

# THE VENT BUTTON

TEN MINUTE PLAY

By Scott Haan

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## **THE VENT BUTTON**

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**SYNOPSIS:** Chris can't understand why Rudy isn't more confrontational, and doesn't stand up to people. But when Chris tries to get Rudy to become more vocal about the little annoyances of everyday life, it quickly becomes a clear case of "be careful what you wish for."

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

(2 EITHER)

RUDY (m/f) ..... Quiet and non-confrontational.

CHRIS (m/f) ..... Vocal, and doesn't take guff from anyone.

### **TIME**

Present day. Noon on a Saturday.

### **SETTING**

This show could be performed on an entirely blank stage. The location is flexible and could be a park, a restaurant, a street corner, a bench, or any other public place.

### **PROPS**

A watch worn by Chris (optional).

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**PREMIERE PRODUCTION**

*The Vent Button* was first presented on April 27, 2014 as part of the Clinton County Civic Theatre 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Gala in Frankfort, IN. The roles were originally performed by the following cast:

RUDY..... Andy Best

CHRIS..... Scott Haan

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**AT RISE:**

*CHRIS is onstage, glancing at his/her watch impatiently. After a beat, RUDY enters from stage right.*

**RUDY:** Hey.

**CHRIS:** Hey. *(Tapping his/her watch, if wearing one.)* So, you know, when I said noon, I, uh...I meant noon Indiana\* time. *(\*Substitute your own local area.)*

**RUDY:** Yeah, yeah. Sorry. I was stuck. I couldn't get in my car.

**CHRIS:** You couldn't what? Why?

**RUDY:** *(With a chuckle.)* Kind of a funny story. I stopped at the store on the way here, and when I came back out, somebody had parked right next to my driver's side. Little green Stratus, way over the yellow line. I could only open the door a few inches.

**CHRIS:** Oh, that's the worst.

**RUDY:** So I thought, "Well, I guess I'll have to crawl in through the passenger side." So I walked around, and... *(Another chuckle.)* Guess what. Believe it or not, I was parked in on that side, too.

**CHRIS:** You're kidding. You were wedged!

**RUDY:** Totally wedged. I mean, I could open the doors a crack, but not enough to squeeze in.

**CHRIS:** But if you didn't have enough room to get IN your car, how did the other drivers get OUT? Who was it, Gumby and Plastic Man?

**RUDY:** They were both parked with their passenger sides against me. Their driver sides had PLENTY of room to get out.

**CHRIS:** Wow. Sounds like you were the meat in an idiot sandwich. I hope you told these jerk-bags off.

**RUDY:** Nah. I just waited by the store until one of the cars left, and then got in after they drove away.

**CHRIS:** And how long did THAT take?

**RUDY:** Ah, maybe 20 minutes or so.

**CHRIS:** So you waited 20 minutes for one of these two nitwits to leave, and you didn't even say something to them?

**RUDY:** *(Another chuckle.)* Heh. Yeah, right. What was I going to say, *(A comedic attempt at acting grumpy.)* "You parked over the line, you stupid scum-bucket"?

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**CHRIS:** *(Can't understand why not.)* YES! EXACTLY! Tear 'em a new one!

**RUDY:** Oh, I couldn't do that. I'm not a confronter.

**CHRIS:** Then you're part of the problem.

**RUDY:** "The problem"? What? What did I do?

**CHRIS:** Absolutely nothing, and that's the point. When idiots pull crap like this, you HAVE to call them on it, or nothing changes. They'll have no reason to improve their behavior. There's an old saying that goes: "Evil triumphs when good men do nothing."

**RUDY:** So now you're equating a sloppy parking job with being evil?

**CHRIS:** TWO sloppy parking jobs, and yes, I think being rude and inconsiderate to others IS a form of evil! Yes! *(Beat.)* And you're too nice. You let people walk all over you.

**RUDY:** People don't walk all over me.

**CHRIS:** Please. You're a doormat. You should tattoo the word "WELCOME" on your forehead.

**RUDY:** Just because I don't sweat the small stuff doesn't make me a doormat. It's not like these guys mowed over a crowd of nuns and puppies. Nobody got hurt. You have to laugh at stuff like this or you'll go insane.

**CHRIS:** No, you have to FIGHT this kind of behavior. If not, society goes right down the toilet, counter-clockwise. *(Pause.)* Is your vent button turned off?

