



Sample Pages from The Art of Rejection

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THE ART OF REJECTION

THE ART OF REJECTION
CHAired

BY
Christian Kiley



The Art of Rejection

Two One Act Plays by Christian Kiley

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The Art of Rejection

Characters

One: Ensemble, Team Captain, Beggar.

Two: Ensemble, Team Captain, Anti-Odd Leader.

Three: Ensemble, Cast List Spotter, Awards Host.

Four: Ensemble, Actor, Therapist.

Five: Ensemble, Actor, Nosey Relative.

Six: Ensemble, Actor, “Yep” Relative.

Seven: Ensemble, Actor.

Eight: Ensemble, Actor.

Nine: Ensemble, Actor.

Ten: Ensemble, Actor.

Eleven: Ensemble, Intense Actor.

Twelve: Ensemble, R’s Ex.

Thirteen: Ensemble, Twelve’s New Flame.

Fourteen: Ensemble, R’s Sibling, ATM.

Fifteen: Ensemble, Boss.

R: The only letter. Constantly ridiculed.

All the characters are gender neutral. In the first production, R was a male character and thus is marked as such in the script. Feel free to change the pronouns to reflect the gender of the actors.

Setting

Here.

Time

Now.

The Art of Rejection was produced by the Etiwanda High School (Etiwanda, CA) Theatre Arts Department and premiered on December 8, 2007 at the Rancho Cucamonga High School One-Act Festival where it was awarded First Place. Cameron Brown was awarded Best Actor for his portrayal of R, and Kenny Gonzalez, Jr. was awarded Outstanding Performer for his portrayal of Five. The playwright would like to sincerely thank the cast for their talent and creative input during the rehearsal process.

One: Raven Takahashi

Two: Kayleigh McDaniel

Three: Tiara Brooks

Four: Reanna Cadena

Five: Kenny Gonzalez, Jr.

Six: Christina Pagel

Seven: Tiffany Gail

Eight: Christopher Butler

Nine: Eric Olney

Ten: Alyssa Alexander

Eleven: Alexandria Smith

Twelve: Brianne Kadlec

Thirteen: Paul An

Fourteen: Karisa Quick

Fifteen: Ashley Harwich

R: Cameron Brown

Light Design: Justin Gardner

Sound Design: Elliot Buckner

THE ART OF REJECTION

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Fifteen actors stand facing downstage. They each wear a black shirt numbered one through fifteen. Another character, R, stands on a chair behind the group in a hooded sweatshirt with the letter "R" on it.

ONE: ...When I was six...

TWO: ...I had a nightmare that...

THREE: ...I fell off my bike...

FOUR: ...and onto a conveyor belt...

FIVE: ...lined with titanium spikes...

SIX: ...but none of my major organs were punctured...

SEVEN: ...so, although the pain was excruciating...

EIGHT: ...I lived... but in the worst kind of pain imaginable.

NINE: ...But at least it was sterile.

TEN: ...It was a pure and untainted kind of agony.

ELEVEN: ...Until the conveyor belt dropped me into a vat...

TWELVE: ...of fresh-squeezed lemonade.

THIRTEEN: ...And I think we all know how dirty that can be.

FOURTEEN: ...All those hands squeezing the lemons.

FIFTEEN: ...Because you know one person wearing latex gloves...

ONE: ...did not squeeze the whole thing.

TWO: ...And the odds are...

THREE: ...that at least one of the squeezers...

FOUR: ...did some unsanitary action during the squeezing...

FIVE: ...and the result is a massive infection to all...

SIX: ...my now open wounds.

SEVEN: ...To compound the situation...

EIGHT: ...I was dried off with high grit cayenne chili sandpaper...

NINE: ...and left to suffer the humiliation of being...

TEN: ...made into the world's largest single piece of jerky...

ELEVEN: ...while a pack of acid-tongued hyenas ridiculed and cackled at me...

TWELVE: ...and invited my former junior high best friend to hit me repeatedly...

THIRTEEN: ...with a freakishly large and grossly expired candy cane...

FOURTEEN: ...coated with giant fire ants who had just finished...

FIFTEEN: ...fasting for a decade.

ONE: And when I woke up I realized that I would rather my plight be exponentially more grotesque and painful than this if I didn't have to suffer one more single moment of...

ALL: Rejection.

The ensemble stands in a line with two captains, ONE and TWO, picking teams. As the numbers are selected they move next to the captain that has selected them, until only R remains.

ONE: I pick... Three.

TWO: Four.

ONE: Five.

