

Youngblood Monday Lunch: Episode 2

she comes from the dirt by Karina Billini

presented by the Ensemble Studio Theatre

[Youngblood Monday Lunch Theme Song begins]

Singer: [Sung] Lunch in the morning, lunch all 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 two of the Youngblood Monday Lunch. My name is RJ Tolan, I'm here with Graeme Gillis.

Graeme Gillis: [Distant, yet strained] HI!

RJ Tolan: Together we run the Youngblood program for early career playwrights at the Ensemble Studio Theatre in New York City and we are coming to you mid days on Mondays with brand new plays, by the playwrights of Youngblood in Podcast Audio Play form.

Why? Why is called - Why is it the Monday Lunch? What is a lunch? "What is a lunch in theatrical form?", I hear you asking yourselves.

To me, the lunch, the podcast, the short play, is somewhere between the mere power bar of a sketch and the full three course meal of a full length fully produced play. It's just a lunch. It's nourishing. It's a little break in the middle of your day. Takes about 20 minutes. And you're glad you did it. So that's what we're doing in theatre form. New plays. That are like a lunch.

Graeme's gonna tell you a little bit more about this episode.

[Bombastic musical interlude]

Graeme Gillis: Today's play is presented with support from the EST Sloan Project. That's a collaboration between the Ensemble Studio Theatre and the Alfred P. Sloan foundation to present new plays about science and technology. Before we start today's play, we want to acknowledge that Ensemble Studio Theatre and the entire city of New York, are located on Lenapehoking. That is the unceded traditional territory of the Lenape People. We want to pay respect to the Lenape People and to acknowledge all Indigenous people's that continue to live, work, create, and contribute here on Lenapehoking.

RJ Tolan: The EST Sloan Project celebrates science and progress. It's important as we do that, and as we tell stories around that theme, to acknowledge that many discoveries in this country have been made with the unacknowledged, unpaid labor, and the suffering of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people. We want to honor their sacrifices and their contributions to the progress of science and to the theatre that we create to celebrate it.

Graeme Gillis: And now we couldn't be more excited, to share with you today's play: *she comes from the dirt* by Youngblood playwright, Karina Billini
[Acoustic guitar musical Interlude]

TRINIDAD: *Mira esto!* Little Paolita doesn't trust me!

PAOLA: It's not a matter of trust; it's a matter of treatment I'm talking—

TRINIDAD: Trust and treatment goes hand-in-hand, little Paolita.

I do not *need* you. To give *me*. *Un lección. In a corner. Between my statue. Of San Miguel y Virgen Maria. On something I know—*

PAOLA: Two saints and a devil sandwich to—

TRINIDAD: [Laughing] You're fresh, Paola—

PAOLA: What did you give Milagros, Trinidad?

TRINIDAD: You don't come here anymore. *Tu mamá* neither. Thirty years she come to me—

PAOLA: She got her green card now—

TRINIDAD: Green card don't meannnnn immunity, okay? What now? Green card is a bandaid? Green card is a tampon? Green card is a gauze?—

PAOLA: First comes Green card, then comes United Healthcare card. I found someone for her in Mount Si—

TRINIDAD: You and your Mount Sinai.

I knew you'd be a nurse, little Paolita.

You used to be wallpaper in here, hungryhungryhungry to see the everything that go down in here. Your big nostrils on every plant I got in here. Every hand on every rosary bead. Both your ears in consultations.

But now you don't visit, no hellos.

OH! But you visit... [Laughs] the front of my botánica.

Harassing my patients outside so you can steal them from me and make them flush money at Mount Sinai—

PAOLA: You don't work with me so I gotta play dirty with—

TRINIDAD: Oh, I play dirty too, Paolita. PREPARATE.

[Sound of a wet slap]

[Paola shrieks]

PAOLA: What did you hit me with?!

[Trinidad laughs]

PAOLA: Is that shit poisonous?! My face is itching!

What is it gonna do to me?!

TRINIDAD: [Still laughing] Ohhhhhmyyyygodddd.

