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CYRIL
AND THE
SUBTLE ART OF PLAGIARISM

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CYRIL AND THE SUBTLE ART OF PLAGIARISM

written by

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Synopsis

Cyril is a gifted writer. Too bad other people like to use his words for their own purposes. How will he balance romance, friendships, bullies, and drama class while still holding on to his voice? A fast-paced comedic re-telling of Cyrano De Bergerac set in a modern high school.

Cast of Characters

All parts can be played as any gender, with slight name/line changes. All parts can be played as any gender, with slight name/line changes. Additional non-speaking student roles can be added as desired, or doubled with existing minor roles.

CYRIL	A high schooler who has a razor-sharp wit, but is not sure how to use it
KRIS	His friend, in love with Rose
ROSE	Cyril's neighbor, a talented actress
VAL	Stereotypical jock/bully who gets her way
CURT	Val's right-hand man, is not very bright
BURT	Val's left-hand, somehow even dumber than Curt
MR. NESTOR	Exasperated theatre teacher
STAGE MANAGER	Takes their job a little too seriously
ACTOR 1	
ACTRESS 1	
ACTRESS 2	
ACTOR 2	
STUDENTS	

Set

Simple sets with chairs and lockers to indicate various locations in a school.

Props

Cell phones
Laptops
Notebooks
Skull props for drama auditions
Paper notes to pass around
Make-shift costumes for the rehearsal
Half-built sets and props for the rehearsal
Couch
DVD case

Director Notes

Have fun with staging the text conversations. Performers could turn their bodies to who they're texting or even have the conversations projected or displayed in some way.

ACT I

Scene 1

Setting: Throughout the scene the setting changes, including the school's drama auditions, rehearsals, and classrooms.

At Rise: Solo spot up on CYRIL, who is typing on a laptop. Hidden in the shadows to either side are KRIS, MR. NESTOR, STAGE MANAGER, ACTOR 1, ACTOR 2, ACTRESS 1, and ACTRESS 2 for the drama audition section.

CYRIL

Alright, last question. "College Application Questionnaire, Question 14: Share an experience that has fundamentally shaped your worldview, highlighting the perspective of others' experiences as well as your own."… Well, that's clear as mud. Seriously, how much more intentionally vague can you be?

(takes a deep breath and thinks for a moment, before beginning to type)

As you, the college admissions committee, review my transcript and permanent record (of which I am convinced is a mythological construct, despite the plethora of depictions in television and movies, but I digress), you may note a comment or report concerning a potentially disastrous topic: plagiarism. Be assured that said incident was not the result of my plagiarizing another author, but rather, I was the author being plagiarized. Sort of. It was partially voluntary on my part. This is the experience or story I wish to share with you. Much like many stories of self-actualization, this one begins with an audition.

(Lights up on CYRIL and KRIS sitting in a row of teenage actors and actresses, with MR. NESTOR, a STAGE MANAGER, and ACTOR 1 downstage of them. ACTOR 1 is auditioning.)

ACTOR 1

(badly overacting with exaggerated movements)

…See! How she leans her cheek upon her hand. Oh! That I were a glove upon her hand!!

(looks at his own hand and arm, where he has the lines written)

That I might touch that cheek. Oh, speak again, bright angel, for thou art as glorious to this night, being over my head, as is a winged messenger of heaven.

(looks at arm for his lines)

Um… upon the white upturned wondering eyes…

MR. NESTOR *(interrupting)*

Ok, that's good enough.

ACTOR 1

But I wasn't done.

MR. NESTOR

Yeah you were. Trust me.

STAGE MANAGER

(too loudly)

Clear the stage please!

MR. NESTOR

Thank you for yet another… unique interpretation of Romeo.

(addresses rest of the CAST)

People, for the fourth time today. We are NOT doing Romeo and Juliet! Or any Shakespeare! Including Hamlet! You know who you are…

(at least one actor tries to hide their skull props)

ACTRESS 1

Um, sir? You haven't actually told anyone what it is we're auditioning for yet.

MR. NESTOR

No, I haven't. It's a surprise… But I did definitely say that it wasn't Shakespeare.

(a pointed look at ACTOR 1)

ACTOR 1

It was the only monologue I know.

MR. NESTOR

And you still had to write it on your arm… a scathing indictment of my own teaching skills I'm afraid. Next!

STAGE MANAGER

Next audition!