TWO: Oh, let me see. Six.

ONE: Tough. That was going to be my pick. Seven.

TWO: I guess... Eight.

ONE: Nine.

TWO: Ten.

ONE: Alright, Eleven.

TWO: Twelve.

ONE: Thirteen... I suppose.

TWO: How about... Fourteen.

ONE: Fifteen.

TWO: Do I have to?

ONE: You have to take him (*referring to R who is now standing alone*).

TWO: We're better off playing one short.

ONE: That might be true, but...

R: This is kick ball. Kick ball. There isn't even a professional league or anything for this. It's not like the proficient ones will be able to get a doctorate in this and write books about it and make money or achieve any kind of success. This is the only place I have ever seen a kick ball field, and to be honest I think it was intended for softball.

ONE: We'll pick you first if we ever play speech and debate at recess.

THREE: The cast list is up!

The ensemble rushes downstage center to look at the cast list. We see reactions as people try to see what roles they got.

FOUR: Ophelia, yes!

FIVE: I can't believe I got the lead... Hamlet baby! Narcissistic Nirvana!

SIX: The Queen... death by poison. That's the Mercedes of deaths.

SEVEN: Lady in Waiting. I love lines.

EIGHT: An apparition! The most recognized ghost in the history of Denmark. Shakespeare himself played this role!

NINE: Claudius! I would poison my babysitter for an extra cookie. This is for me.

TEN: This must be some kind of mistake... Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Both of them? I'll divide my face in half and play them both brilliantly.

The numbers are celebrating and giving each other high-fives as they exit. They clear out and R steps forward. Looks at the list and clearly does not see his name. While thumbing through the script, ELEVEN stands next to R.

ELEVEN: What'd you get?

R shakes his head and starts to walk off.

ELEVEN: You can always help with the concessions. Oh, wait, the culinary club has that covered. You could twirl a sign outside the theatre to help advertise. A little underground PR. Because it

wouldn't be school sanctioned or endorsed. So you might have to haul butt if the cops come by.

R: This is fifth grade. Why are we doing Hamlet anyway?

ELEVEN: It's Hamlet Jr. actually. Gertrude drinks from a poisoned juice box instead of a chalice. The big sword fight is actually a thumb war, and instead of a poisoned-dipped rapier, Laertes puts liquid paper on his thumb nail. There's a lot of cool symbolism. Like instead of Yorick's skull, it is his funny bone that Hamlet pulls out of his grave. Get it, jester, funny bone?

As R laments his not being cast, TWELVE and THIRTEEN enter. One is male and one is female. The female is throwing rose petals as she blissfully skips on stage. The male moves downstage with a dumbbell and starts doing curls.

R: Hey, Twelve. Do you have a minute to talk?

TWELVE: A whole minute. I don't know. The average person only gets 38,460,642 minutes.

R: Well, you're far from average.

TWELVE: Still, I don't know.

R: Let me cut right to the chase then. You, me, the dance.

TWELVE: You got two-thirds of it right. Me, the dance, and...
Thirteen.

THIRTEEN: Did you call my little dozen?

R: Her name is Twelve.

TWELVE: I like dozen, reminds me of roses.

R: You've changed.

TWELVE: It's not me, it's you.

R: Aren't you supposed to say it the other way around to throw me a figurative bone of sympathy?

TWELVE: Those birds you thought you saw were not love birds, but vultures. And they're going to pick that bone clean.

THIRTEEN: (to R) Loser.

TWELVE and THIRTEEN exit arm in arm. FOURTEEN enters and approaches R with a letter.

FOURTEEN: This came in the mail for you today.

R: Alright! It's from State University.

FOURTEEN: Aren't you scared?

R: I've been working for this my entire life. The late nights, the AP classes, the college courses, the extra curricular activities and it all comes down to this.

FOURTEEN: Good luck.

R opens the envelope and scans the letter.

R: How could this happen to me?

R rips up the letter. FOURTEEN frantically picks up the pieces of the letter.

FOURTEEN: I still get your room, right? I mean, I know this is not the best time. But Mom and Dad promised, and I didn't think it was contingent upon your acceptance.

FOURTEEN exits. FIFTEEN enters and moves the chair/stool center.

FIFTEEN: R, could I talk to you for a minute?

R: Well, I only have about 38,460,642 of those. But who's counting. I mean, besides my ex-girlfriend. Am I right?

FIFTEEN: I just wanted to let you know about the promotion first, before word got around.

FIFTEEN seems to offer the chair to R but then abruptly sits in it.

