
I'd do it
For you.

[The wind returns, the loudest it's been]

LILY: Woah.

I forgot you are supposed to wear a cardigan to the theater.

SOFYA: That wasn't air conditioning that was-
Otherworldly.

LILY: oh yeah no it has to be otherworldly.
No way they'd have air conditioning in here.

SOFYA: I kind of remember air conditioning
Loud air conditioning
Bumping on at inopportune times
Goosebumps

LILY: Oh yeah
I remember goosebumps

SOFYA: But Lily I-
I feel like I can't even imagine a theater anymore
The gaff tape?
I haven't heard applause in a year and a half
Does that make me a shitty person?
That I want to hear applause?

[The wind gets even louder]

LILY: No
I really love attention
I like to say because I'm a writer that I don't like attention
Ya know, cause I'm not an actor?
But really I love the attention the most of all.

[The wind starts to drown out Lily]

LILY: But wait-
We are standing in a theater
How can you not imagine a theater
When we're -
It's cold
Isn't it really cold all of the sudden?

[The wind continues for a moment, and fades]

[The following lines sound as if they're from an old tape recording]

SOFYA: Did you know that there are three types of black holes?

LILY: What?
No
But I love that
I love you
I didn't know that

SOFYA: Yeah
Stellar black holes are small but dense
It's a dead larger star, but compressed
They suck up dust and gas and grow and grow and grow.
The Milky Way has a few hundred million of them

[Digital pings play intermittently for a few moments]

LILY: so like

An off-Broadway theater?

SOFYA: Woah Lily woah

I can't tell if that is super mean or super beautiful

LILY: I think I'm both.

SOFYA: Next up is intermediate black holes

Scientists used to think there were only small and large black holes

No middle

No in-between

But then-

The intermediate black hole was like

Um guys I'm right here

[A cosmic growl]

SOFYA: I'm in the middle

So scientist were like yes okay

There are medium black holes too

LILY: I like that story.

Do you think I'm mean?

SOFYA: What! No!

Sorry I should have said that earlier!

I think you're the nicest person I've ever met.

I love you.

LILY: I love you.

The missing feels like cat scratches.

SOFYA: I'm not going to talk about the final black hole.

Because it is too much for me,

And I also feel like if we are in a black hole right now
it might be this kind.

LILY: Oh god

Oh no

SOFYA: You're exactly right

By the way

It feels just like cat scratches

That's exactly how it feels

You know my black cat sleeps with his body wrapped around my arm

Every night

And back in November, he had a nightmare

And his claws dug into my arm

And I was so worried about him

But he was okay

But it left these two gashes on my arm

And now it's May

And one still hasn't gone away
It's still a faint black line

LILY: That's what it feels like

SOFYA: That's exactly what it feels like

LILY: I think we need to be brave.

SOFYA: Yes. I think we do.

LILY: Would it help if I held your hand?

SOFYA: Yes. Of course. Are you kidding? Of course.

[A cosmic synth chord sting]

LILY: Also do you want to get into my robe with me?
Get into my robe with me!

SOFYA: Okay yes that sounds really wonderful thank you.

[The distinct rustling of a velvet robe]

[The tape recorder effect on the voices stops]

LILY: Okay.

Tell me about the final black hole.

SOFYA: Okay.

When it is small, it starts with the mass of at least 10,000 suns.

Think about how many cats could warm their fur in the light of even one sun.

So many cats.

LILY: I love them all.

SOFYA: Me too. I love them all.

All the 10,000 suns of warm kittens.

But the black hole keeps growing.

Gobbling.

They call it supermassive.

Which is stupid

Because

I feel like they could have called it something more poetic.

It doesn't just eat suns it eats years.

Billions of years

All existing simultaneously

In this mass

All of the memories of the billions of years and days of sunshine and days it maybe

rained a little bit

Are floating.

But we can't access them

Because

Because

If we go inside

We turn into...
spaghetti.

LILY: Spaghetti?
Parmesan-

SOFYA: They call it spaghettification!
Vertical stretching
The gravity
And the years
And the cats' meows
Pull you apart
The string cheese effect
Goopy and transforming
String cheese hairs becoming one giant ball of parmesan
Forever and ever and-

LILY: Okay that's enough.
That's done now.

[The distinct rustling of velvet robes]

[A silent moment and a heavy sigh]

LILY: Hey

SOFYA: Hi!!

LILY: What play is this?

SOFYA: ...What do you mean?

LILY: The play
The play we're here to see
What is it?

SOFYA: Oh
Oh
The play
The Play
Hmmm
This is so weird
I feel like I knew the name
I feel like it's supposed to be good, right?
I felt excited
But I just
I just can't really remember

LILY: I want to say nice things about it after
I want it to give me that feeling when it ends
That tingly feeling that makes me feel like I'm in outer space
Looking at the world from above

SOFYA: What the fuck is the play?
The play we're here to see...