Paolita.

Relax.

It's a palm leaf.

And your itching?...is in your head.

What you think I am?

A bruja?

You see? *That's* your problem— you expect the worst. You think I do hocus-pocus on Milagros? *Dios.*

What I do here is not hocus-pocus.

PAOLA: Look. I'm sorry.... for not visiting.

You were like my godmother....you...

Look.

Milagros.

She's crazy for you.

That's why she's in a hospital bed in pain, just *eating it*—not saying shit. But you can tell me, Trinidad—what did you give her?

She's convulsing.

Spasms. The scary, scary works.

TRINIDAD: Welllllll.... what did the doctor pump into her?

PAOLA: Noooooooooo

it's what YOU gave her—

TRINIDAD: OOOooooohhhhh *is Me?* And not your white pill-happy Jesus in that *comemierda* hospi—

PAOLA: It's what *you* gave her because *we both* know you gave her something and that's why she been neglectin her condition—

your herbs and the plastic Jesus's she be praying up in here trying to pray the—

TRINIDAD: Let's leave all the Jesus's out, ah?

Before he comes down here ready to give out pow-pows to—

PAOLA: Can you just STOP putting merchandise away and listen—

TRINIDAD: Señor Jesus, you see little Paolita in her blue polyester bossing me in *my botan*—

PAOLA: *Paola.* Not *little* Paolita.

Jesus can see I have tetas and a degree now.

And *Jesus?*— — Trinidad has you next to a poster for a plant-based viagra.

Mamajuannna.

Is that what you gave Milagros? Mamajuana?

Which one of these hokey dokey hocus-pocus potions did you give Milagros? Hmmm?

Because if you don't *tell me*, I'll just take a sample of all of them to get Mount Sinai scientists to test the shit out—

TRINIDAD: Coñoooooooooooooooooo

Why did she even go to a hospital, ah?

You go in there complaining about your stomach and next thing you know they're giving you pills for your maldita heart that fucks up your liver.

PAOLA She came in there like that. *Convulsing*.

She came in pain without having her papers and ya know how she is about her status. I'm not gonna say where she got it from, okay?

My supervisor just wants to know if she's taken anything because we can tell Milagros is lying.

She's lying bad and she's lying for you.

[Pause]

TRINIDAD: You keep my name out and I'll tell you.

They don't— white Jesus don't see that I am also...

Soy doctora! Soy botanica!

PAOLA: Yeah. Okay. So what is it, Trinidad?

TRINIDAD: Aposote.

PAOLA: In English, Trinidad, I can't go saying *aposote* to my—

TRINIDAD: *Dique* in English! *Aposote aposote aposote*—

PAOLA: I don't know what that me—

TRINIDAD: Of course you don't. Worm seed.

Mira.

Now that you finally visit, I show off.

It's tall. Almost 4 feet. The stem is straight.

[Trinidad sniffs]

TRINIDAD: The smell of the root is like kicking you in the face.

Mmmmmm. Smell it.

You know it's good when it smells like that.

Touch it.

[Paola groans]

TRINIDAD: *Ay, Paola, touch it, it's safe.*

Mexicanos put this stuff in their beans *all the time*.

You see? No problem with the plant I gave Milagros. Remember that.

I made her a-a-a...*una cosa* of tea for the month. And a spoonful of oil. If she is convulsing...*BUENO*...

She took too much, then.

PAOLA: What is too much?

TRINIDAD: I told her to drink it when she did not feel good—

PAOLA: She didn't feel well all the time so she drank—

TRINIDAD: She. Took. Too. Much.

PAOLA: What. Is. Too. Much?

TRINIDAD: You *know* when it's too much.

It's in our people to know when it's too much.

PAOLA: Trinidad.

You don't even....it's crazy, ya know— Hold on.