R: Thanks, Ms. Fifteen. Thanks a lot.

FIFTEEN: I'm giving it to One.

R: One...really. One.

FIFTEEN: Sorry, kiddo I... this is the way things go sometimes. You'll bounce back.

R: Thanks, Ms. F. I'd better get back to work.

FIFTEEN: Actually, corporate is asking us to cut back and... this is hard for me, but I'm going to have to let you go.

R: I... I'm not sure what to do, or say, or...

FIFTEEN: We'll mail you your last check.

R: Yeah.

FIFTEEN exits. R goes to sit down on a bench or chair and just as he does, a member of the ensemble rushes on with a sign that reads "WET PAINT."

R: Even paint thwarts me. I at least hope it's semi-gloss.

ONE enters and holds out a cup and is asking for change.

ONE: Could you spare a dollar for someone who is down on their luck?

R: Here you go friend. (*putting a bill into the cup*)

ONE: No thanks. Not from you.

R: Why? My money spends just like any other.

ONE: Yes, but you are trying to change your luck. I won't be a catalyst for your metamorphosis. I can't risk being pulled into your spiraling free fall into the mire.

R: It's more like a mud bath in here, really. And you said that you were down on your luck.

ONE: Down, but not that far down.

TWO enters and begins to make an important announcement. As the announcement is being delivered, the other numbers enter to hear the news.

TWO: May I have your attention please. All the odd numbers please vacate the premises immediately.

THREE: That seems rather arbitrary.

FIVE: It certainly does. I've lived in this community since I was a little integer.

TWO: It's nothing personal. You're not divisible by me, and that's it.

SEVEN: I'm prime, I have rights.

TWO: You're not divisible by anything.

NINE: I am. By three.

TWO: Look, we can do this smoothly and easily, or...

R: What? What are you going to do to them?

TWO: You are a rabble-rouser. You need to leave also.

R: Fine. We'll leave, but we'll be back.

ELEVEN: Look, don't heap us into a group with you.

R: This is an injustice.

ELEVEN: Things like this happen all the time. They'll let us back...
eventually.

R: But you don't need to leave at all.

THIRTEEN: Just do yourself a favor and go away.

All the numbers exit except for FOURTEEN.

R: Alright.

R approaches FOURTEEN who is representing an ATM.

R: I'll just get a little cash and get away for a while. A nice trip, that's what I need.

R slides his card into the ATM.

FOURTEEN: Enter your PIN number please.

R enters the PIN number.

FOURTEEN: Invalid.

R: Probably just punched it in wrong.

R enters it again.

FOURTEEN: Invalid.

R: Come on! (*R motions to strike the ATM.*)

FOURTEEN: Surveillance cameras from several angles are capturing your every move.

Two members of the ensemble enter holding cameras. They move around R as if "capturing his every move."

R: Alright, I'll try again. After all, I am the person, you the machine.

FOURTEEN: Warning. Your PIN number must be entered correctly this time or your card will be confiscated and chopped up into

pieces and those pieces placed in a time capsule and launched into the future where they will be fused together with sophisticated lasers the likes of which your puny brain could not comprehend, and your account balance at the time will be sent to every communications device available, and there will be many, many of these, and the entire universe will see that you have only twelve dollars and thirty-seven cents in your account. And with the inflation of centuries, this will be an even more Lilliputian figure than it is today.

R: No pressure. Just enter the numbers.

R enters the numbers again.

FOURTEEN: I am sorry for the inconvenience, but that was not the correct PIN.

R: No!

FOURTEEN: Have a great day.

FOURTEEN exits. R pulls a coin out of his pocket.

R: I'll flip this coin. My last coin. Heads I persevere, tails I wait for a moving truck or falling church organ or something to take me out.

R flips the coin.

R: Tails. (*again*) Tails. (*again*) Tails. (*A few times in a row.*) Tails, tails, tails... tails, tails. (*He turns and throws the coin offstage. A coin is immediately thrown back at him.*) With my luck it will sprout into a grove of money trees that someone will harvest for millions of dollars.

THREE enters and moves downstage ignoring R.

THREE: Ladies and gentlemen it is my pleasure to announce the "Best Person of All Time Award." (*The other numbers enter to hear the news.*) This award is given out only once and comes with unlimited funding to do whatever you want. Heck, just keep doing what you were doing, you're the best person of all time, who am I to tell you what to do? And the winner is everyone on the planet earth except those individuals on death row, unless you can honestly look me in the eyes and tell me without your fingers crossed that you did not do it, and then what the heck, you can have a share too. Congratulations to the over six billion winners!