**RUDY:** My what?

**CHRIS:** Your vent button. *(Suspicious.)* You DO know the brain has a switch that controls whether or not you... "express your displeasure" when something annoys you.

**RUDY:** *(Laughing it off.)* Ha. If only.

**CHRIS:** No, I'm serious. It's true. It's right on the back of your head.

**RUDY:** *(Looking at CHRIS as if monkeys are dancing on top of his/her head.)* The back of your head.

**CHRIS:** Right. That's why if something hits you there, you get angry.

**RUDY:** You don't think maybe you get angry because you got HIT IN THE BACK OF THE HEAD?

**CHRIS:** Mock me all you want, but it's a proven fact. Medical journals have been written about it.

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**RUDY:** *(A pause while RUDY shakes his/her head, looking at CHRIS with pity.)* You DO realize medication has an expiration date, right?

**CHRIS:** You don't believe me? Fine. I'll prove it to you. Hold still.  
*(Moves behind RUDY.)*

**RUDY:** *(Uncomfortable.)* What are you doing?

**CHRIS:** Don't move. I'm just going to turn your vent button on.

**RUDY:** You really have gone COMPLETELY insane, haven't you?

**CHRIS:** Not completely, but pretty close. Here we go. *(Makes a grand show of applying pressure to one particular spot in the back of RUDY'S head, complete with a sound effect.)* Boop! There. It's on.

**RUDY:** *(Sarcastic.)* And yet, somehow, I feel no different.

**CHRIS:** That's because there's nothing annoying you yet, to trigger the reaction.

**RUDY:** *(With a pointed glare.)* Don't be so sure.

**CHRIS:** Come on, this is your chance to rant and rave and get angry!  
Go for it!

**RUDY:** This is dumb.

**CHRIS:** No it's not! Come on, man! *(Replace "man" with "girl", or just omit, if RUDY is female.)* Shout! Shout! Let it all out! What annoys you? What are your pet peeves?

**RUDY:** *(Thinking hard.)* Well...hmm. If I HAD to name something, I guess it DOES sorta bug me when I see people behind the wheel, texting.

**CHRIS:** Doesn't it?

**RUDY:** I mean, you're basically piloting a big metal missile of death. Isn't that a little more important than tweeting that you ate Cap'n Crunch for breakfast?

**CHRIS:** I agree! Besides, being hyped up on Cap'n Crunch ALREADY makes you dangerous behind the wheel!

**RUDY:** I even saw someone driving with an open novel resting on their steering wheel. It's like, "Excuse me. YOU might be willing to die for the latest Nicholas Sparks romance, but don't take me with you!"

**CHRIS:** Totally. *(Beat.)* Danielle Steel is better anyway.

**RUDY:** (*Slightly more agitated.*) And why is it that when I'm on 52\* (*Substitute a local two-lane road or highway.*), I'll be cruising along in the right lane, the only car on the road, and some chowder-head from a side street will pull onto the road in front of me, in MY lane, when there's a whole empty left lane they could use?

**CHRIS:** Yeah, I hate that too.

**RUDY:** I don't mind that they're pulling onto the road with me, but if they would just get into the EMPTY lane, I wouldn't have to hit my brakes, or switch lanes to pass them. They wouldn't inconvenience me at all, if they just used the lane I'm not in. It just seems like common courtesy.

**CHRIS:** Yeah, but "common courtesy" died years ago. That's what I'm saying!

**RUDY:** It's about respecting other people's space, y'know? Oh, and it's the same at a movie theatre. I went to see the last Texas Chainsaw Massacre movie with Bob... (*Putting a warning finger up quickly to prevent CHRIS from commenting.*) I know, it was Bob's choice, don't judge me. Anyway, picture this. Empty theatre. In fact, we're literally the ONLY ones in there. Just as the movie is starting, this mom walks in with three little kids. Now first of all, why are you bringing KIDS to see Texas Chainsaw Massacre? Seriously? You're going to scar them for life!

**CHRIS:** She probably just wanted them to learn how to use power tools.

**RUDY:** Idiiotic. But as if that wasn't enough, this Mother-of-the-Year decides to plop her brood down RIGHT IN FRONT OF US. Empty theatre, hundreds of seats all over the place, and she literally chooses to sit RIGHT HERE. Now I can understand if the theatre is packed, there aren't many choices, you might have to sit in front of somebody. I get that. But when the place is empty? Honestly, people!

**CHRIS:** Imagine that...a mother who drags her kids to a horror movie turns out to lack social skills. Who'da thunk it?