ACTRESS 1 *(haughtily)*

This is an original monologue I wrote for today.

MR. NESTOR *(skeptically)*

That's a bold move, kid. Go for it.

ACTRESS 1

(takes a big breath, then dives in dramatically)

"There I was, staring down a hallway of flickering light…"

(She continues in pantomime as the focus shifts to CYRIL's conversation with the others waiting.)

KRIS

You ready for this?

CYRIL

Nope.

KRIS

Did you bother memorizing anything?

CYRIL

Not in the slightest.

KRIS

Then why are you here?

CYRIL

I was told point blank to be here for some reason. Why are you here? You've never done a play.

KRIS

Emotional support?

CYRIL

Did you actually learn a monologue?

KRIS

Shockingly… yes.

CYRIL

You're kidding me.

KRIS

Is it so hard to believe? Maybe I have secret, unrealized dreams of being an actor you just don't know about.

CYRIL

No you don't.

KRIS

Not even a tiny bit. I was told I'd get some extra credit for auditioning and my grades need as much help they can get.

(Applause indicates that ACTRESS 1 has finished her monologue. She is taking a deep bow.)

MR. NESTOR

Thank you for that… whatever it was.

ACTRESS 1

I call it a postmodern deconstructionist horror story with a Brechtian analysis of—

MR. NESTOR

(cutting her off)

That's great. Maybe next time, stick to Shakespeare… Next!

STAGE MANAGER

Next Audition!!

KRIS *(standing)*

I'm up, wish me good luck!

CYRIL

That's actually bad luck in the theatre…

KRIS

What?

CYRIL

Nevermind, just go!

KRIS

This is from "A Zoo Story".

MR. NESTOR

Oh dear lord…

(As KRIS begins in pantomime, ROSE enters and sits next to CYRIL.)

CYRIL

You're late…

ROSE

I'm aware…

CYRIL

Are you ready?

ROSE

Um… always. This is what I do.

ACTRESS 2

(leaning over)

Rose! I didn't know you were auditioning for this!

ROSE

Of course I am, why?

ACTOR 2

(also leaning in from the other side)

Because there goes her shot at the lead role!

ACTRESS 2

Shut up!

ROSE

Nonsense, you're just as good as I am.

CYRIL

No, she's not, Rose. Everyone knows you're the most talented person in this school. Plus, you know, the president of the drama club.

These pages have been removed
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ROSE

(texting CYRIL)

"Your friend, Kris. He's a little different, isn't he?"

CYRIL

(texting ROSE)

"Different good or different bad?"

ROSE

"I don't know yet. But it's like he's two different people sometimes. Like, real life versus his texts…"

CYRIL

"Maybe he just gets tongue tied?"

ROSE

"He's kind of cute. Anyways. Study time. Goodnight!"

(She exits.)

CYRIL

(to audience)

Kind of cute?! What had I done? It was in this moment, I felt the most high school, the most juvenile of emotions: jealousy. Was Kris right? Was I secretly in love with Rose, my oldest friend? And she'd called my best friend, who is using MY words, CUTE!? Dear members of the college acceptance committee, I implore you to remember being a teenager, awash in—

(CYRIL is cut off by CURT entering and shoving him down, followed soon by BURT. They hold him down as VAL enters.)

CURT

Found him!!

BURT

Haha, finder's keepers!

VAL

Hey Writer's Block! You got us a C minus on that paper!

CURT

As in "C" you next year!

BURT

And there's a hole in the bottom of… the… "C."

VAL

We had a deal, nerd. Now Burt might not be able to play in this week's hockey match. And he's gonna need someone to smash up against some walls because of it.

CYRIL

I couldn't make it look like I wrote it! I told you! How suspicious would it be if you three suddenly got A's all of a sudden. We could ALL get expelled.

CURT

We still expect better.

BURT

Yeah, we expect butter… I mean better.

VAL

How did you get those mixed up?

BURT

I'm hungry…

VAL

The goons have a point. C's might get me a degree, but it'll make them repeat times three.

CYRIL

I know, I know… wait… Val, that was actually really good!

VAL

What?

CYRIL

I've heard the "C's get degrees part" but the rest was actually really clever? Are you hiding some talent underneath all that bravado?

VAL

I'm about to hide my fist in your throat!

CURT

And my foot in your butt!

BURT

And my knee in your gut!

VAL

A minus on the next paper.

CYRIL

C plus.

CURT

B minus!