TRINIDAD: DON'T be taking out your phone to call *la policia* on me or put me on that *maldita Feibú* or *Esnapchat!* *Como soy criminal! Tú camara tendrá un ojo, pero yo puedo hacerte mal de ojo!*

[The sound of a phone keyboard]

PAOLA: *Google.*

...is saying here it can cause paralysis and it's difficult to determine the quantity of when it becomes toxic. Oooooohhhhhheeeeeeeeeee—

TRINIDAD: Yeah-yeah-yeah—

that's nothing to worry about, trust me—

PAOLA: You gotta leave with me *right now!*

Here take your Halloweentown wannabe bag and your Walter Mercado cloak and come with me—

TRINIDAD: You will not be taking to *la policia*, I go fighting if—

PAOLA: I'm taking you. To. The. Hospital—

TRINIDAD: Same politics, different uniform—

PAOLA: *To Milagros* who can be a damn convulsion away from paralysis. She's refusing treatment.

She "sleeps" with her running sneakers on in the hospital bed. She thinks her convulsions are just the sweats.

"The good sweats."

And I never seen that Catholic, marry-to-Jesus woman so dang nasty but *she is....*she is to me and the doctor.

TRINIDAD: And you need Walter Mercado in your hospital, for what?

PAOLA: You treated her for so long and she—

TRINIDAD: As long as your mother long as you too—

PAOLA: If it's not out of your mouth, she don't wanna hear it. I need you to talk to her. Get her to—

TRINIDAD: Bring her here and she won't be paralyzed, Paola.

I'm gonna give her a herb bath, be there in the tub naked with her if I have to. And you'll see, I promise.

[The rustling of a plastic bag]

TRINIDAD: Let me get out my mortar.

PAOLA: She'sI can't bring her nowhere in her condition, she got other things going on with her, things that got h—

[The grinding of a mortar and pestle underneath]

TRINIDAD: It's *empacho*.

Just gastro and her intestines. And you will make it worse. Bring her here. I will make her a new tea.

PAOLA: Trinidad, Milagros is in no shape to come h—

TRINIDAD: [Laughing it off] *It's empacho, niñññññña!!!*

Because the woman wanna eat like she isn't gonna eat tomorrow. *Mira*, emotional eating doesn't bring a *Baja-panty papi* back. Bring her here and we'll put her in a ba—

PAOLA: Empacho is not even a real illness—

TRINIDAD: In white Jesus world.

But *here*— it is. For your mother it is. And *only here*— is where I will talk to her.

PAOLA: How did you diagnose her then? What's your diagnosis technique?

TRINIDAD: Ay, spare an old lady your new school mumbo jumbo, okay?

PAOLA: You're a practitioner so what's—

TRINIDAD: *Your practitioner.* And a whole neighborhood's.

Generations of generations of *Dominicansdominicansdominicansandddominicans* come to who?

Me.

PAOLA: I'ma talk to you like a practitioner then.

Milagros is your patient. What is your diagnosis technique?

TRINIDAD: You know it. I give consultation.

I have her tell me about her symptoms.

And then I tell her to tell me what happens in her life.

Is their heart ache? Stress? A loss? Then...

She pee in cup. I look at her urine.

I analyze.

Then, I scan my hand over her body and

you feel a different energy....where the ailment is... my hand directed me to her upper abdominal.

PAOLA: *Well, dang!* Forget x-rays when we have your hands—

TRINIDAD: Worked for you when you had that fibroid, and the chlamydia and the pregnan—

PAOLA: Stop.

This is Milagros' sonogram from yesterday. It's like a black funeral dress inside her colon. Come with me and tell her to listen. Please.

TRINIDAD: Let me see.

[Papers being shuffled]

TRINIDAD: *Pobre Milagros.*

PAOLA: Trinidad? Trinidad.

What are you doing? Can you back away from your mortar? I'm not gonna bring her that.

TRINIDAD: You're gonna bring these to her.

Yerba mora— it treats cancer.

Hinojo— for digestive problems. I'll make this to a tea in a minute.

Cancharagua— for inflammation. She—she can chew it raw.

PAOLA: Why would I bring more from your collection of toxic Chia Chia plants, huh? I'm not gonna bring her anything but you in the flesh.