LILY: Maybe there's a program?

SOFYA: Let me look

[Shuffling paper]

LILY: I miss everything that hasn't happened yet

SOFYA: What?

LILY: What?

SOFYA: Me too

LILY: Want to sit on the risers with me?

Crouched together
Bad posture
Rub each other's backs

SOFYA: More than anything
More than anything

LILY: I really wanted to have an *experience* tonight
I wanted to sink into the darkness and laugh with people and have an Experience

SOFYA: We still could
We still are
right?

LILY: I'm hungry

SOFYA: I remember there was sometimes a jar of peanut butter back here.
Sometimes some crackers to dip in it.

LILY: That sounds so good.

SOFYA: I'm always hungry
After the walk
I usually bring my own snacks
Actually I did
I brought Goldfish
Parmesan kind

[Rustling of a bag]

SOFYA: And dried mango
Want some?

LILY: Oh my god yes

[Graphic eating and chewing noises]

SOFYA: Hey Lily

LILY: Hi!

SOFYA: I wrote you something
A love letter

LILY: Oh my god you did??

SOFYA: Do you want to hear it?

LILY: Yes!

SOFYA: Okay, I just have to find it
I know it's in here somewhere

[A zipper and rummaging through a bag]

LILY: I had a dream we were in a theatre in a basement that was also a theatre that was also fifteen stories off the sidewalk in Manhattan, an island that floats above billowing garbage. In that basement, we were surrounded by all the ghosts of all the people we had casual conversations with at theatre parties, after and before shows. There were echoes of “what are you working on?” and “congratulations! seriously!” and “oh, we’ve met before, actually. a few times.”

[We hear distant echos of other voices]

[Quotes throughout are spoken in unison with distant voices]

LILY: and “I really loved your play, I was surprised by how much I loved it. I didn’t know you could write like that?” We floated through the ghosts of our still-living acquaintances and friends, journeyed backstage to the lifeless curtains, the tape on the floor, the smell of burnt coffee. We talked about the things we used to care about, who got what award, which play made us incensed or bored. We missed being hugged, we missed squeezing arms as we walked by, we missed being sweaty and anonymous. I told you about first seeing you, how I remembered your puffy coat and pretty colors. Your big, sad open eyes and bold voice and how the boy I loved said “New York Theatre is like a small town” for you. And how, like it was kindergarten or something, you turned to me one week and seemed to say “You are my best friend here.” And that I want you to know that I changed my name to Lily for one whole month in preschool and since then, she’s always been my alter-ego. And how you took a car to meet me 13 blocks from my apartment in South Slope, on 7th Avenue in the Donut Diner I told you I thought my life was falling apart and how I loved how open you are about your pain, how you wear it like a wound, proud. How we both write plays that bleed all over the place. How I never got to meet your dad, but I feel like I know him because I know you and I know your heart. And the fierceness we both try to inject in the world with our writing and you call me your favorite writer and I don’t know how to write anymore, I don’t know how to do this thing.

[The number of voices in unison are now overwhelming, making it difficult to hear Lily]

LILY: I’m too inside myself, inside a monologue inside a dream inside a basement theatre that is also a skyscraper that is also a nightmare vessel of how things used to be. Is anyone checking on the lights? Is anyone checking on the water filter?

[Back to singular voices in unison with Lily for moments here and there]

LILY: Is the just-new paint fading, what happened to the shelves? Over a year ago, this month, I vomited in that bathroom, came out to read more of a play aloud, then vomited again. In between two lovers: one who did not want me, put his hand between my legs and laughed at my wanting, and the other who wanted me too much, put all his pain on me, neither knew me. Months ago, I wandered freezing Brooklyn and thought: no one loves me the way I want to be loved. And I waited to bleed. I thought: I want a cheeseburger, but I didn't do it. I thought: I want to devour, be devoured. I want a love like the kind I've stored away to rot, the kind I've closed my heart to. I curled my hair for the first time in 10 months, wondering why I make rules for things that don't matter. Wondering if it is rules that keep me alive, that keep me tethered to this earth, but maybe I don't want to be tethered anymore. And one year ago, two years from now seemed far away, but now nothing makes sense. It doesn't make sense that we've made sense of this. I miss sitting in a bad play, squirming in the dark. I miss the lights coming on, post-show music filling the space, and I'm left there weeping. I saw the play alone and I will leave alone, after I'm done crying. On drugs, I told my boyfriend about some of the best plays I'd ever seen as we drifted off to sleep in bed. I described them in detail as he fought to stay awake and listen, but it wasn't for him, not really. How do you talk about a thing you love that has disappointed you? Talk about it compulsively until it works itself out: in the air, in your mouth, in the mouths of those you respect. The hike west, stopped on the street, late for the brunch show, a woman stops me. She seems normal enough, I think maybe to ask for directions. She says "I feel energies..." and I start to walk again (these days I would stop until she got sick of me, see my desperation from afar and swerve, move on). "I feel energies," she says. "And I see two men. Are there two men?" and I cannot exactly think so, but to see what she says I respond, "Yes..." and she says again, "I see two men. There's two men. And trust me, I know. One of them's your soulmate." And she walks off first, and I'm left reeling to decode, too late. And that day we talked backstage and you filmed me as an angel. Clean hair, for once, I feel nice. Matching velvet pants and puffy coats, I grip your hands like always. Like always, we catch up always and as always you hold my pain. And I never know where to put my coat, gloves, hat, bag. Do I stack or hang or shove under an audience chair? I'd give anything for a line for the bathroom. I miss the things I took for granted. Maybe I no longer think in dialogue because we've all been living in monologue.