BURT

X squared!

(They all look at BURT, confused for a moment.)

CYRIL

Val, if you agree to write part of the essay yourself, we can settle on a B minus.

VAL

Make it a flat B and I'll write the intro and conclusion.

CYRIL

Deal.

CURT

But if we sense any funny business…

CYRIL

I know, you'll make the quantity of my teeth exponentially lower.

BURT

Exactly!

VAL

Get me my paper, dweeb.

(as they exit, to BURT)

You actually know math?

CYRIL

(addressing the audience)

Besides the revelation that our villains apparently have layers upon layers to unpack, I now realized I had forgotten something important: my own school work. Luckily, drama class was a place to get caught up.

(The scene shifts to a classroom with ROSE, CYRIL, and KRIS in back. We hear MR. NESTOR talking at

the front of the class.)

MR. NESTOR

So, here it is, one of Shakespeare's most famous monologues, the "Queen Mab" speech from Romeo and Juliet. Let's uh, take it line by line. Who wants to read first?

(As STUDENTS take turns reading the speech, the focus centers on ROSE, CYRIL, and KRIS in back, who turn to read what they are writing to the audience.)

KRIS *(writing)*

"Cy, I need something to pass to Rose. Any ideas?"

(He folds the note and passes it.)

CYRIL

(reads the note and addresses the audience directly)

I know what you're thinking, passing notes? When we have phones? It's absolutely prosaic. But Mr. Nestor is infamous for confiscating electronic devices in the name of "artistic integrity", so old school note passing it is.

(He writes a reply, then passes it.)

"Listen to what Nestor is saying about Queen Mab and work it in somehow. How can you go wrong with Romeo and Juliet?"

(During the next exchange, the three write notes and pass them to each other.)

KRIS *(replying)*

"Why can't you write it for me?"

CYRIL

"Because maybe I need to focus on my own life?"

ROSE

(writing to CYRIL)

"This is the third time I've read this stupid play. Please write better than this when you become famous. Also, is Kris passing notes about me?"

CYRIL

(replying to ROSE)

"I promise I won't write the most famous romantic play ever. Also, he kinda is."

ROSE

"Oh, yeah? What's he saying?"

CYRIL

"He's overcome by the iambic pentameter and trying some free verse of his own. It's not great"

ROSE

"Well no one has ever written poetry about me, including you, so points for originality."

KRIS

"Dude, is she writing you notes about me?"

CYRIL

(to KRIS)

"Yes she is, make up some free verse poetry to send her."

(to ROSE)

"If you squint hard enough, you'll see yourself in all of my writings."

(passes the notes, then to audience, panicked)

Wait, did I really just admit that to her?! I haven't even admitted that to myself yet!

KRIS

(note to CYRIL)

"I CAN'T WRITE POETRY! I CAN BARELY WRITE THIS!"

ROSE

(note to CYRIL)

"Awww, that's sweet of you, Cy. Also, hand this to Kris."

(She passes him two notes, and he passes one of them to KRIS.)

KRIS

(note to CYRIL)

"She wrote me a note! It says 'Are you as bored as I am? Help!' I'm pretending to write something, cover for me!"

(He passes both notes to CYRIL, who now has all three notes. He looks at the audience, confused.)

CYRIL

Um, give me a minute here.

(He replies to all three, feverishly, takes a minute to figure out where to pass them, but as he starts to pass them…)

MR. NESTOR

Cyril! Are you passing NOTES to Kris and Rose?!

ROSE

Um, mine is about my part in the play, Mr. Nestor. Notes on character and all…

MR. NESTOR

And you, Kris?

CYRIL

Um, he was actually discussing Queen Mab and how…

MR. NESTOR

Nope, I want to hear HIM tell me.

(Everyone looks at KRIS, who is frozen in fear.)

MR. NESTOR

Well?

KRIS

(slowly standing)

I was telling… Cyril… that… the uh… Queen Moby speech…

MR. NESTOR

Queen Mab…

KRIS

Right, her… it's about Mercury and…

MR. NESTOR

Mercutio…

KRIS

Exactly! And he's picking on Romeo about being in love.

MR. NESTOR

…and…

KRIS

And he's…

(looks at ROSE and CY)

…actually he's jealous of Romeo. Because he, um, Mercutio doesn't have anyone and his teasing is basically a

KRIS (CONT)
manifestation of his subconscious jealousy and his desire to have someone to love.