TRINIDAD: [Yelling] You're not taking me to that *maldita* hospital, okay!

I don't trust you.

We don't trust you.

So take my *plantas* and tell Milagros that we consulted.

She will meet you halfway if you meet us halfway.

[Plastic bags rustling]

PAOLA: Oops-

TRINIDAD: *Que haces!* You're mixing up the *plantas!*

PAOLA: Why does it matter?

You can decipher which herb is what. What drydrydry part is what.

Go ahead. Which one is *yerba morba?*

TRINIDAD: *Estos son...*

This part is...

For Milagros, I won't guess.

You owe me money; this is garbage now.

PAOLA: Don't guess, period.

Milagros is paying for your genius guessing.

TRINIDAD: I wasn't guessing when I treated her.

Or when you had the uterine fibroid, ah?

And you and your *mami....and I....we were scared.*

Agave sap to reduce the fibroid

Remolacha and *caña de azúcar*

to strengthen and fortify the uterus

when we drain the fibroid.

And then you were brand-new, no?

PAOLA:...I was. You did heal me—

TRINIDAD: And that was no guessing, Paola, no guessing at all.

PAOLA: You don't even have the whole plants here. You only got plant fragments.

Roots and crushed leaves—

TRINIDAD: That is not my fault.

In *La Republica*, we pick them fresh. This country has limitations—

PAOLA: They're all pressed and dried and I'm sorry they look like dandruff on the table—

TRINIDAD: These drydrydry herbs—they are not *the best.*

They from *here— Miami, grown in some fulano's backyard in the Bronx, you know.*

Suffocating in these plastic packages.

Sprayed with all the chemicals.

The way it is in this country.

Spray down its plants and its people.

There is no room for biodiversity. There is no room for different. I wish they treat plants,

treat *mujeres* like me like *farmacia*. Imagine.

All the money, all the research.

No convulsions, no mistakes—

PAOLA: No more mistakes, then.

These little herbs can have different adverse reactions to the medication we're gonna put Milagros on so she can beat this.

TRINIDAD: *Medication?*

Pa'alla? We live to 120 on *plantas*. *Aqui?* We die early on pills. You rely so heavy on pills, Paola.

You forgot your instincts as a healer. The dirt the body the nature of it—

PAOLA: I have my instincts.

I would see Milagros walking on Fort Wash, *okay*, and I knew.

She was limping all the time, like something was ready to explode in her.

TRINIDAD: You terrorize me from outside. Now, the inside? Without paying rent or *comprar algo?*

[Door bell rings]

Paola: Don't touch me! Leave me alone.

TRINIDAD: *No no y no.*

Out!

PAOLA: You missed it. But *I found it.*

With Milagros.

You miss alotta things.

Summer 2015 you told Mami she had a "faint spell" from stress and what? *Heartbreak?* but it was her blood sugar. She had diabetes all that time and you didn't know.

TRINIDAD: *Yo no sabia.* She didn't tell—

PAOLA: Mami didn't want to say anything to you, because respect, but that's why she stopped coming.

I started standing outside your shop since then.

You missed alotta things.

And I said nothing because ya know, *respect.*

I stayed outside in silent protest,

pulled anyone who looked too bad coming from you. Other than that, I was *silent.*

But your patients' bodies, they protest louder.

Look at Milagros's sonagram.

That's protest.

You hear it? So fix it.

TRINIDAD: I go.

If no more of you camping outside my *botanica.*

If they find you, they find you in Mount Sinai.

PAOLA: This is Milagros we're gambling with—

TRINIDAD: Is *you* gambling Milagros, Paola. Those are my terms *y ya...*

PAOLA: I dunno if I can...

