

SILENT TREATMENT

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Scott Haan

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SYNOPSIS: Three friends are getting together for lunch, but June and Gretchen are surprised to find that Billie, normally the unstoppable chatterbox of the group, isn't saying a word. Can two friends figure out why a third is giving them the silent treatment?

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 EITHER)

JUNE (m/f).....A friendly and gentle person. (*JOHN, if male.*) (41 lines)

GRETCHEN (m/f).....Loud and boisterous, and with a sarcastic sense of humor. (*GREG, if male.*) (41 lines)

BILLIE (m/f).....Usually very talkative, but uncharacteristically quiet today. (*BILLY, if male.*) (5 lines)

FLEXIBLE CASTING

The genders and ages of all three characters are flexible, but for best results, they should all be the same gender, and roughly the same age. The roles are all written here as females, but could be played by males with minor changes in the dialogue.

SETTING

Present day. Noon on a Saturday.

This show could be performed on an entirely blank stage. (A house or apartment set could also be used, if already standing.)

PROPS

- Two chairs (or a bench or couch)
- A watch worn by June
- Money in a pocket or purse, carried on by June
- Money in a pocket or purse, carried on by Gretchen

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Silent Treatment was first presented on June 21-22, 2013 as part of the inaugural 10-Minute Play Festival at the Civic Theatre of Greater Lafayette in Lafayette, IN. It was directed by the author, Scott Haan. The roles were originally performed by the following cast:

GRETCHEN Julie Doan
JUNE Erin O'Connor
BILLIE Whitney Freeland

AT RISE:

JUNE and GRETCHEN are onstage. Both are seated in chairs, or on a bench, center stage. June is on the stage right side, and Gretchen is stage left. They randomly look towards stage right as if waiting for someone.

GRETCHEN: She knows to meet us HERE, right?

JUNE: *(Checking her watch.)* Yep. I texted her this morning, and she wrote back and said she'll be here.

GRETCHEN: Late, as usual. When she gets here, I hope you're ready to listen to every last mind-numbingly boring detail of her date last night. *(A fast and unflattering imitation.)* "Our waiter's name was Steven, you know, only on his nametag it was Steven with a P-H, like Stephen King, instead of Steven with a V, like Steven Tyler. And he had a big mole on his left earlobe – HIS left, I mean, not YOUR left if you were talking to him and looking at his face – and the mole had two hairs coming out of it, but one was sticking up and the other one was longer and was sticking down. And he didn't really have a lisp or anything, but I think it's possible that he may have stuttered when he was a child." Yadda yadda yadda.

JUNE: She's not THAT bad. Besides, you never know. People change.

GRETCHEN: Yeah, but Billie isn't people. She's Billie. The Energizer Bunny of non-stop yakking.

JUNE: We'll see. Hey, did your power go out last night? I lost electricity at about eleven.

GRETCHEN: Nope, mine never went out. I THOUGHT maybe yours did. So the lights still hadn't come on when you chose that outfit, I take it?

JUNE: *(Realizes she has been insulted.)* Hey!

GRETCHEN: Ha! *(Looking offstage towards stage right.)* Ooh, here she comes. What time is it?

JUNE: *(Checking her watch again.)* Um...eight after.

JUNE follows GRETCHEN'S look off stage right. At that moment, BILLIE enters from stage right. JUNE and GRETCHEN both stand to meet her.

JUNE: *(A greeting, loud enough for the approaching BILLIE to hear.)*
There she is!

GRETCHEN: *(Also a greeting.)* Hey.

JUNE: *(Holding out her arms for a hug, or one hand for a handshake.)*
Good to see you, Billie.

BILLIE stops SR of JUNE and accepts the hug or handshake, but still doesn't say anything. Her expression is stoic. JUNE and GRETCHEN look at each other with confusion.

JUNE: *(To BILLIE.)* Is everything okay?

BILLIE nods her head a few times, unenthusiastically.

GRETCHEN: *(Baffled.)* Um...okay. *(Shrugs it off.)* So where are we going for lunch?

JUNE: I vote for the Singer Grill on Nolan Street.

GRETCHEN: Again? We always go there! Billie, back me up here. We need some variety, am I right?

BILLIE shrugs, ambivalent.

JUNE: *(To BILLIE.)* All right, WHAT is going on with you today?

GRETCHEN: *(Pointing to BILLIE'S throat.)* Did you go hoarse, or something? *(No response.)* Hello? Scratch your hoof in the dirt once for yes, twice for no...

JUNE: Billie, say something. You're starting to freak me out.

BILLIE makes a gesture of helplessness, as if to say "I can't."