**RUDY:** (*Really getting worked up now.*) Oh-ho-ho, and you know what REALLY burns my butter?

**CHRIS:** Um...people who say things like "burns my butter"?

**RUDY:** *(Completely ignoring this, and now basically talking just to him/herself.)* It's those people who go into the bathroom, do their thing, and then leave without washing their hands. Make me puke! **ESPECIALLY** at a restaurant. "Enjoy your meal, sir\*! *(Change "sir" to "ma'am" if RUDY is female.)* Hope you're not having finger food!"

**CHRIS:** I know, and they have to walk right past the sink anyway to get—

**RUDY:** *(Interrupting, as if CHRIS isn't even in the room.)* And then I go back out to my table, and I see them sitting at THEIR table with a bunch of people finishing their meal, and I want to walk up to them and warn their family and say, "Just so you know, your friend here just went number two and has no concept of personal hygiene, so think twice before you ask them to pass you anything! Bon appétit!"

**CHRIS:** *(Regarding RUDY with concern.)* I think I may have created a monster...

**RUDY:** But then, maybe they're not washing their hands because they HATE those stupid, worthless hot air dryers that take the place of towels but don't actually dry your hands, which means they FAIL at the ONE task they were created to do, and you have to wipe your hands on your pants to dry them!

**CHRIS:** You know, I was just kidding about this "vent button" stuff, but let me just try something here... *(CHRIS moves behind RUDY and tries to press the spot on the back of Rudy's head again.)*

**RUDY:** *(Practically foaming at the mouth now, on a rant and completely oblivious to CHRIS'S presence.)* Or maybe they were just ANGRY because they went into the STALL, and everything's fine and dandy and tra-la-la, except then they see there's no t.p. in there, and they're stranded! Or maybe there IS toilet paper, but whatever brain-damaged chimp changed the roll put it on backwards, which drives me CRAZY, because even a two-year-old knows the toilet paper is supposed to come OVER THE TOP of the roll instead of out from the BOTTOM!

**CHRIS:** Actually, that's a subject of debate, and there's no right or wrong—



**RUDY:** *(Interrupting again.)* And then, I'll go to a gas station or something, and there are two cashiers and a bunch of people in line, but the customers always split into TWO lines, one line per register, when they SHOULD form one big line, and let the cashier say "I can help whoever is next," which makes it first-come first-served, instead of everybody having to PICK a line and basically GUESS on which cashier might be faster or which mouth-breather in front of them is going to pay for their gas with a jar of PENNIES!

**CHRIS:** *(Waving his/her hand in front of RUDY'S face and getting no reaction.)* Um...hello? *(During the next line, CHRIS dances around in front of RUDY to get their attention, but to no avail.)*

**RUDY:** I mean if it was one BIG line, you would all be helped in the order you've been waiting, with the person who's been there longest getting helped FIRST, which is only FAIR, and I can't understand why people don't want to do things that are FAIR!

**CHRIS:** *(Very concerned now.)* Huh. This is not good.

**RUDY:** *(All but screaming now, still to nobody in particular.)* Ah, but you know the WORST? The absolute WORST that makes me so mad I could just start PUNCHING things until my fists turn to pulp? *(Turning directly to CHRIS for the first time.)* Do you KNOW what that IS?

**CHRIS:** *(Scared.)* Um...no?

**RUDY:** *(Instantly calm and rational again, back to his/her original friendly personality.)* It's people who try to change my personality.

**CHRIS:** *(Caught off guard by this unexpected shift.)* What?

**RUDY:** I'm an easygoing person, and I don't get worked up over silly stuff. People like you who get agitated easily seem to think there's something WRONG with that, but there isn't. There's nothing wrong with remaining calm and mellow when things bother you. Is there?

**CHRIS:** Well, I—

**RUDY:** *(Loud and threatening again.)* IS THERE?

**CHRIS:** No! No, there certainly isn't!

**RUDY:** *(As friendly as can be.)* Good. Now where are we going for lunch?

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**CHRIS:** *(A little on edge.)* Wherever YOU want. Preferably someplace with paper towels in the bathrooms instead of hand dryers.

**RUDY:** *(With a mischievous smile.)* Cool. I know just the place. And maybe later I can show you a little trick I learned in that Texas Chainsaw Massacre movie.

*CHRIS is alarmed, keeping a nervous eye on a smiling RUDY, as they walk off stage. Lights out.*

**THE END**

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