THREE starts handing out trophies or similar awards.

R: I finally won something! I did it! I-

THREE: Pardon me everyone. I don't mean to interrupt the celebration here, but also someone named R... you are with those guilty death row people.

R: I am... I am... not a winner. I'm not...

If a trophy has been given to R, it is abruptly taken back. All the numbers exit laughing. R should reveal a medal around his/her neck. FOUR enters and places a chair downstage as if it is for R but puts a dead plant on it when R tries to sit down.

FOUR: So what you're saying is that you're a loser?

R: That's a little harsh.

FOUR: What's that around your neck?

R: Oh... a medal that I won in the second grade spelling bee.

FOUR: You won. Good that's something to build on.

R: Actually, I came in sixth place.

FOUR: Still an accomplishment nonetheless.

R: There were seven students in the competition and Gretchen locked her knees and passed out. She's the only one I beat. And honestly she would have beaten me.

FOUR: Why do you wear it then?

R: Don't know, just do.

FOUR: Listen, Mr. R, I don't normally deal with self-esteem issues.

R: Please, I just... give me a chance to show you. I could be one of those come-back-story case studies that you write a book about.

FOUR: Actually I've got a kleptomaniac-pyromaniac who steals items and then lights them on fire. Now that's someone who is a defeatist-perfectionist. You can't wallow on the fringe of this thing. If you're going to be a loser, be the best loser you can be. Anyway, that's all I've got for you. You better go. My next patient thinks he is the rock that Arthur pulled Excalibur out of.

FOUR exits. R follows FOUR and is intercepted by FIVE and SIX.

FIVE: R is that you? Oh, you look terrible. Just terrible. Doesn't he?

SIX: Yep.

R: I just... just a little down on my luck.

FIVE: Oh, nonsense. We just need to find you a nice vowel to marry.
Isn't that right?

SIX: Yep.

FIVE: A vowel. An O. You would love an O. Just say it.

R: No I'd rather-

FIVE: Say it!

R: O!

FIVE: How was that?

R: Fine, fine.

FIVE: More than fine! Am I right?

SIX: Yep.

FIVE: Fine, don't marry an O. Turn your back on your family. See if I care. But I am going to tell your mother.

R: She might as well know.

FIVE: And I shouldn't tell you this, but you are an ungrateful little consonant.

SIX: Yep.

FIVE: You were adopted! And your mother wanted to let you keep your real name. But I told her, give him a number I said. Look at all the possibilities for numbers. Addresses, phone numbers... I mean, could you imagine being a social security number?

SIX: Yep.

FIVE: We're leaving. But do yourself a favor and find yourself a vowel to settle down with. This swinging lifestyle has got to stop! Look at you with that bling. Is that what they call it?

SIX: Yep.

FIVE and SIX exit.

R: Actually, it's my second grade... forget it.

Each number crosses from one side of the stage to the other. R stands in the middle getting bumped and pushed. As each number passes R they should make him feel excluded, picked on, and unloved. Certainly ad libs can be used here at the discretion of the director.

ONE: I pick... anyone but you.

TWO: Even odd numbers have more rights than... you.

THREE: *(gives R a prize)* Winner. *(takes it back)* Sorry, not you.

FOUR: Sixth place. What a shame.

FIVE: Ungrateful little consonant.

SIX: Yep.

SEVEN: *(makes a sneezing sound)* Loser.

EIGHT: R for reject.

NINE: Welcome to Loserville, population, you.

TEN: Better you than me.

ELEVEN: Why even bother trying?

TWELVE: I love Thirteen, I hate R, I love Thirteen, I hate R, I love Thirteen...

THIRTEEN: I got the girl... you got... nothing.

FOURTEEN: I got your room.

FIFTEEN: Didn't I fire you?

R: I've had it! You and you and you and you, all of you have made me feel so low and unable to do anything special that I just want to crawl back into the womb. But my mother would never go for it, for a number of reasons. Chief among them that I am too big and would need a garden hose for an umbilical cord. Then I thought I would invent an adult napping chamber called "The Womb", but I couldn't handle the possibility of failure, and could never find an artificial material that realistically felt like a womb. Regardless of the fact that even inanimate objects seem to take joy in my demise, I will make this pledge that I will transform like the great figures of literature... Odysseus, Edgar, you may not know him but he had to disguise himself in King Lear, that Little Mermaid with the whole tail to legs thing, pretty impressive, and those robots that literally transform into cars. They're actually called



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