[The other voices fade, Lily speaks alone]

LILY: Now, my cat will cry soon when he wakes up and no one is around him, half-asleep. I will call to him and he will find his way to me. When you first met my cats, you said they were human-cats, they were special. Like your lifelong best friend, Rosie.

SOFYA: Lily

LILY: Sofya
Lily

SOFYA: how did you know the letter
How did you read the letter?

LILY: what
You read the letter

SOFYA: No
Wait
Did you write the letter

LILY: No
I love myself
But I don't think I would write a letter about it

SOFYA: oh god
I feel something on my tongue

LILY: what?
Spit it out!

[Slurping]

LILY: Is that a noodle?

SOFYA: Spaghetti!
It's Spaghetti!

LILY: Oh god
With Parmesan-
Wait-

[A spitting noise]

LILY: OH my god

SOFYA: what is-

SOFYA & LILY: can I just say
It tastes kinda good
An old fashion Italian meal
It tastes kinda good.
Homey.
What?

GUY: Hey!

SOFYA & LILY: Oh my god, someone else!
Hi!

GUY: Hey, hey!

SOFYA & LILY: You're here for the play?
It hasn't started yet

GUY: *[Interrupting]* That was really great, you guys

LILY: What?

SOFYA: What was?

GUY: Just like, big congrats

SOFYA: What?

GUY: Super brave, you know?
I really liked the lighting

LILY: What lighting

GUY: Super glad I made it out.
Worth the train ride, truly.
Always love to support your work.

SOFYA: What
Work

GUY: [His own lines overlap and intersect] I was in a thing here once
I actually have a thing next week
Would love if you could make it
I'll send you an email
I'll shoot you a DM
Super great catching up
We should grab a coffeewalkdrink

LILY & SOFYA: Wait what play
What are you...
Wait
What?

GUY: You have my number right?
No worries I'll find you online
Big congrats, again, really
Loved it

[Slow clapping builds into full applause]

[The sound of an empty room]

[The click of a recorder, then silence]

Graeme Gillis: You've been listening to a new play, *How Will We Know When The Play Starts?*
by Lily Houghton and Sofya Levitsky-Weitz.
Directed by Jake Beckhard and starring Lily Houghton and Sofya Levitsky-Weitz, with
Jacob Brandt as GUY.
Sound Design was by Jack Mullin.

RJ Tolan: The staff of Ensemble Studio Theatre are
Artistic Director: Billy Carden
Executive Director: Susan Vitucci
Associate Artistic Director, Co-Director of Youngblood, and Program Director of the EST
Sloan: Graeme Gillis

Graeme Gillis: [Doing his best WWE Announcer impression] GRAEME /

RJ Tolan: Don't you do it!

Graeme Gillis: GILLIS!

RJ Tolan: [Depleted sigh] I tried folks.
Director of Play Development and Associate Director of EST Sloan: Linsay Firman

Co-Director of Youngblood: RJ Tolan. Hey, that's me!
Production Manager: Jack Plowe
Brand Marketing Manager: Harrison Densmore
Communications and Audience Services Manager: Samantha Sembler
Finance Director: Jonathan Suárez
Company Administrator: Mariel Sanchez
Literary Associate: Nikomeh Anderson
Development Assistant: Joey Nasta
and Facilities Manager: José Sanchez

The Youngblood Monday Lunch theme song was written and performed by Jake Brasch and Nadja Leonhard-Hooper, two of Youngblood's member playwrights.
And incidental music was by Jake Brasch.
Podcast Sound Engineer was Caroline Eng.

If you have made it, through the credits, to the very end of this podcast episode, you have shown a dedication that indicates to me that you might be the kind of person who wants to support our work here at the Ensemble Studio Theatre bringing you lunchtime podcast theatre. If that is, a correct hunch, I'm gonna direct you to estnyc.org/lunchmoney. You will find buttons there to donate to the continued survival and future episodes of the Youngblood Monday Lunch. And I cannot tell you how much we would appreciate it. That's estnyc.org/lunchmoney.

Thank you so much for tuning in and listening. We will be with ya next week for another Togetherness Lunch. Thanks for comin'! Be well.

Graeme Gillis: [Distant] Thanks everybody!

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