

Nine-And-A-Half-Nervous

By Mika Higgins-Woo

Character Descriptions:

Clara: Clara is a timid and shy freshman who is new to theater, new to the school and new to the audition process. She is young and grateful for any advice given to her by more experienced upperclassmen.

Robin: Robin is a more experienced, older character. Robin has done all of the plays at this high school and knows the ropes. She is ready to make some new friends, share some advice and help any underclassmen with the audition process.

Mr. R: Mr. R doesn't really show up that much in the script because the play mostly focuses on the relationship between Clara and Robin, but Mr. R is a middle aged man who has been director of the shows at this high school for over twenty years. Like Robin, Mr. R knows the ropes and knows how to deal with scared freshmen. He is witty in an old man way, and he thinks that all of his jokes are really funny. At the end of the day, he is a compassionate teacher and values the relationships made between young kids such as Clara and Robin.

Lights up. The stage is set with three rows of chairs. All of the chairs are facing towards one third of the stage that is bare. A teenage girl, Robin, walks to the corner of the stage, flicks on an upright lamp, flooding the room with light and goes to sit on the floor in front of the first row of the chairs leaning against the legs of one of them.

Robin is sitting in a way that if someone were to enter from the opposite side, they wouldn't be able to see her. She is holding a crumpled sheet of paper and is mouthing words over and over again as if she is reading something.

In storms another younger girl, Clara. She is out of breath and, with eyes wide, seems nervous. She pushes herself against the door and seems to try to ground herself. She, too, carries a sheet of paper, but hers is folded precisely into squares. Her sheet of paper is tucked in between her fingers, barely noticeable to the audience at first.

Clara: *(rushed, wavering and almost through tears)*

I'm-sorry-okay-I-don't-know-why-you're-being-such-a-baby-about-this-can't-you *(Clara's shoulders sag, her face unclenches and she sighs looking down at her paper for the next line in the monologue. She gives up, sighs, and starts to talk to herself).....*UGH I can't do this I can't do this I can't do this. Stop being stupid, yes you can. You're already in the room, stop being SUCH A BABY.

Robin is now crouched behind the chairs. She has stopped looking at her paper and her eyes are trained on Clara.

Clara: Okay Clara. You have to pull yourself together. It's in a few minutes. Take a deep breath. *(she takes a deep breath and unnaturally reads from the script in her hand)* I. Am. Sorry. Okay? I. Don't. Know. Why. I.....NOOO not like that EITHER!!

Robin: *(standing up from the chairs)* Hey...? You okay?

Clara: Oh! Uhhh I'm so sorry I didn't know there was anyone in here already...I should've checked I'm sorry, I'll leave, sorry!!

Robin: Oh my God you're totally fine don't worry about it. *Are* you okay though?

Clara: *(looks down at her paper and then back up at B)* She sighs.

Robin: Um well...how old are you? Is this your first time?

Clara: ...yeah... was it that obvious?

Robin: Nono I just haven't seen you around before!

Clara: Yeah...I'm a freshman.

Robin: That's great, our department really needs some new blood.

Clara: Thanks?

Robin: What I mean is we haven't had a new kid audition for like three shows....we're getting sick of each other.

Clara: Well I'd be so happy to get any role in this show, I'm just excited to be here. I'm also new to this school so....oh! Sorry, I'm Clara by the way.

Robin: I'm Robin! And also welcome – I was also new in freshman year. It's so brave of you to audition for this on top of everything. I was too chicken to do it when I was you.

Clara: Oh thanks, I've always liked theater so I thought maybe doing this would help me meet new people?

Robin: One hundred percent. Not sure if you'll take that back once you've met us though, we're an odd group.

They both laugh. Clara's smile fades as she looks back down to her sheet of paper.

Robin: Oh! Do you wanna maybe run lines? Maybe I can help you through some sticky parts? Preparing for a play you don't know can be really hard.

Clara: Yeah I am starting to realize that...would you really mind?

Robin: Not at all! You sounded like you had a good start already but yeah I'd be happy to offer some tips.

Clara: Would you? Oh thank you so much...I need it.

Robin: Well, first of all don't ever go in with that attitude. Directors are never looking for self-conscious kids. I mean that's literally why theater kids are so loud.

Clara: *(laughs and sniffles)* Okay. I'm not very confident about this scene yet though...I got it just this morning from the bin in the lobby? I didn't know they'd been out before.

Robin: Oh my goodness, first of all it's great that you even prepared anything. Second of all, do you think I, or anyone else, am gonna waltz into the audition room having perfectly memorized my monologue? Absolutely not. I was literally just going over stuff when you walked in. Don't let others scare you. What monologue are you doing?

Clara: Uhhh I'm not sure. I just took the top one? It says at the top that my character's name is.... Sally I think? I'm not sure. I don't really know this show...

Robin: Oh that's great! Your monologue is directed towards Henry, right? I picked up the side for Henry so we can practice you speaking to me. I find it always best to pretend to be speaking to someone you know?

