

Youngblood Monday Lunch: Episode 5

Otter Delight (Working Title) by Michael Feldman

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, and welcome to episode five of the Youngblood Monday Lunch. Thanks for joining us, my name is RJ, I'm here with Graeme.

Graeme Gillis: [Distant] Bonjour mes amis!

RJ: Graeme whose greetings from the back of the room get, uh, get more elaborate every single time. And that's probably just going to keep happening. We're so happy to have you here with us listening to this brand new short play by one of the members of Youngblood.

Youngblood is a company of early career playwrights that Graeme and I co-run at Ensemble Studio Theatre in New York City, and the Youngblood Monday Lunch is a podcast series we've been doing to share the new works, the new short plays of our writers with you. It's sort of the online version of a thing that we do in person, we've talked about this in previous episodes and I know some folks listening will be familiar with the Youngblood Sunday Brunch, which is the live in-person version of the Youngblood Monday Lunch. Um, but for those of you that haven't been able to attend one, or have never been to Ensemble Studio Theatre, or even for those of you who may come to those and it's just been over a year, and maybe you're missing it. I know we are. The Sunday Brunch we do five short plays around a theme, and they write these plays and we get the most wonderful assortment of actors and directors to put them together in the week in advance of the Sunday performances. And when you come see one, you come down 52nd Street in Hell's Kitchen, New York, and you go further west on 52nd Street than you think you have any cause to go. You're like, surely if I go any further I'm going to be in the river. But no! You go a little further and you're at the Ensemble Studio Theatre, and you come through the doors and you come up a truly weird set of stairs to the second floor and into a lobby that is just abuzz with life. We are blessed with a wonderful, energized audience who come to see these short plays and eat breakfast food with us. We serve pancakes, and bacon and eggs, and fruit salad, and have an open bar of mimosas and bloody marys, and everybody grabs a plate and

settles in and watches some new plays. It's a treat to do, it's a treat to share with people, we cannot wait to someday, someday, we are tentatively hopeful we'll get to do that in person again soon. And when we do we really, really hope that you can join us, and we can't wait to see you here.

In the meantime, while that is not happening, we're doing this online, in your device, in the podcast listening platform of your choice. And Graeme is going to tell you a little bit more about this episode of that.

[Musical Interlude]

Graeme: Picture yourself in a theatre. Maybe it's the Ensemble Studio Theatre, maybe it's Shakespeare's Globe. Before the show is about to begin, what's the one thing everybody does? Turn off their phones. You're asked to turn off your phones so as not to disturb the people around you and the performers on stage. When's the last time you did that? When's the last time any of us turned off our phones? Well today, we're going to start again. I want everybody out there, everybody within the sound of my voice, to turn off your phone. I know something important might happen, I know there might be a call you're waiting for, this is your lunch! Turn off your phone! Lie back and close your eyes, put a piece of pizza on your face, lie back and enjoy the play...

Unless of course, you're listening to this play, on your phone. In which case, just forget I said anything.

The theme of the first six podcasts of Youngblood Monday Lunch is science, and that means this is a collaboration with the EST/Sloan Project. The EST/Sloan Project is a partnership between Ensemble Studio Theatre and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, to present new plays about science and technology.

RJ: The EST/Sloan Project celebrates science and progress and as we do that it's really important to acknowledge and keep in mind that in the field of science many discoveries and advancements have come at the cost of the exploitation, through the unpaid labor, and through the suffering of Black, brown, Indigenous people. We want to honor their sacrifices and contributions to the progress of science and the theatre that we create to celebrate it.

Graeme: We want to acknowledge that Ensemble Studio Theatre and all of the city of New York are located on Lenapehoking, that is the unceded traditional territory of the Lenni Lenape people. EST want to pay respect to the Lenni Lenape and to all Indigenous people that continue to live, and work, and create, and contribute here on Lenapehoking. If you don't know the history of the land you live on, you can go to native-land.ca, you can look up the place where you live, or the place you grew up, and learn about the history of those lands.

RJ: Now we could not be prouder to share with you episode five of the Youngblood Monday Lunch, a new play called *Otter Delight (Working Title)* by Youngblood's own Michael Harrison Feldman. Thanks for joining us, everybody.

RECORDING: Welcome to InZone Conference Call, the only environmentally focused conference call service. Please enter your pass code followed by the pound sign.

[Beeping]

RECORDING: You will be the second caller to join the line for

DORIS: [Muffled] Oh uh uh

Otter Delight, working title. Science Advisory Call with Otter Consultant.

RECORDING: Please announce yourself at the tone.

A tone.

MARK: Mark Frelander.

DORIS: Hi Mark.

Doris here with Dave.

DAVE: We're just waiting for Lauren.

MARK: Great.

Everyone at the network is just buzzing that Doris and Dave are exploring a new idea!

