

# IF YOU START A FIRE [BE PREPARED TO BURN]

A play by

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# IF YOU START A FIRE

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### CHARACTERS

LUCY / LUXXX	F	20s
CHRIS / CHRIXXX	M	20s
BIG_BEN	A sex chat client	
TOMMYKNOCKER	A sex chat client	

### SETTING

CHRIS and LUCY's apartment. The epilogue takes place in their starter mansion.

### SCENES

#### ACT I

InnerRoutes.com

#### SCENE 1

A Plant for Hanging

#### SCENE 2

Of the Labia

#### SCENE 3

Mister Takayama's America

#### ACT II

[All Together Now]

#### SCENE1

Rubber Souls

#### SCENE 2

Revolver

#### SCENE 3

Lucy in the Sky

#### EPILOGUE

All You Need Is [Like]

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## NOTES ON THE SCRIPT

\* [Text in brackets like these happens via chat.] A projector could be used in combination with voice over, or you might have the actors hold up a ping pong paddle and wiggle their fingers to suggest they are typing and chatting. Feel free to find the combination that works for you. The New Theatre project used voiceovers and thirteen salvaged computer monitors scattered around the space, on which the video chat and still images of InnerRoutes.com appeared. It was not possible to clearly read the chat on these monitors, though they did give the impression that a chat was taking place. This was effective.

\* For readings I recommend you cast at least four actors: two for CHRIS and LUCY, one to read stage directions, and a fourth to double as BIG\_BEN and TOMMYKNOCKER. A fifth could be cast to have separate actors for the two chat-only parts. The cast for a production could call for two or four actors, depending on how you intend to handle BIG\_BEN and TOMMYKNOCKER. In the first reading of the script it was very humorous to have a third person live onstage reading both the parts of BIG\_BEN and TOMMYKNOCKER.

\* As of January 2011 in “reality” InnerRoutes.com appears to represent a Bhutanese travel agency and not a boutique sex website run by two American twenty-somethings. If you are interested in traveling to Bhutan, check it out.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

IF YOU START A FIRE [BE PREPARED TO BURN] was written with the support of a 2009-10 Jerome Fellowship from the Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis.

## DEVELOPMENT

The script received its first staged reading in August of 2011 at the New Theatre Project in Ypsilanti, Michigan.

## PREMIERE

IF YOU START A FIRE [BE PREPARED TO BURN] was originally presented by the New Theatre Project on February 17, 2012 under the artistic direction of Keith Paul Medalis and directed by Natividad Salgado with designs by Janine Woods Thoma. The cast was as follows:

CHRIS/CHRXXX.....	Peter Giessl
LUCY/LUXXX.....	Elise Randall
BIG_BEN (Voice).....	Keith Paul Medalis
TOMMYKNOCKER (Voice).....	Andrew Sandoval

Goethe said, 'Talent is developed in privacy,' you know? And it's really true. There is a need for aloneness which I don't think most people realize for an actor. It's almost having certain kinds of secrets for yourself that you'll let the whole world in on only for a moment, when you're acting.

- Marilyn Monroe

Boy meets girl, so what?

- Brecht

ACT I  
INNERROUTES.COM

SCENE 1  
A PLANT FOR HANGING

CHRIS and LUCY's apartment. LUCY sits at the dining table with a textbook and laptop. SHE types at the laptop.

CHRIS enters. HE wears the uniform of the trucking company for which HE drives. CHRIS removes the baseball cap with the company's logo and throws it to the side. HE goes to the kitchen and returns with a six pack. HE shotguns one and starts on a second.

CHRIS  
What's this?

LUCY  
It's a hanging plant.

CHRIS  
Where are we going to hang it?

LUCY  
I thought maybe the office.

CHRIS  
What office?

LUCY  
That general area. Use your imagination. How was your day?

CHRIS  
Awful. Yours?

LUCY  
Same. My feet hurt. I miss you. We never see each other. I have to do this, though. Otherwise what? Otherwise I wait tables forever. Or get some kind of degrading, pseudo job. And I don't want to be a secretary. A temp. A coordinator. A coordinating consultant. A consulting coordinator. A substitute teacher. An actual teacher. A tutor. I don't want any job that begins with a T.

CHRIS  
Tank-operator.

LUCY  
Definitely not.

CHRIS

You'd be a terrible tank-operator.

LUCY

It's just three years. Then I'll have my MBA. I'll get a good job with benefits. Maybe I can telecommute. People will finally start to respect me! And if not, we'll just buy some respect. And actual free time! We'll find new hobbies! Expensive, sporty hobbies! Maybe I'll golf!

CHRIS

Golf?

LUCY

Golf! Or ski!

CHRIS

You hate the cold.