Clara: Yeah I get that. Okay....what should I do? Do you want me to just...do the monologue for you?

Robin: Yeah sure go for it! What is there to lose, right?

Clara: *(takes a deep breath and looks down at her paper and begins speaking slowly yet without that much feeling)* I'm sorry, okay? I don't know why you're being such a baby about this. Can't you just leave me alone like any other person would do? Oh no you can't, right? You can't. I get it. You're just special. You handle this differently than anyone else would because you're just different. All right. I get it. I'll back off. No! Are you kidding me? You think I'm gonna be just like every adult in your life? No. I'm going to hold you accountable. No, this isn't Sally flipping out again. No. No. No. You're finally going to get what you deserve. Do you feel guilty? Cause you should.

Robin: Wow! That was great, I can even hear improvement from your performance just a few minutes ago...

Clara: No please stop...I'm trying to forget that even happened.

Robin: Clara. It's totally normal to feel nervous. I'm nervous right now! You just have to take it and USE it.

Clara: Use it?

Robin: Yeah use it! Like how nervous do you feel right now? Scale of one to ten.

Clara: Like a nine and a half?

Robin: Okay. I want you to yell a nine-and-a-half nervous scream. Go for it. Use the nerves.

Clara: What? No! Not here!!

Robin: Why not here? You're going to have to let go at some point, no one is judging you. Just let all tension away. Give me your best nine-and-a-half nervous scream.

Clara: (*hesitates*) Um ok? AHHHHHHHHHHHH.

Robin: Okay....I'd say that was maybe a six? You can do better. Prove to me how terrified for this audition you are. Cause if you're only *that* nervous, you don't even need my-

Clara: -AHHHHHHHHHH!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

Robin: Now we're talking! Okay. Quick. (*starts backing up and moving around the space as if envisioning a scene*) I want you to be Sally. Don't think too much about it. Suddenly I'm Henry right across from you. What's the first line? Something about being sorry? Just yell them at me. I've made you mad, right? Prove it.

Clara: I'M SORRY OKAY???!!

Robin: GOOD! Keep going! This is the right path....now keep going but don't even look at me face out and just say the lines as if they meant as much to you as this audition does..go!

Both girls start to pace around the room. Clara is suddenly invigorated. Seeming to forget herself, she keeps going with the dialog.

Clara is speaking the lines of her monologue and Robin is serving the purpose of Henry, the person who the monologue is directed at. She occasionally improvises lines for Henry that aren't included in the monologue in order to rile up Clara and keep the energy.

Clara: I don't know why you're being such a baby about this. Can't you just leave me alone like any other person would do?

Robin: Good! And now imagine Henry tells you NO! (*improvising inexistent lines as Henry, taunting Clara in order to get her to keep going*) No I'm so special. I'm SOOOOOOO special, Sally. More special than you'll ever beeeeeee...

Clara: *(looking down briefly at her paper)* Oh no you can't, right? You can't. I get it. You're just special. You handle this differently than anyone else would because you're just different. All right. I get it. I'll back off.

Robin: *(still in character as Henry, creating lines in the middle of the monologue to encourage Clara to use her frustration)* Good. Cause I deserve it. I'm just different like that.

Clara: I CAN'T...oh wait shoot that's not the line..

Robin: Don't get caught up in the lines!! Make it up for all I care...stay in the Sally mindset, don't lose it now! Unless you believe that Henry should get off without any punishments...?

Clara: *(has a sharp reaction to this question, snaps back into character, and looks back to her paper to get the next line)* No! Are you kidding me? You think I'm gonna be just like every adult in your life? No. I'm going to hold you accountable. No, this isn't Sally flipping out again.

Robin: *(as Henry)* It's not?

Clara: *(finding her line)* No. No. No. You're finally going to get what you deserve. Do you feel guilty?

Robin: *(prompting the last sentence in Clara's monologue as Henry)* Should I?

Clara: *(getting up on one of the audition chairs to finish the monologue strong)* CAUSE YOU SHOULD!!

Clara finishes the monologue strong and for a moment just stands there. Suddenly her eyes widen as she realizes that she's just been screaming and tearing up with anger over some made-up character. Quickly, she wipes away her tears and straightens back to herself and gets off the chair.

Robin: *(breaking out of character as Henry, returning to Robin)* Clara!! That was fantastic! Do you see what you can do when you take those nerves and use them for something better than just a thumping heart and sweaty palms? That was awesome!

Clara: *(blushing and suddenly self-conscious)* Oh um thanks...I've never done that before...that was pretty cool...

Robin: *You* were pretty cool. All you have to do *that* in the audition and you're sure to get a good role.

Clara: I don't know if I can do that again though...

Robin: Are you kidding? You just did, you've got this, just take the nerves and go for it. Nine-and-a-half nerves okay? You wanna yell one more time with me?

Robin gets on the chair and gestures for Clara to follow.

Clara: Umm

Robin: Let's do it. One....Two...