DORIS: Aww that's sweet.

MARK: You're our child whisperers.

DAVE: Let's not get ahead of ourselves/ again.

DORIS: Oooh oooh Mark, while we have you, can I flag one tiny weency little thing?

DAVE: [Muffled] Please don't Doris. It's a nothing burger.

DORIS: I understand but he should know.

MARK: Yes, Doris? Go ahead.

DORIS: You know, our son Robinson, the gay one?

MARK: Uh Huh.

DORIS: When we told him our next series was going to be about otters, burst into laughter.

You see, he's an otter. In his community, the gay one. It's what they smaller framed, hairier homosexuals. Bigger older hairy men like my Dave are bears and if not yet of age, they call them cubs!

DAVE: Otters and bears and cubs - oh my!

MARK: Well, no ones canceling Winnie the Pooh.

DORIS: AND... it could be great for business, if our cute little otters became gay icons! Maybe we'll even make the stars of the show gay. He could be this sort of outspoken, confident kid trying to understand his otter ancestry.

MARK: So just our son?

DORIS: YES! We'll name him Robinson, Robinson the Otter son and oooh oooh we'll all march in the parade together, as a family for promotion.

DAVE: What about an ocean parade?

DORIS: Like as part of the show?

DAVE: Yes.

DORIS: You're a visionary. Give me a kiss.

MARK: I see that second hit show in your future...

[A tone]

LAUREN: Lauren Dickinson from the Marine Center.

MARK: Lauren. Great. Mark Freelander. Head of children's programming at the network.

DORIS: Hi Lauren! This is Doris.

DAVE: I'm Dave.

LAUREN: Apologies for being a little behind. What a day! A want-to-be marine biologist trespassed the otter zone of our sanctuary.

DORIS: Oh my Lord, are the otters ok?

LAUREN: We're relieved no one was hurt.

MARK: Ahahaha sounds like drama, thank you for still hopping on.

LAUREN: Of course. I should be doing this for free. Elve's Island literally saves me from so much parenting.

DORIS: Awww, well full circle, we're going to save the planet TOGETHER!

MARK: A perfect segway for a little context.

LAUREN: Yes please.

MARK: The network has decided that climate change is a major issue.

LAUREN: Ok...

MARK: In 2021, we're dedicated to making the world notice and to become a leading voice on this issue, we're making commitments regarding emissions and behavior but also seeking to creating new content that addresses environmental issues.

DORIS: The way Elves Island taught kids about immigration from the perspective of the elves arriving at Ellis Island.

MARK: Yes, exactly, which is why we were so excited when Doris and Dave called with the seed of an idea for a show called Otter Delight.

DORIS: Working title.

MARK: Yes, working title.

Dave. Doris. Maybe share a little about your vision.

DORIS: I've just always just thought otters were the most cuddly of creatures.

DAVE: And so when I read about the possible relocation of otters to San Francisco Bay because of the bizarre increase in shark attacks in the wild, I showed the article to Doris right away.

DORIS: And we just thought, well wouldn't that be a colorful, delightful foundation for a series. Otters relocating to their new home and finding safety under the Golden Gate Bridge.

DAVE: What better way to educate children about conservation than through the otter?

DORIS: The ADORABLE otter.

LAUREN: Uh huh.

DORIS: The way they hold hands.

DAVE: She loves that.

DORIS: He's holding mine right now... ow ow that hurts.

LAUREN: Ok... Yes, well, for otters it's not so much about love and affection as it is necessity. Holding hands is a practical maneuver to ensure that they don't drift away from each other as they sleep.

DORIS: And that's why we've called on you. We want to capture the science of it all. The truth of the otter.

MARK: And also create something that delights children and activates their imaginations!

LAUREN: Well, for me, what makes the sea otter so remarkable is its resilience, the way they have survived despite being hunted, relocated, scapegoated by -

DAVE: Excuse me. Sorry.

Lauren, this is Dave.

From the little you just said, would you agree that sea otters are the Jews of the sea kingdom?

LAUREN: Oh. Well. Uh. I've never thought about it, but it's uh something to think about.

DAVE: Uh huh.

LAUREN: So... Any conversation about sea otters has to begin with the three F words... Any ideas?

DORIS: Fingers.

Feet.

... fish?

LAUREN: Nooo...

DAVE: Famine?

Flavor

DORIS: Figs

DAVE: Fauna falafel

DORIS: Flags

DAVE: Fantasy.

DORIS: Faces.

DAVE: Facetime!

DORIS: Facades.

DAVE: Fertilization.

DORIS: Fetuses!

MARK: Family friendly.

DAVE: Freud!

LAUREN: Here's a little hint, I use with the kids. Otters don't have a layer blubber and Pacific ocean is cold burr, which is how you can remember the first F...?

