

HOT ZERO

A short play

by

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HOT ZERO

CHARACTERS

LUCY, 20's to 30's

ERIC, 20's to 30's

A.J., a cousin of ERIC's

SETTING

A park

TIME

The present

HOT ZERO

LUCY is sitting on a park bench, reading a copy of *Us* magazine. ERIC, dressed in athletic gear, enters jogging. He jogs across the stage and exits. After a moment, he re-enters, hands on hips, panting with exhaustion. He takes several deep breaths, and sits next to LUCY on the bench. He's nervous.

ERIC

God it's hot!

LUCY glances up, smiles politely. Beat.

What are you reading?

She shows him the cover.

Us magazine. Good title.  
(She reads. Beat.)  
We're all in this together.

LUCY

What?

ERIC

Sex, drugs and rock and roll.  
(Embarrassed, laughing)  
Just kidding. I mean this heat. It's a record for April.

LUCY

So?

ERIC

You don't see the connection?

LUCY

What?

ERIC

Us sitting her sweating, the record heat?

She looks at him with polite disdain, and returns to her reading. A slight pause.

ERIC (CONT.)

Sorry.

LUCY

I came here to read.

ERIC

Of course, I didn't mean to, er... I just had to take a breather. The heat. And my knees. Falling apart. We're all falling apart!

(He chuckles nervously. LUCY reads with determination.)

And faster than we think. Like the Arctic glaciers.

LUCY

Look—

A.J. enters, running, and glances at ERIC and LUCY before exiting.

ERIC

I mean, when you think about it—

LUCY

I'm really don't want to talk about global warming right now.

ERIC

So you did make the connection!

LUCY

It was tough. You were so subtle.

ERIC

So what do you think about it?

LUCY

What did I just say?

ERIC

Sorry.

(Beat.)

LUCY

Not much.

ERIC

What?

LUCY

I don't think too much about global warming.

ERIC

Really? I find that very surprising.

She does not respond. She reads. A slight pause.

And to think this could be beachfront property.

LUCY

In your dreams.

ERIC

In thirty years.

LUCY

We're six miles from the ocean.

ERIC

Five and a half.

LUCY

You really believe that everything from here to the coast is going to be underwater in thirty years because of global warming?

She rolls her eyes and returns to her reading as A.J. enters, running. A.J. slows down, glances at LUCY, unintentionally catches her eye, then exits.

LUCY

(Rising as if to leave)  
Jesus!

ERIC

What?

LUCY

(Packing up her shoulder bag)  
I don't believe this. It's like you never grow up, any of you, ever!

ERIC

No, no, it's not what you think.

What do I think?  
LUCY

A.J. is completely harmless.  
ERIC

A.J.?  
LUCY

God it's hot!  
A.J. enters, running, and stops, panting; sits down on the bench next to LUCY.

God it's hot!  
A.J.

We're researchers.  
LUCY shakes her head in disbelief and starts to exit.

Blondes, brunettes, tall, short, big tits, little tits?  
ERIC

No! We're doing research on climate change, how to fight it, how to get more people to do their part.  
LUCY slowly returns to her spot on the bench.

We've designed a person-to-person survey—  
A.J.

And we came up with this icebreaker.  
ERIC

God, it's hot?  
LUCY

What do you think?  
A.J.

It sucks.  
LUCY

ERIC  
She already told me.

A.J.  
I think it's very Buddhist.

LUCY  
Do you?

ERIC  
The point is to engage people, start the conversation. People relate to it because it's like extremely hot or extremely cold or extremely something a lot of the time, and...Anyway, that was our thinking.

LUCY  
I would think again.

ERIC  
But you were curious, right, I mean...I'm sorry, I didn't get your name?

LUCY  
Lucy.

ERIC  
Lucy. Well, we are having a conversation.

LUCY  
It's lame. Trust me.

A.J.  
I have to go. Another research site.  
(To LUCY)  
Nice to meet you.

She nods. A.J. exits.

ERIC  
Okay, so it depends how you say it.

LUCY  
Look—

ERIC  
Eric.

LUCY  
Eric. I gotta go. Good luck.

ERIC  
Wait, just let me...Okay, so you could say: God, it's HOT!

LUCY  
As opposed to...?

ERIC  
GOD, it's hot!

LUCY  
Wow. Yeah.