(Everyone stares at him stunned for a beat.)

MR. NESTOR
That's… actually very insightful.

KRIS
Well, I mean, it's nothing I can…

MR. NESTOR
Come on up here and act it out for us.

KRIS
Wait, what?

MR. NESTOR
That's a fresh take and I want to see how you interpret it in your acting. Come on, don't be shy…

(KRIS mouthed 'Help me' to his friends as he makes his way to the front of the class. He and MR. NESTOR work the scene while CYRIL talks to the audience.)

CYRIL
As great as Kris's confusion is, mine was even greater. Had I truly been harboring feelings for Rose all this time and it took the plagiarizing machinations of my best friend to realize it?

(The classroom breaks up and forms into after school rehearsals.)

CYRIL

And now, college admissions committee, we come to the grand finale, where all the loose ends are tied up and we all learn a lesson… maybe. I take you to… the dress rehearsal.

(Enter ACTORS in various make-shift costumes and half-built sets and props. NESTOR is downstage with the STAGE MANAGER and CYRIL while the performers are upstage.)

MR. NESTOR

No, no, no! You cross down LEFT after that question, not before! Let's take it to the top of the scene, please.

STAGE MANAGER

Actors to the top of scene six! Techs, reset to sound cue 7-A, lights to 9-C, backstage standby. By the way, Mr. Nestor, we still need more stagehands.

MR. NESTOR

I know, I know. Everyone! Take a five minute break!

STAGE MANAGER

Five minute break! No more!

MR. NESTOR

Cyril, can I talk to you?

(as they move away from the action)

What do you think so far?

CYRIL

It's not bad actually. They're not completely butchering my words and you've somehow made it a lot lighter, but in a good way.

MR. NESTOR

Well, it was pretty heavy. But the key thing is… are you happy?

CYRIL

I don't understand…

MR. NESTOR

Everything was kind of thrust on you. It's all been out of your hands since this whole thing started. You weren't even really asked if we could do your play. You didn't have a voice in casting, in the directing, design… Before this goes out to the public, next week, I have to know. Are you happy with it?

CYRIL

I think so. I mean, you're right. It's like I've been watching someone else's life the past few weeks. I've been tossed around, told what's going to happen, but had no autonomy for myself.

MR. NESTOR

Cyril. Say the word and this whole thing stops right now. It's your show. I'm giving you back your words. I'm sorry I didn't do that sooner, actually.

CYRIL

No.

MR. NESTOR

No?

CYRIL

No, don't stop. Rose was right. I needed to be pushed a little, to be challenged. And really, you all have done a great job with the play. So I'm using my voice to say… Yes. Yes to the play. Yes to the challenge. Yes.

(KRIS comes running up.)

KRIS

Cy! Need you! Now!

CYRIL

And NO to you! No to using my words anymore for your own gain.

KRIS

That's not the problem!

VAL

(busting in with her goons)

Where is he?

MR. NESTOR

What is going on… where is who?

VAL

Him!! The writer, the scribe, the wordsmith who might get me expelled!

CYRIL

What?!

CURT

We got busted! Using your words!

BURT

Now we all might get kicked out!

(ROSE enters.)

MR. NESTOR

I'm sorry, what is this about?

VAL

Your prodigy has been in the middle of a plagiarizing ring. He wrote our essays for us.

BURT

Then we sold them to others.

MR. NESTOR

Is this true?

CURT

Except he got too smart and used the word "occidental" in my essay…

BURT

And everyone knows ones don't need dentists!

MR. NESTOR

Wait, wait, hang on. Cyril, Kris, Rose and you three stay here. Everyone else! Get changed and go on home! We'll resume right here tomorrow.

STAGE MANAGER

You heard him! We're going dark!

(STAGE MANAGER stands nearby.)

MR. NESTOR

That includes you.

STAGE MANAGER

Including me! I'm off the clock!

(exits)

MR. NESTOR

(once everyone has left)

Cyril, how much of this is true?

CYRIL

I wrote their papers, yes. I didn't know they were selling them!!

MR. NESTOR

You realize the play could get shut down, right? You could get expelled. And what about Rose and Kris? Did you write for them as well?

ROSE

No sir! He never wrote any papers for me.

KRIS

Me either. The whole Mercutio thing was actually my own brain! I was just as surprised as Cyril! He only wrote my texts to Rose…

ROSE

WHAT!?!?

