

HOT ZERO

A short play

by

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HOT ZERO

CHARACTERS

LUCY, a woman, 20's to 30's

ERIC, a man, 20's to 30's

JAMES, a man

SETTING

A park

TIME

The present

HOT ZERO

LUCY is sitting on a park bench, reading a copy of *Us* magazine. ERIC, dressed in running gear, enters running. He runs 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 Weekly. 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, er...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 dismissively, and returns to her reading. A slight pause.

ERIC (CONT.)

Don't worry about it, I...I'm 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. Beat. LUCY reads with determination)

And faster than we think. Like the Arctic glaciers.

LUCY

Look—

JAMES enters, running. He glances at ERIC and LUCY as he passes, then exits. Beat.

ERIC

I mean, when you think about it—

LUCY

I'm really not in the mood to talk about global warming.

ERIC

So you did make the connection!

LUCY

It was tough. You were so subtle.

ERIC

Thank you, that's always been one of my strengths. So what do you think about it?

LUCY

About what?

ERIC

Global warming.

LUCY

Not much.

ERIC

Really? I find that very surprising.

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

ERIC (CONT.)

To think that we could be sitting here on the beach. Right here. This could be beachfront property.

LUCY

In your dreams.

ERIC

In thirty years.

LUCY

We're five miles from the ocean.

ERIC

Six.

LUCY

You really believe that stuff? 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 JAMES enters, running. He slows down, glances at LUCY and unintentionally catches her eye. He exits, running.

LUCY

(Rising as if to leave)
Jesus!

ERIC

What?

LUCY

(Packing up her shoulder bag)
I don't believe this, it never stops—

ERIC

You think that guy—?

LUCY

It's like you never grow up, any of you, ever!

ERIC

No, no, he didn't mean anything, he's harmless. At least he seems—

You know him? LUCY

Well, I—yes, kind of, he’s, er... ERIC

What? What? LUCY

JAMES enters, running, and stops, panting.

A friend. ERIC

LUCY hesitates, then sits back down on the bench. JAMES smiles at her and sidles up, taking deep breaths. He sits next to her.

God it’s hot! JAMES

LUCY shakes her head in disbelief and starts to exit.

Wait, wait, it’s not what you think! ERIC

Fuck you! LUCY

You’re helping to fight global warming. ERIC

(Halting and laughing)
What? LUCY

My name’s Eric, this is James. We’re doing research. ERIC

For the government, about climate change. How to get more people to do their part. JAMES

ERIC

We're designing a survey and we came up with this icebreaker.

LUCY

God, it's hot?

ERIC

It's catchy. Don't you think?

JAMES

Very Buddhist.

LUCY

I'm not a Buddhist.

ERIC

Well sure, but the problem is that everyone knows about global warming, I mean, it's always on TV and in the papers, and there're three-fifty dot org, and the Keystone pipeline, and the tar sands, and the whole green energy thing—

JAMES

But not enough people—individually—are doing anything about it.

LUCY

And “God, it's hot” is going to motivate them?

ERIC

No, no, that's just a way of starting the conversation, you know, you get to chat, they relax, and then you begin your questions. And people relate to it because, I mean, it is very very hot these days. Most of the time.

LUCY

It didn't work for me.

ERIC

But you were curious—I'm sorry, what's your name?

LUCY

Lucy.

ERIC

Well, Lucy, we did talk, we're talking now.

LUCY

It's lame. Trust me.

JAMES

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

She nods. He exits.

ERIC

It depends how you say it, okay? I mean, you could say: God, it's HOT!

LUCY

As opposed to...?

ERIC

GOD, it's hot!

LUCY

The Buddhist thing?

ERIC

No, no, I was just...It's emphasis, how you get someone's attention, get them, you know...Excited.

LUCY

Excited?

ERIC

About doing something about global warming.

LUCY

Shit, it's hot!

ERIC

What?

LUCY

That's a whole lot stronger.

ERIC

Well, except that—

LUCY

Fuck, it's hot! It's fucking hot, bro. That's a real statement. That has fucking balls.

ERIC

It won't fly. It's too ghetto.

LUCY

Too ghetto?

ERIC

No, no, that's not what I...like, I didn't mean...Sorry. It's just that, it's got to have that, that, that... spiritual dimension.

LUCY

As in God?

ERIC

Right. "God, it's hot!", it's more...er... inclusive, it reaches a lot more people—eighty-five percent of Americans believe in God, right, so...And it's tender, it's warm—well hot. Obviously.....Anyway, "Fuck, it's hot!", that's just not... It's aggressive, offensive even, it's too, er, you know...

LUCY

Hard?

ERIC

Well, it's, er...it's certainly not warm.

LUCY

It's hot.

ERIC

Yeah, in a manner of speaking, but—

LUCY

No, no, you're right, it makes sense.
(A slight pause)

ERIC

God, you're hot.

LUCY

Excuse me?

ERIC

Nothing. Oh God, oh shit, I'm sorry.

LUCY starts to leave.

Don't go, Lucy, please, please. Okay, I'm not doing research, and neither is James, he's my cousin, second cousin actually, he was just helping me out, I'm just...I come here a lot, to the park, and I see you sitting here, reading, and I...I...I'm not good at this sort of thing, and I needed some reason, you know, to come over and talk to you, and global warming seemed like, well...and "God, it's hot"—

LUCY

Is a lousy pick-up line.

ERIC

Except that I *am* concerned about climate change, for real, really, I mean I try, I do, I try to do my part and make a difference,

LUCY

You drive a Prius.

ERIC

Honda Civic Hybrid actually. But I take public transportation to work.

LUCY

Squiggly lightbulbs?

ERIC

In every socket.

LUCY

Bricks in your toilet cistern?

ERIC

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

LUCY

You're obsessed with recycling.

ERIC

Yes.

LUCY

Even those tiny little plastic containers for salsa.

ERIC

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.

LUCY

Iced coffee?

ERIC

(Laughing nervously)
Yes! Oh good, that's good, that's very good. Iced. Coffee. Yes. Funny.

LUCY

You really think I'm hot?

ERIC

Oh God yes.

LUCY

It's bullshit.

ERIC

What?

LUCY

Global warming.

ERIC

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

LUCY

A bunch of liberal bullshit propaganda.

ERIC

But the scientific evidence, no one disputes it any more, not even Republicans—

LUCY

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

ERIC

That's just not....that's absurd.

LUCY

Absurd?

ERIC
Misguided.

LUCY
Stupid. That's what you think. You think I'm ignorant and stupid

ERIC
No!

LUCY
I just said something real stupid.

ERIC
I don't think you're stupid.

LUCY
You don't?

ERIC
No way! Are you kidding?

LUCY
So what do you think of me?

ERIC
I think you're smart. Very smart.

LUCY
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 crisis of the modern era, perhaps in all of human history, it's a threat to the survival of all living things, and we have to take action now, the whole world, everyone, before it's too late. I have a Prius.

ERIC

Forest green?

LUCY

And 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

And when it's too cold, you walk. Offsets?

LUCY

All my carbon-based travel.

ERIC

Zero emissions!

LUCY

But that's not you?

ERIC

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

LUCY

You are?

ERIC

Yes. No. I mean, I do, on occasion—

Emit? LUCY

Yes. ERIC
(Beat)

God, it's hot. LUCY

Fucking hot. ERIC

They embrace hungrily. Blackout.

END OF PLAY