ERIC  
You see the distinction?

LUCY  
I believe I do. How about: Shit, it's hot!

ERIC  
Well, except that—

LUCY  
Or: Fuck, it's hot! It's fucking steaming!

ERIC  
The thing is it needs a spiritual dimension.

LUCY  
The God thing.

ERIC  
Exactly.

LUCY  
Without the F-bombs.

ERIC  
Right.

LUCY  
But isn't "God, it's hot!" like taking his name in vain?



ERIC

No. No, no. It's centering God in the debate. I mean, I'm not a believer myself, but eighty-five percent of Americans are, so you need to appeal them on their terms. Protecting God's creation, being a steward of the Earth, that kind of thing.

LUCY

Got it.

(A slight pause)

ERIC

God, you're hot.

LUCY

Excuse me?

ERIC

Oh God, I'm sorry, that was....oh shit.

LUCY starts to leave.

Lucy, please don't go, please. Okay, I'm not doing research – well, not about this – and neither is A.J. A.J. is my cousin, second cousin actually, just helping me out. I come to the park a lot, and I see you sitting here reading, and I needed some reason to come over and talk to you, and global warming seemed like it might be a topic of mutual interest, and “God, it's hot!” was—

LUCY

A lousy pick-up line.

ERIC

But the truth is that I *am* concerned about climate change. I mean, it's our future and it's so huge it's hard to get your head around it, and you feel kinda powerless, but you're not, I mean, there are things you can do, you know, personal stuff, lifestyle choices, even though we need to be in the streets and in the face of legislators and create a national movement to force the government to take aggressive action to end our dependence on fossil fuels and build a whole new paradigm of sustainability for the planet.

LUCY

You drive a Prius.

ERIC

I did. I sold it. I take public transportation as much as I can. Occasionally, I break down and get an Uber.

Squiggly lightbulbs? LUCY

In every socket. ERIC

Bricks in your toilet cistern? LUCY

Saved five hundred and thirty-eight gallons of water last year. ERIC

You're obsessed with recycling. LUCY

Yes. ERIC

Even those tiny little plastic containers for salsa. LUCY

YES! I knew it, I knew you were.... Will you have dinner with me? Or coffee—we could just do coffee, to start with. As an icebreaker. ERIC

Iced coffee? LUCY

(Laughing nervously)  
Oh that's good, that's very good. You're funny. ERIC

And hot. LUCY

Yes. ERIC

It's bullshit. LUCY

What? ERIC

Global warming. LUCY

ERIC  
You don't think that. You can't think that.

LUCY  
A bunch of liberal bullshit propaganda.

ERIC  
But the science is indisputable.

LUCY  
It's people like you who are killing the American dream.

ERIC  
That is absurd.

LUCY  
You mean stupid.

ERIC  
Misguided.

LUCY  
You think I'm ignorant and stupid.

ERIC  
No!

LUCY  
I just said something real stupid.

ERIC  
I don't think you are stupid.

LUCY  
You don't, huh?

ERIC  
No way! Are you kidding?

LUCY  
So what do you think of me?

ERIC  
I think you're smart.

LUCY

Smart, funny, and hot.

ERIC

Hotter than a thousand suns. Hotter than Dante's Inferno. Well, not quite that hot, I mean...

LUCY

Good.

ERIC

Good?

LUCY

I was lying.

ERIC

You were?

LUCY

Just a little test. I believe global warming is the greatest existential crisis in all of human history, it's a threat to the survival of all living things, and we have to take action now before it's too late.

ERIC

Do you still have your Prius?

LUCY

Yes, but it mostly sits in the driveway. And I have solar panels, a composter, and rain barrels in my backyard. Last year I grew fifty-seven point six percent of my own food.

ERIC

Orgasmically.

LUCY

Organically.

ERIC

Yes.

LUCY

I bike to work.

ERIC

Offsets?

All my carbon-based travel.

LUCY

Zero emissions!

ERIC

But that's not you?

LUCY

Of course! I'm strictly a zero emissions guy.

ERIC

You are?

LUCY

Yes. No. I mean, I do, on occasion—

ERIC

Emit?

LUCY

Yes.

ERIC

(Beat)

God, it's hot.

LUCY

Fucking hot.

ERIC

They embrace hungrily. Blackout.

END OF PLAY