VAL

Oh, this just got real good. Goons! Chair!

(They form a chair for her to sit on and watch.)

ROSE

All those things he—

(points at KRIS)

—said, was from you?!

CYRIL

It's not like that, I swear.

ROSE

So, what? Are you in love with me? Were those all of your secret thoughts?

CYRIL

No! I mean… they're my words, but…

ROSE

But, what?!

KRIS

Rose, it's not his fault, I asked him…

ROSE

Quiet you!

MR. NESTOR

Quiet, all of you! Cyril, earlier I gave you back your voice. I'm doing the same thing now.

CYRIL

Rose, I… Kris… Mr. Nestor, I can't… Fine. This what I have to say.

(a long beat)

Val, you KNOW you don't need me or your goons so quit feeding into the bully jock stereotype and worrying about what everyone has you labeled as. Kris, you should never have asked me to write for you. You're smart enough and funny enough that you don't need me. Rose, Kris really does like you and is actually a really nice guy, I was just trying to be helpful as a friend. But it doesn't make it right. As for me, you're in every word, sentence, every pen stroke I make. I'm still trying to figure out what that means, but there it is. I'm sorry.

(a long tense silence)

VAL

So, you gonna kiss the guy or what?

ROSE

What?

VAL

This is when you're touched by his speech and realize you're in love with him and kiss him!

ROSE

No! I'm not going to kiss him or go out with him. I'm furious! Cy, you're my best friend and I'm glad you confessed but this is the consequence. I'm mad at you.

KRIS

So, what does that mean for…

ROSE

Are you kidding? No! I don't need a significant other or some dashing prince to make me happy or fulfilled! I'm completely fine without either of you!

BURT

Hey Rose, what about me?

ROSE

No!

(turns to CURT)

And before you ask, no.

(to VAL)

And no to you! No to any of you! Ugh!

(She storms out. KRIS, after a moment, goes after her.)

CYRIL

Mr. Nestor, this is all my fault. I'll own up to everything. Don't cancel the play. Everyone has worked too hard. I'll find a way to fix this for everyone, even Val, just give me a chance.

MR. NESTOR

Let's go talk to the principal. Since you're willing to make it right, I think he'll listen. Val, you need to come to.

VAL

Yeah, yeah, I figured.

(She stands.)

Goons! Up!

(They hop up.)

By the way, what about Curt and Burt?

MR. NESTOR

I actually may have a solution. Um, where did the stage manager go?

STAGE MANAGER

(popping in from backstage)

I never left!

MR. NESTOR

I have two willing and able stage hands for you. Follow her, boys.

STAGE MANAGER

Alright, you two, backstage! Now!

CURT AND BURT

Yes boss!

(They hustle offstage.)

MR. NESTOR

You two, follow me and let's see if we can salvage this debacle.

(He and VAL exit as CYRIL crosses to center.)

CYRIL

Somehow, everything turned out well for everyone, as cliché and trite as it sounds. The play was a success, the goons are now a permanent presence backstage, and Val and I had to do some community service as recompense. I learned to take responsibility for the power and effect of my words. And to fully own them instead of others.

(ROSE enters, reading CYRIL's laptop.)

CYRIL

Rose forgave me, eventually, and Kris, though romance is currently off the table for any of us.

(KRIS and VAL enter and sit with ROSE on a couch, as if ready to watch a movie.)

CYRIL

Part of our restitution was, ironically enough, a group project. Which I am not allowed to write any part of.

VAL

I've got popcorn!

(She sits next to KRIS.)

KRIS

What is this movie again?

CYRIL

(to audience still)

Which, I guess is better than being expelled.

ROSE

I told you already, "Cyrano De Bergerac."

KRIS

Sounds weird.

ROSE

It's French, you clod.

VAL

(looking at a DVD case)

Hahaha! He's got a big nose!

CYRIL

In conclusion… well, I hope you will consider me for admission to your prestigious university. Sincerely, Cyril the plagiarized.

(He sits and addresses ROSE.)

How was it?

ROSE

(handing back the laptop)

It's really good. You're gonna get in for sure.

KRIS

So, watching this movie, after what we went through… doesn't it feel a little… on the… NOSE?

(They all groan.)

KRIS

What? That joke was right there for the… PICKING!!!

VAL

Haha! High five for booger jokes!

(They high five.)

ROSE

Shut up! The movie is starting!

(She hits play on the remote and lights fade to black.)

(The End)



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