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GRETCHEN: (To JUNE.) I know how to get her to speak. (She squeezes in between the other two.) Hey, Billie, did you hear the government has permanently outlawed all chocolate and caffeine? (BILLIE merely glares at her, not amused. Pause.) Yeah, they announced that on the news, right after the story about how the entire cast of *Downton Abbey* [or another popular show] was killed in a tragic pontoon accident. (Pause. Still no response.) Okay, time for the big guns. (She cracks her knuckles and gets serious.) Channing Tatum is an ugly fatty with halitosis who can't dance, and he thinks his fans are all giant losers. (Pause. Still no response. To JUNE, with a shrug.) I got nothin'. (Defeated, GRETCHEN sits back down on the stage left side. JUNE steps closer to BILLIE.)

JUNE: Billie, did you lose your voice? (BILLIE shakes her head "no.") Then what? Take a vow of silence? Studying to be a mime?

GRETCHEN: Oh man, I HATE mimes. If you escape from an invisible box, I will punch you in the head.

BILLIE puts up one warning finger to GRETCHEN. Her expression says, "Don't even think about it."

GRETCHEN: (Continued. Standing back up quickly, inspired.) I got it! You were attacked by an angry cat, and it LITERALLY got your tongue!

JUNE: Gretchen, this is serious. Something BIG must be going on for HER to be this quiet. (To BILLIE.) No offense, but you ARE a fairly talkative person.

GRETCHEN: Talkative, nothing. You're an unstoppable chatterbox. Normally we couldn't shut you up with duct tape and a staple gun!

JUNE: (To GRETCHEN, a plea not to be rude.) Gretchen...

GRETCHEN: (To BILLIE, even more agitated.) Oh, and might I add... You picked a lousy day to finally shut your yap!

JUNE: (To GRETCHEN, a warning not to reveal a secret.) Gretchen! (To BILLIE.) Listen, this silent treatment? You're obviously upset about something. Is it me? Are you mad at me? (BILLIE shakes her head "no".) You're not? (To GRETCHEN.) Then I guess she must be mad at YOU.

GRETCHEN: Me? Why? What did I do?

BILLIE squints her eyes and tilts her head to the side as if to say, "You know exactly what you did." The following conversation is all done intentionally within earshot of BILLIE, who is meant to hear every word.

JUNE: Well, think. You must have done SOMETHING to make her angry.

GRETCHEN: No, nothing! I mean, nothing she KNOWS about, anyway!

JUNE: Are you sure? Why else would she be mad at you?

GRETCHEN: *(Loudly, but matter-of-fact.)* Because I'm an obnoxious, abrasive person! *(BILLIE nods in agreement, eyes wide, as if to say: "That's an understatement!")*

JUNE: Well, no argument there.

GRETCHEN: I'm surprised people don't chase me around with pitchforks!

JUNE: Still, don't you think you should apologize for whatever it was?

GRETCHEN: Not really, but if it'll get you off my back... *(GRETCHEN moves past JUNE to stand next to BILLIE. To BILLIE, grudgingly.)* Billie, I would like to apologize if I have done something to offend you. And if I have done MANY things, please consider this a blanket apology that covers ALL of them at the same time.

JUNE: *(Sarcastic.)* How noble.

GRETCHEN: *(With a shrug.)* I'm efficient. *(To BILLIE.)* So are we cool now? *(BILLIE shakes her head "no.")* Oh, come on!

JUNE: *(To BILLIE.)* So it's something specific that you're upset with Gretchen about? *(BILLIE nods her head "yes.")*

GRETCHEN: *(Jokingly.)* Psh. What am I supposed to do, guess? *(BILLIE nods again.)* Seriously? I was kidding!

JUNE: Have you done so many mean things to her that you can't even narrow it down? *(BILLIE nods.)*

GRETCHEN: Hey, I provide a valuable service. I keep my friends on their toes, and I keep them modest and humble. There should be a monthly fee. *(To BILLIE.)* So if I had to guess what you found out, I would say...it's "The Photo," right?

JUNE: What photo?

GRETCHEN: You know, the one from her party, that Shelly Abrams posted on Facebook? The picture in mid-sneeze?

JUNE: I have no idea what you're talking about.

GRETCHEN: *(A mild chuckle.)* Oh, you'd remember it if you saw it. Billie was TRYING to hold back a sneeze, and it looked like her entire face was imploding. It was like... *(GRETCHEN contorts her face and body into a hideous frozen statue with the ugliest expression she can muster, her hands twisted into gnarled claws, and freezes that way for a moment.)*

JUNE: Nice.

GRETCHEN: Maybe the single most unattractive photo ever taken of anyone in history.

JUNE: And you posted it.

GRETCHEN: No, I TOOK it! But I knew she would kill me if I put it up on Facebook. So I e-mailed it to Shelly and told her SHE could post it, as long as she didn't I.D. me as the source. But it looks like that stoolie caved and gave me up. So, there you go. You got me.

BILLIE uses her hands to do a "please continue" gesture, as if to say, "Keep going. What else?"

JUNE: I think she wants more.

GRETCHEN: What do you want from me? You have to give me a hint or something, or we'll be here until our corpses decay. What is this about?

BILLIE rubs the thumb and index finger of one hand together, a gesture to indicate money.

