

New Girl

By Larry Mitchell

A short play

Based on the short story, "The New Girl," by Roger Gross

First Draft

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Setting: (1970'S) A hotel bar, a hotel room,
(1950'S) a bedroom, a library, a house party, a bathroom

CAST

HARRY CUMMINGS: (1970's) a middle aged advertising man, and

HARRY CUMMINGS: (1950's) the same man as a college freshman.

GLORIA KENNY: (1950's) a twenty-something college student (1970's)
and a middle aged call-girl.

PETE: (1950's) Harry's college roommate; a jock.

FLORENCE: (1950's) A party-goer.

FOSTER: (1970's) A younger employee of Harry's

DANCERS: Extras, chorus, costume and set runners, etc. Between
four and twelve of them.

NEW GIRL

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AT RISE, a hotel ballroom. HARRY, a middle aged advertising man, with the greying temples of dignified success, has a martini in his hand, which he holds up to toast the evening.

The DANCERS are spread throughout, in uniform clothing. Perhaps, a couple is dancing, some are sitting at the bar, mimicking HARRY's movements, making him seem like one of many other Harrys in this world.

HARRY

Let's see. What is the occasion this evening? It seems to have slipped my mind.... Oh! Yes, of course, the annual Ad Club stag. Well, here's to the annual Ad Club stag. May it continue through the years as an occasion for the lifting of glasses in tribute... Say, if this is the annual Ad Club stag, what were we doing here last week?... Oh! The annual Radio Buyers stag. How could I forget the annual Radio Buyers stag? It must have been a success. I don't remember anything about it. Well, here's to stags! Last week's, this week's, next week's...

One of the DANCERS peels out from the crowd, becoming FOSTER. HE is quite a bit younger than HARRY, armed to the teeth with smiles, handshakes, and belly-laughs for the boss's jokes.

FOSTER

Hey, Mr. Cummings! Will you do that funny routine for us tonight?

HARRY

Routine?... Oh, hello..Foster. Routine? I'm afraid you'll have to tell me exactly what you mean by "routine." I cannot recall any funny routines off-hand.

FOSTER

You're not going to be modest are you, Mr. Cummings?

HARRY

Routine? I have no routines?

FOSTER

You know, the thing you did last week. The one about the toothbrush. It killed every body.

The DANCERS all nod in agreement.

DANCERS

(Ad-lib)

Oh, yes! Wonderful! Certainly was the best thing since Mallory's routine last year. Hilarious! Etc.

HARRY

Toothbrush? Oh, Lord! Don't tell me I ended up doing poems last week. Unbelievable... Sad, actually.

FOSTER

Aw, c'mon! It killed everybody. *Everybody!*

HARRY

Well, that's good to know.

FOSTER

Come on Mr. Cummings, some of the fellows missed it last week. Hey! Everybody! Let's have a hand for Mr. Cummings! He's going to do the toothbrush routine for us again. How about it?

HARRY turns to the bar, downs his martini, points to indicate that he needs another one, which instantly appears. HE takes the drink gingerly by the stem and eases his way to the STAGE. Friendly cheers greet him as he approaches the MICROPHONE, clearing his throat.

HARRY

Fellow hypocrites! I have been asked to repeat a funny routine which I do not recall having done on this stage last week, or ever, for that matter, but in any matter, however, I am never one to ignore the call of an adoring public.

With that in mind, I submit myself to you, glass in hand, and funny routine bouncing somewhere around in what is left of my mind. Pause with me a moment while I dispose of this glass. I assure you, the routine will be the better for it.

There are cheers as he empties his glass and tosses it over his shoulder, and begins the poem, gesturing, in an exaggerated tone.

HARRY

*“take it from me, kiddo.
Believe me.
My country tis of...”*

The room goes silent, and into slow motion, as HARRY continues the poem, his mouth moves but no sound comes out.

SFX: muffled, underwater laughter.

The DANCERS are reacting to HARRY, pointing, laughing, but no sound comes from them. The canned laughter stops just in time for HARRY to say the final line.

HARRY

“Comes out like the ribbon lies flat on the brush.”

The DANCERS go ape-shit. Applause. HARRY makes a mock Shakespearean bow, as another drink, not a martini, is thrust into his hand. He drinks it fast realizing it is not his chosen drink, but not really caring. He holds up his hand as he clumsily drops the glass to the floor. The DANCERS quiet down.

HARRY

OK... OK. I'll give you one more. Just don't leave me dry up here. Keep me wet, kiddos, and I'll keep you...

*“in just--
Spring, when the world is mud--*

*Luscious and little
Lame balloon an
Whistles far and wee...*

Again, silence, slow motion. As HARRY continues, his gestures growing more ludicrous, as well as that of the DANCERS' reactions.

As HE continues, the dancers will intermittently insert sharp and short spurts of laughter.

Someone gives HARRY a drink, which he downs without thinking about it and tosses. HARRY bows as if he has finished one of the poems, but begins another, looking more like a fish made of gelatin as it wears on, by the end of it he is passed out on the floor.