[Silence]

DORIS: Fur! It's fur.

LAUREN: Yes! Fur. Otters have the thickest of any mammal with as many as 165,000 hairs per square inch, which during the fur trade made it "hot" commodity, if you will. By the early 20th century, otters were nearly hunted to extinction

DAVE: Ah see, Jews! .

DORIS: Honey

DAVE: It strikes me as an angle.

MARK: The creative process at work.

DORIS: Continue Lauren please.

LAUREN: Otters spend hours everyday grooming themselves by spinning and somersaulting to trap air bubbles under their fur for warmth.

DORIS: Cuties.

LAUREN: But this constant primping isn't enough to keep them warm in the cold Pacific waters, which brings us to the second F-word, Food. To heat themselves, otters also eat and eat and eat, 25% of their body weight a day.

DORIS: Ok. Jewish.

LAUREN: They feast on mostly shellfish - urchins, crabs and clams.

DAVE: So not kosher,

DORIS: As the rabbi says, we eat shrimp to remind us

DAVE: Yes, the guilt. It jolts us!

DORIS: Amen!

MARK: Doris and Dave, maybe you want to mute yourselves?

DORIS: Sorry yes

This is so fantastic Lauren.

MARK: Please continue

LAUREN: Urchins dine on the marine plant - kelp. So, when otters with their large appetites are introduced into habitat and start eating urchins, kelp forest, that's the third F word, FOREST, prosper and grow as high as 10 feet - creating a rich environment for species like salmon and rockfish to populate and hide from predators like sharks and killer whales. Any questions before I move on?

MARK: Doris and Dave...

[Silence]

MARK: I think you're still muted.

DORIS: Hello

[Yelling] HELLO, can you hear us now?

MARK: Yes.

DORIS: We were just saying that Solomon the Salmon and Rifka the Rockfish might be fun characters.

DAVE: Little thankful sidekicks to their kind conservationist otter neighbors.

MARK: Goosebumps.

DORIS: They can escort the otters in the parade.

MARK: More goosebumps.

DAVE: Please keep teaching Lauren.

DORIS: Your knowledge bombs are elixir to our brainstorming minds.

LAUREN: Awww, well, I do have a little surprise for you all... There is actually a fourth F-word.

DORIS: Stop it. Nooo way!

DAVE: Can we guess?

LAUREN: Sure?

DAVE: Hmmm. Fins?

LAUREN: No...

DORIS: Fun.

DAVE: Faith.

DORIS: Fabric

DORIS: Fat!

DAVE: Fungus, fangs

DORIS: Farms, fame, fumes

MARK: Lauren, tell us, please.

LAUREN: Fishermen.

DORIS: Oooh. I'm sensing another F word with this one. Friendship.

LAUREN: Fishermen despise otters.

DORIS: Or feud.

LAUREN: As otters repopulate their homelands or are brought to new homes, valuable shellfish supplies deplete. Fishermen, mostly members of Native populations, lose income. Now, can fishermen and otters live side by side in peace?

MARK: Thank you, Lauren but, before we ponder whether fishermen and otters are the Palistian Israeli conflict of the sea, can we just acknowledge that our job is to create educational children's television and kids will fall in love with otters?

LAUREN: Um?

DORIS: 100%

DAVE: They'll want to pet their fur!

DORIS: And cuddle with em

DAVE: And hold their hands.

DORIS: Ahh, they're so just so adorable...

LAUREN: About that. They're predators, extremely aggressive, gluttonous, and sexually rambunctious, especially the hypersexual males who are vicious as they compete for food and over a small population of female otters. They kidnap otter pups from their mothers as ransom for food and or sex, sexually coerce both otters and seals, even baby seals. They sometimes MURDER seals for no reason. And I've personally witnessed necrophilia.

DORIS: Are you talking about the same otters I see on Google holding their little cute pups?

DAVE: The species that do grooming gymnastics all day to keep warm?

LAUREN: I am.

DORIS: And when you say sexual coercion?

LAUREN: Essentially rape.

DORIS: And necrophilia?

LAUREN: Intercourse with corpses.

DAVE: So otters are the Nazis?

LAUREN: NO, what?

DAVE: Nazis.

LAUREN: They're otters. Wild animals.

DORIS: Those poor baby seals.

LAUREN: Yes but... Seals grow up and sexually coerce penguins.

DORIS: Penguins?

LAUREN: And penguins, well they can be abusive and sometimes participate in prostitution.

DAVE: Hooker penguins?

DORIS: Sex workers is the proper term, honey.

MARK: And yet, what really matters is that people still loved Happy Feet!

DORIS: I don't know if I can contribute to continuing the false narrative around seemingly adorable animals as they go around doing who knows what to each other.