LUCY

I'll buy an expensive jacket! What the sport is doesn't matter. The point is to take up some activity that costs a lot and talk about it a bunch. It's a tactful way to tell people you've got money and free time. That way they know you're a first class citizen and treat you accordingly!

CHRIS

Golf?

LUCY

What? Why not?

CHRIS

What am I going to do while you're out there golfing?

LUCY

Well you can stop driving that truck. Maybe go back to school...

CHRIS

Sure. I can get an English degree. Wait tables. Operate tanks.

LUCY

At least I finished.

CHRIS

I'm sorry. Today was shit. They made me run half of Thompson's route. I'm exhausted. I hate driving that truck.

LUCY

My day wasn't a peach either, thanks for asking. I had this one asshole... oh excuse me "guest"... who actually grabbed my ass.

CHRIS

Bastard.

LUCY

I told Jonathan, but he didn't do anything! It was during lunch, and we were slammed. Some vacuum convention or something.

CHRIS

That really does suck.

LUCY

Ha ha ha ha ha. Vacuums do suck! Turns out the guy's a "friend" of the "Regional Manager." "Oh, Lucy. I'm sure he didn't mean it. He's on his second Manhattan."

CHRIS touches LUCY suggestively. Her response lives somewhere between reluctant and hungry.

CHRIS

You should have done something.

LUCY

You know what thought went through my head? It's my period, right?

CHRIS

(standing off)

I pay strict attention to your cycle.

LUCY

Don't be sarcastic.

CHRIS

I'm not! You leave all these implements in the bathroom! Some days I go in there and I don't know what's happened. It's like a snake after it molts.

LUCY

I wanted to take out my tampon and dip it in his third Manhattan.

CHRIS

That is disgusting.

LUCY

I seriously considered it. The worst thing I could do to him without him really knowing.

CHRIS

Sadist.

LUCY

He's probably some tampon fetishist. Probably sticks them in his nostrils at night, adds a little water, and breathes through his mouth. Imagines he's sailing or something.

CHRIS

When do you have time to come up with these things?

LUCY

Waitresses harbor a lot of rage. Rage turns into thoughts. Weird thoughts. Remember that next time you're in a restaurant. Be nice to the wait staff. Anyway, that guy was an asshole. Look what you did. Now I can't focus.

CHRIS

It's part of the job, isn't it? Guys get a little drunk and grab waitresses on the ass. It's like a rite of passage. Social hazing. We're just monkeys, right? What? I've been to a good liberal arts college just like you. I'm the one that had the brains to quit before they took all the money I didn't have to begin with. I am so absolutely a feminist!

LUCY

Get me a beer then, Mister Feminist.

CHRIS gets LUCY a beer and makes a show of opening it for her. SHE slaps his ass.

CHRIS

See, that doesn't bother me.

LUCY

This is a different context. Ahh! Get away from me. You stink.

CHRIS

(touching the plant)

Where am I supposed to hang this?

LUCY

Over the wireless router?

CHRIS

I'll do it tomorrow. Gah! Look at all these bills. I've got a new name for our generation: Generation Fucked. You like it? It's that or "the Recession Generation," and I think "Generation Fucked" is better. It's got a lot of punch.

LUCY

You're very creative.

CHRIS

Bill. Bill. Past due bill. Hey! Coupons for shit we don't need! Bill.

LUCY

I'll get to them later.

CHRIS

I'm sick of living check to check. We're just treading water.

LUCY

It's better than drowning.

CHRIS

What are you working on?

LUCY

I have to do a presentation. Ugh.

CHRIS

Hey! Flex those poetry muscles. Recite some verse for me.

No? Fine. Hey, you should write your presentation in verse!

And lo, in the third quarter  
of the fifth fiscal year  
of our Lord Money  
Verily the trumpets  
Flowery love will blow,  
and we shall—

LUCY

Don't mock me.

CHRIS

You're the published poet.

LUCY

One poem in "Angry Feminists: A Bitch Journal." It's not a serious publication.

CHRIS

It's on the shelf, isn't it? Proof you're an angry feminist. And a... published poet.

LUCY

You're scoring all kinds of points here.  
(tapping at her computer)

What are you doing?

CHRIS

I'm bonding with our new plant. We're watching you work. What are you doing?

LUCY

It's my first attempt at a business plan.

CHRIS

Can you write a plan in which we are reborn into rich families?

LUCY

It doesn't work that way.

CHRIS

The golden rule: the folks with the gold—

LUCY

Make the rules.

CHRIS

I just wished they'd share a little more. Spread it around.

LUCY

I'm sure they wished you'd work harder for less.

CHRIS

(grabbing her laptop)

Seems like they've figured out how to do that. Seems like they let the leash out just enough so we get confident, then they yank the thing back and we all behave again. We grovel and hope they let the leash out like they used to, and by the time they do, we've forgotten there's a leash. Wash, rinse, repeat.