At the last moment, Clara joins her and grabs her hand and screams.

Clara and Robin: AHHHHH-

An older man enters the room a couple of seconds after Robin and Clara start yelling. They both automatically fall silent and turn towards the man.

Mr R: Robin! Already torturing the freshman, I see?

Robin: Oops sorry Mr. R, we were just practicing...

Mr. R: *(goodnaturedly)* Last time I checked this show didn't involve screaming...

Robin: Sorry...

Mr. R: And who do we have here??

Clara: Um hi my name is Clara?

Mr. R: Are you sure?

Clara: *(clears her throat)* Uh yeah sorry. I'm Clara. I'm new this year.

Mr. R: Well nice to meet you, Clara. I take it I'll be seeing you in a couple of minutes?

Clara: Uhhh..*(her eyes widen)*...

Robin: Yes you will!! Clara has such a good monologue ready for you, you're lucky.

Clara: *(shooting Robin a grateful look)* Yeah, I'm really excited for the audition.

Mr. R: Well I'm glad. This department needs new blood.

Clara: *(laughs)* That's what Robin told me!

Mr. R: Well there are *some things* that Robin and I agree on....most things? No. But new blood...for sure.

Clara's eyes grow larger in disbelief and fear.

Robin: Now who's torturing the new girl? C'mon Clara, I can go introduce you to the other kids.

Mr. R: Actually....while I have Clara here, would you like to go first? I don't really have a set order..

Robin: oooh!

Clara: Ummm.....(*deep breath*)...ok!

Robin: That's my girl!

Mr. R: Terrific, I'll just go outside and tame the nervous hoards of children out there and I'll be back soon.

Mr. R exits. Clara turns nervously to Robin.

Clara: First?!

Robin: You've got this! You're gonna set the bar high for everyone else; don't even worry...maybe no more screaming but...here squeeze my hand ok?
Nine-and-a-half-nervous type of squeeze okay?

Clara: My heart is beating so fast right now

Robin: Perfectly normal. And guess what? Probably so is Mr. R's? Honestly, think about it this way. We don't have to be here. We're here to show him what we have. He needs us, all of us. Without us he wouldn't have a show to direct. We're only showing off for him at this audition because he needs our help. Here, do you want me to stay in the room?

Clara nods her head furiously as Mr. R walks back into the room. Both girls straighten up and face Mr. R.

Mr. R: Alright! Clara! You ready?

Clara: As I'll ever be!

Mr. R: Alrighty! Step on up then!

Robin: Ummm Mr. R? Would it be possible for me to sit in the back during her monologue? Uhhhh....her mom wants me to film it?

Mr. R: (*smiling, catching on to the lie*) Are you sure?

Robin: Yes. I have to. Film it. I have to film it. Can I stay?

Mr. R: Do whatever you want. As long as Clara's okay with it?

Clara: Oh yeah sure she's fine...

Mr. R: *(playing into the lie)* Alright, maybe if you have to film it you can come sit by me right? So the camera can see her better?

Clara and Robin: Perfect!

Robin shoots Clara an enthusiastic smile and thumbs up. Clara turns around to center herself and takes a deep breath.

Robin: Nine-and-a-half, okay??

Mr. R: Robin! First torturing the young and now distracting them? Tsk tsk.

Robin: Sorry Mr. R!

Clara turns around and begins the monologue.

Clara: I'm sorry, okay? I don't know why you're being such a baby about this....

Clara's eyes widen as she loses her spot on the page. She looks up, panicked, at Robin.

Robin: Use it!!

Clara takes a deep breath and finds her spot.

Clara: Can't you just leave me alone like any other person would do? Oh no you can't, right? You can't. I get it. You're just special. You handle this differently than anyone else would because you're just different. All right. I get it. I'll back off.

Clara starts pacing up and down the stage.

No! Are you kidding me? You think I'm gonna be just like every adult in your life? No. I'm going to hold you accountable. No, this isn't Sally flipping out again. No. No. No. You're finally going to get what you deserve. Do you feel guilty?

Clara pauses.

Cause you should.

Satisfied with herself, Clara rushes off stage and whispers thank you to Mr. R.

Robin: Clara! Great job! That was fabulous!

Mr. R: Agreed, really great job.

Clara: Thank you guys! Should I wait outside for my scene or...?

Mr. R: Yes. We're going to have everyone with your monologue do it and then move on. It might be a little bit of a wait, but thank you so much for your time. Robin, you can go with her? Introduce her to the cult?

Robin: That I will, Mr. R!

Robin and Clara walk towards the door together.

Mr. R: Oh and Clara?

Clara: Yes?

Mr. R: I'd block off your calendar for tomorrow as well.

Robin: Clara!! That's Mr. R language for you-got-a-callback. Congrats, girl!

Clara: Thank you so much. And thanks, Robin, for helping me. I know we're both technically competing for the same roles but you still helped me and that means a lot even if I don't get into the show...

Mr. R: Alright guys, have the sappy theater kid talk outside.

Blackout.