I don't trust you, man, I—

TRINIDAD: You trust me when your panty and pussy was *itchy-itchy-itchy*

when you was sixteen and you had sexy-sexy with that *puto*, Lenny, from Riverside, ah-

PAOLA: Trinidad—

TRINIDAD: And you come crying to me because you didn't want white Jesus or white Mary knowing *Dominicanas* could get itchy pussy? Because they expect us *and crucify us if we have itchy pussy when white Mary get itchy pussy all the time—*

PAOLA: *Trinidad, respect—*

TRINIDAD: No, *listen, Paolita.*

We don't want white Jesus to *know either, to treat us either, to examine us either,*
we afraid of white Jesus, too, you know.

We worry more that they think we have accent on the brain because we have accent on our tongue—

We worry about that over the pain.

We worry if they believe us when we say the pain is too much—

because they never believe when it comes from *us.*

We worry if they laugh when they see we smeared *moringa* all over our cuts looking like a pig covered in blood because our *abuelas* been doing that for years— and that matters more in a country that erase us— because white Jesus don't bother to learn what remedies us—

PAOLA: Trinidad, *por favor—*

TRINIDAD: I have good hands, Paolita.

When I was a nena,

My great-grandmother told me in a dream and she died the next day. *Inheritance.*

I come from the dirt.

PAOLA: My supervisor is waiting for us—

TRINIDAD: *Anjaaaaaaa* White Jesus—-

PAOLA: *ay, please—*you love to be Jesus.

you look into a crowded *botanica* and you think it's medical efficacy and prophecy if they keep coming back and it's not.

TRINIDAD: I do.

You do it, too.

But you...

you are white Jesus to your *gente*. That's why they don't see you.

Let's go see Milagros.

No more No more No more
no more standing outside my *botánica*. Okay?

PAOLA: Okay.

TRINIDAD: ...y *Perdoname*.

For your mami. For Milagros.

[Silence]

TRINIDAD: Paola?

PAOLA: Yes?

TRINIDAD: I'm going to bring her something, okay? Just aloe. Is safe.

PAOLA: Aloe is good.

TRINIDAD: It's fresh.

When I buy fresh plants in New York, I buy them with some *fulano* who has a little of Dominican Republic to sell.

In an alleyway.

It's always in an alleyway, Paola. Like how I am.

Secret.

See this *planta*?

Anamú! Guinea hen-weed! *Petiveria alliacea!*

And this one? *Aniseto!* Cake bush! *Piper marginatum!*

Aguacate! Avocado! *Persea americana!*

Berenjena! Eggplant! *Solanum melongena!*

Cancharagua! Sweet broom! *Scoparia dulcis!*

And this one?

Aposote. Worm seed. *Chenopodium ambrosioides.*

Graeme Gillis: You've been listening to a brand new play: *she comes from the dirt* by Karina Billini.

Directed by Andrés López-Alicea

Featuring Susanna Guzman as Trinidad and Luz Ozuna as Paola

Sound Design was by Jack Mullin

RJ Tolan: The staff of the Ensemble Studio Theatre are

Artistic Director: Billy Carden

Executive Director: Susan Vitucci

Associate Artistic Director, Co-Director of Youngblood, and Program Director of EST

Sloan: Graeme Gillis

Director of Play Development and Associate Director of EST Sloan: Linsay Firman

Co-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 and Audience Services Manager: Sam Sembler

Finance Director: Jonathan Suárez
Literary Associate: Nikomeh Anderson
Production and Operations Producing Apprentice: Mariel Sanchez
Development Assistant: Joey Nasta
and Facilities Manager: José Sanchez

Graeme Gillis: Ensemble Studio Theatre is encouraging all of our audiences to support Black Girls Do Stem. That's a non profit that envisions a future with equitable representation for Black women in all the S.T.E.M fields of science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Their mission is to inspire curiosity in Black girls in all communities through education, access and opportunity. You can find them at bgdstem.com. We encourage you to support their important work and a more equitable future.

RJ Tolan: Thank you so much for tuning in to episode two of the Youngblood Monday Lunch. We hope you will subscribe and stay tuned for new short play lunches, from the playwrights of Youngblood. We'll talk to you soon. Be well.

Graeme Gillis: [Distant, and excited] Have a good lunch!

[Musical trill]

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