LUCY

That sounds right. What are you going to do about it?

(taking the laptop from CHRIS)

Anyway, I'm going to work on this. I'd like to join their ranks, you know? I'd settle on becoming an assistant to a priest in the capitalist hierarchy. All I want is to sell out, if they'd only just let me! I'll carry laundry for a rich misogynist if it means a salary with benefits. Health insurance. Dental insurance. 401k... maternity leave... I mean, the benefits from your job are okay, but they're not great. Sorry. It's true. I know we should have perspective. At least your job insures us.

CHRIS stands and takes off his shirt. HE takes off his pants. HE stands in his boxers. HE opens a window. LUCY taps at the keyboard. CHRIS stands there.

I lost my job.

CHRIS

CHRIS exits to the kitchen.

What?!

LUCY

I lost my job!

CHRIS  
(off.)

What are you doing?!

LUCY

Setting my uniform on fire!

CHRIS  
(off.)

Not in the house!

LUCY

It's not a house. It's an apartment!

CHRIS  
(off.)

CHRIS enters, still wearing only his boxers. HE holds a smoking cooking pot in his hands, which are covered with some kooky oven mitts. Chickens or something.

Quick quick quick! Open the door!

LUCY

You're insane!

CHRIS

The door, Lucy!

LUCY opens the front door. CHRIS streaks out with the smoking pot, only to return a few moments later.

I didn't like that job anyway.

CHRIS

What the hell is wrong with you!?

LUCY

CHRIS

I lost my job.

LUCY

We can't survive off my tips, and I can't do any more shifts. I have to focus on the MBA!

CHRIS

Maybe if you smile when guys grab you, you'll get bigger tips. Then we're really living!

LUCY

What the hell happened?

CHRIS

I did most of Thompson's route today on top of my own, and he didn't even say "thank you". He was at the bar right at five watching the game. He'd been faking sick, and he laughed at me. You know how Thompson laughs. Hurr hurr hurr.

So I punched him.

LUCY

You punched him for his laugh?

CHRIS

I would have punched his laugh if it was punchable, but it's not, so I punched the place from whence the laugh originates: his face.

LUCY

You have to apologize.

CHRIS

I'm sick of groveling.

LUCY

They could press charges.

CHRIS

No they won't. He kind of pushed me first. There were words. It's complicated. You'll be glad to know I was technically laid off, not fired. That company isn't exactly on the level. Their books are cooked. Somebody's fucking somebody and not wearing protection. The fuckee doesn't even know he's the fuckee, which is the worst way to get fucked! The fucker sure knows there's fucking going on, though. Woo boy. And I think I know who the fucker is. I think the fucker's/

LUCY

Don't tell me! La la la la la la!

CHRIS

But I know who the fucker is!

LUCY

You're a criminal mastermind. What's your point?

CHRIS

They're not going to challenge my unemployment. We're not going to starve.

LUCY

Chris, dear, did you blackmail your employer?

CHRIS

Ex-employer. And no. They offered. Hey. What? Why would I lie? It's going to be fine.

LUCY

Oh good! Fine. You only lost a job with benefits in the worst job market since Prohibition!

CHRIS

Good point! Let's toast the end of Prohibition. What were those idiots thinking?

LUCY

We were saving for a real wedding! We were going to buy a house!

CHRIS

I know!

LUCY

Weren't we friends with Thompson?

CHRIS

Yeah. I saw how he looked at you.

LUCY

I have that effect.

CHRIS

He had it coming.

LUCY

Typical! You acted out, and now we're screwed. What if one of us gets sick?

CHRIS

We'll take cough medicine and drink chamomile tea.

LUCY

No! Sick like really sick! Sick like we get an arm cut off! We're running around armless!

CHRIS

How are we going to lose an arm?

LUCY

These things happen! We'll go into the hospital, they'll cauterize the stump, send us the bill to end all bills, and we'll lose everything!

CHRIS

What everything?

THEY look around their apartment. THEY have little to lose except perhaps some credit debt, outdated consumer electronics, secondhand furniture, a half-read copy of *Angry Feminist: A Bitch Journal*, and a plant for hanging.

LUCY

I don't want to lose my arm.

CHRIS

Your arm isn't going to fall off. We're fine. We're fit, young specimens. Look at us!

CHRIS beats his chest and shows off his various parts. HE is indeed well assembled. HE pulls LUCY's hand and shows her to herself.

LUCY

What are we going to do?

CHRIS

I have two years of college.

LUCY

Oh yeah! What did you study? Oh I remember! Hallucinogenic drugs!

CHRIS

And Philosophy! And Latin!

LUCY

Great! Call Rome and ask them when we can expect universal health care and a robust job market! Latin! Why Latin?