GRETCHEN: Money? Oh, man. You know about the car too, don't you? *(BILLIE nods.)* How did you find out?

JUNE: Find out WHAT?

GRETCHEN: *(With a sigh.)* I'M the one who banged up her car last month.

JUNE: *(Shocked.)* Wait, that hit-and-run in the Applebee's parking lot? That was YOU?!? *[Feel free to substitute a popular local restaurant name.]*

GRETCHEN: Yeah, but it was an accident! Billie, when I got to the restaurant, you were there before me, for ONCE. I was parking behind you...and suddenly this huge spider the size of a TODDLER dropped right in front of my face. Well, it freaked me out, and I must have hit the gas, because the next thing I knew I smashed into your back fender.

JUNE: *(Judgmental.)* Unbelievable.

GRETCHEN: Nobody saw what happened. So I parked somewhere you couldn't see any damage on my car. Then I went in and I didn't say anything. I wanted to, but I kept chickening out. And as we were leaving, I pretended to be surprised at the damage to—

JUNE: *(Interrupting to correct her.)* Surprised AND outraged, as I recall.

GRETCHEN: Sure. Fine. Surprised AND outraged.

JUNE: In fact, I remember you saying, and I quote, "Whoever did this should be eaten alive by fire ants."

GRETCHEN: *(Glaring at JUNE, speaking through gritted teeth.)* I don't recall exactly what I said. It's all a blur. *(Back to BILLIE.)* Look, I'm sorry. I should have told you right when it happened. But the longer I went on lying, the harder it was to confess. It wasn't fair to you, and I'm the worst friend in the world, and I'm sorry. *(No response.)* How DID you find out, anyway? *(No response, but BILLIE'S eyes squint with accusation, and a hint of a smile.)* Wait a minute. You DIDN'T know, did you? *(BILLIE shakes her head.)* You didn't know until I just opened my big mouth. *(BILLIE gestures with her hand in the form of a pistol aimed at GRETCHEN as if to say, "Bingo!")* Oh, for—

JUNE: Ha! *(Doing the same "money" gesture that BILLIE did earlier.)* She tricked you with that "money" gesture! That could have meant ANY-thing. Sneaky, Billie.

GRETCHEN: *(To BILLIE.)* All right, fine. Now you know. So SAY something! Get mad at me, yell at me, cuss me out! Do SOMETHING! What is the matter with you?!? This is really starting—

JUNE: *(Looking at her watch, she interrupts.)* Hey! *(BILLIE and GRETCHEN both look at her. A brief pause as she looks at her watch, then...)* That's time!

GRETCHEN grimaces in disgust and disappointment, but both JUNE and BILLIE look happy. BILLIE crosses in front of GRETCHEN to stand next to JUNE.

BILLIE: *(Victorious, to JUNE.)* Yes! I told you I could do it!

JUNE: *(Smiling.)* You sure did.

GRETCHEN: *(Startled to hear BILLIE talk.)* Wait, you— What? What are you talking about?

BILLIE: *(Holding out her hand to JUNE while answering GRETCHEN.)*
She called me this morning and bet me ten bucks I couldn't be completely quiet for ten minutes.

Pause as a stunned GRETCHEN absorbs this, and watches JUNE pulling out cash from her pocket or purse.

GRETCHEN: *(It all finally makes sense, and she glares at JUNE.)* Oh, she did, did she?

JUNE: *(Beaming proudly, she hands the cash to BILLIE.)* Yes, I did.

BILLIE: Why are YOU smiling? You lost.

JUNE: Well, you know, it takes money to make money.

BILLIE: What?

GRETCHEN: She's smiling because she played us both. She bet you ten bucks that you couldn't stay quiet. But I bet her FIFTY bucks that we couldn't shut you up. Our bet was, as soon as you got here, you would spend AT LEAST ten minutes talking our ears off about your stupid date last night.

JUNE: *(Walking stage right to be on the other side of GRETCHEN, who is now standing between the other two.)* And I WON that bet. She didn't say a word. I lost ten to her, but I get fifty from you!

GRETCHEN: That's cheating!

JUNE: *(Holding out her hand to GRETCHEN.)* I prefer to think of it as creative manipulation. Pay up, sucka!

Grudgingly, GRETCHEN pulls money from her pocket or purse and angrily slaps it into JUNE'S palm.

GRETCHEN: (To JUNE.) So if you knew the whole time why she was quiet, what was with this “She must be mad at YOU!” stuff?

JUNE: Oh, I was hoping you would volunteer something incriminating that would make her talk early, and then I would have won BOTH bets. And if not, I figured I’d still get a kick out of watching you squirm. And boy, did I! What a treat!

GRETCHEN: I hate you.

JUNE: (To BILLIE.) Thanks for playing along, by the way.

BILLIE: My pleasure. (Advancing on GRETCHEN, sternly.) So. About my car...

GRETCHEN: Uh-oh...

Lights out.

THE END

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