MARK: Please, let's not give up on Otter Delight, working title, yet

DORIS: Corpses, Mark. Corpses.

LAUREN: What about humans?

We murder.

We kidnap.

We rape.

We take land.

We start wars.

We change habitats.

[Silence]

MARK: Do you ever think about how many whole chickens you've eaten in your lifetime?

DORIS: Well Dave and I always share a chicken

DAVE: And we turn the carcass into stock.

DORIS: For split pea soup!

DAVE: And matzah balls!

DORIS: I love your matzah balls.

DAVE: The key isn't to make the balls too round.

[Silence]

LAUREN: My point is that-

MARK: We have a mission-driven hit on our hands.

LAUREN: Right but I do have something to -

MARK: No no no no please don't.

So, some otters rape and murder and they only hold hands for practical purposes. I don't care I just can't let your science cloud the one idea that gave me hope today. Robinson, the Otter Son. See, all I had as a kid was Snow White, on repeat. My mom even took me to a therapist to find out why I was so obsessed. We played games with sticks and pegs and the doctor concluded that I saw myself in Snow White because I was fundamentally passive. But, I actually saw myself in Doc, Grumpy, Happy, Sleepy, Bashful, Sneezzy, and Dopey because I was living in the woods waiting to find acceptance. They do of course with Snow White. Then, the witch places the spell on her, transforming her into their Judy Garland, a diva fallen to young. And what do the dwarfs do? They build her a shrine in the forest, a place to watch over her and worship her. AND YET, the role of saving her goes to the prince who with a kiss brings her to life and then sweeps her away to his castle leaving those 7 men without love lives, isolated in their cottage. I've now lived in a forest alone of my own creation for 35 years, worshipping female pop stars. To this day, when my psychiatrist asks me if I've gone on

dates with any women, I don't correct him. So, please, Doris and Dave, WRITE THE ANIMATED GAY OTTER ENVIRONMENTAL WARRIOR SAN FRANCISCO CHILDREN'S TV SERIES!!!

DORIS: Oh my God, Mark, why haven't I set you up with our Robinson? You'll love him. He's so cute and funny and insightful.

MARK: I um...

[Beep]

RECORDING: Your time InZone is ending now to conserve energy. We believe that it's not about what you do on the phone but what you do with your time on earth that counts. Go forth and remember the 3-F mission that drives us, fight fossil fuels. Thank you. Call ending. Hanging up now.

[Beeping]

[The Sound of Ocean Waves]

Graeme: You've been listening to a new play, *Otter Delight (Working Title)* by Michael Harrison Feldman, directed by Colette Robert.
Featuring Catherine Curtin as Doris
Daniel K. Isaac as Mark
Jonathan Randell Silver as Dave
Akyiaa Wilson as Lauren
and also starring Cleo Gray as Recording.
Sound Design by Jack Mullen.

RJ: The staff of the Ensemble Studio Theatre are
Artistic Director: Billy Carden
Executive Director: Susan Vitucci
Associate Artistic Director, Director of Youngblood, and Director of EST/Sloan: Graeme Gillis. He's right over there.

Graeme: [Distant] Wooooooo.

RJ: Director of Play Development and Associate Director of EST/Sloan: Linsay Firman
Co-Artistic Director of Youngblood: RJ Tolan. That's me.
General Manager: Liz Uchtman
Production Manager: Jack Plowe
Development Manager: Aaron Hock
Brand Marketing Manager: Harrison Densmore
Communications & Audience Services Manager: Samantha Sembler
Finance Director: Jonathan Suárez
Literary Associate: Nikomeh Anderson
Productions & Operations Producing Apprentice: Mariel Sanchez
Development Assistant: Joey Nasta
and Facilities Manager: José Sanchez
The theme song for the Youngblood Monday Lunch is by Youngblood's own Jake Brasch and Nadja Leonhard-Hooper.

And incidental music for the podcast episodes is by Jake Brasch.
Our podcast Sound Engineer is Caroline Eng.

[Musical Interlude]

Graeme: Ensemble Studio Theatre is encouraging all of our audiences to support Black Girls Do Stem. That is a non-profit organization that envisions a future with equitable representation for Black women in all the STEM fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Their mission is to inspire curiosity in Black girls in all communities, for all those STEM fields, through education, access, and opportunity. We encourage you to support them at BGDSTEM.com. Support their important work and a more equitable future.

We also encourage everyone to join the fight against acts of hatred and violence against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders. We encourage you to visit stopAAPIhate.org/actnow.

RJ: Thank you so much for joining us for episode five of the Youngblood Monday Lunch, so glad to have shared *Otter Delight (Working Title)* with you today. We look forward to sharing new plays with you on coming Mondays in coming weeks. Thanks for joining us, don't forget to turn your phone back on. Talk to you soon.

[Musical Outro]

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