MUSIC PLAYS as the DANCERS pick up HARRY, who is out cold, and carry him around, as if he is floating in some sort of pattern that indicates their travelling to an ELEVATOR. They set him up on wobbly legs which give out almost immediately, sending the rest of HARRY into a pile on the floor.

SFX: Bell.

The DANCERS exit the elevator, carrying HARRY through a door, and setting him on those wobbly legs again. By now, a bed appears, which catches his fall.

BLACKOUT

AT RISE, HARRY still passed out on the bed, in the exact spot we last saw him.

He is framed by a single SHAFT OF LIGHT, As he slowly rises, wiping his face with his hands, the rest of the room appears. A TOILET, and GLORIA, adjusting herself in front of the MIRROR. SHE is in her forties, with a black and slightly grey haired wig on. HARRY notices her.

HARRY

Oh, hello. Excuse me...

GLORIA

(facing the mirror)

I'm glad to see you're on your feet. I thought for a while that you were going to be out all night.

HARRY

I didn't know you were waiting. I assume some of my friends made this reservation for me?

GLORIA

Indeed.

HARRY

Had they been thoughtful enough to mention this to me, perhaps I should have been thoughtful enough to avoid passing out in your... boudoir. As it is, I seem to have had one or two more drinks than might permit me to operate at maximum efficiency.

GLORIA

You sound all right to me.

HARRY

Thank you. I appreciate even such unintended compliments. Will you excuse me? I feel I am not putting my best face forward at the moment.

HARRY makes his way to the toilet, miming the action of washing his face, as he continues.

HARRY

You know, I sometimes think the only reason I drink so much is because the boys invariably play the same joke on me. You'd be amazed at the amount of money I save this way.

GLORIA isn't listening.

HARRY

I haven't met you before, have I? You must be new here. That is another unchanging part of the game. Whenever the hotel gets a new girl, she is assigned to me. It must be some sort of freshman hazing ritual.

There is no answer. GLORIA pulls a pin from her hair, letting the full length drop. SHE is still facing away from HARRY, who is checking her out.

HARRY

Well, I must say I'm not at all sorry that they sent you. You're a pleasant change from some of your colleagues. You don't talk very much, do you?

GLORIA

(As she turns to face HARRY)

Is there anything in particular you'd like me to say?

Harry sees HER and freezes. GLORIA freezes.

The DANCERS enter, carrying HARRY off stage. Some remain, and outfit GLORIA with a camel hair coat, younger hair, and glasses.

Two bookcases appear, along with HARRY, who is in the same suit though it now has a coat of arms on the front pocket. He is wearing a beanie. Notices GLORIA, who smiles.

HARRY

Hello.

GLORIA

Hello.

HARRY

Can I help you find something? Oh please don't think I have ulterior motives. I work here.

GLORIA

Oh?

HARRY

Yeah, I know the stacks pretty well. I just thought you might need some help. You look a little lost.

GLORIA

Well, that's very nice of you--?

HARRY

Harry.

GLORIA

Harry. That's very nice of you. And you're right. I am lost. The card catalogue is too much for me. I've been wandering around for ten minutes trying to find a book by e.e. Cummings. If you could--

HARRY

You couldn't have possibly found a better man for that section. It's like a second home to me.

GLORIA

Where is it?

HARRY

You're standing in it. Right over here.

HARRY pulls a green book from the stacks.

HARRY

What course are you reading Cummings for?

GLORIA

No course. Just for fun.

HARRY

You don't mean that. You mean to say that you don't read him because you want to? Because you like what he writes?

GLORIA

Yes.

HARRY

I can't believe it.

GLORIA

Why not? I like him. Don't you like him?

HARRY

Sure I do. He's my favorite. But, believe it or not, you're the first girl I ever met who *liked* to read e.e. Cummings.

GLORIA

Were you convinced that women and artistic sensitivity didn't go together?

HARRY

Yes... No... Sort of.

GLORIA

Perhaps you've found an exception.

HARRY

Perhaps.

Awkward silence...

GLORIA

I'm Gloria.

HARRY

Hi, Gloria.

GLORIA

Would you like to discuss cummings, Elliot, or the shallowness of the typical college student over coffee with me?

BLACKOUT

AT RISE, The bed is back, sitting on the corner, is PETE, HARRY'S jock roommate, who is chiseled, young, and handsome. HARRY is pacing as he tells the story.

HARRY

Honest to God, Pete, you wouldn't believe it. My first girl. And, this girl is just what I've been looking for. She actually reads poetry. For enjoyment! And, she understands it, I think.

PETE

OK...

HARRY

Even a football player should be able to appreciate how rare it is to find a woman with good looks and brains.

PETE

For Christ sake, she must be something special to get a bookworm like you all worked up.

HARRY

She is.

PETE

Personally, I don't know that I'd want a chick with too much in her head. Makes them hard to handle.

HARRY

Oh?

PETE

But you go ahead. It'll be good for you. Get out and see the world for a change. It's a wonder you don't turn moldy in that damn library.

HARRY

Well, I won't be in the library this weekend.

Oh, yeah? PETE

Oh, yeah. Gloria and I are going to a movie. HARRY

Two weeks before finals? PETE

Yep. HARRY

And you're going to a movie? PETE

Yeah. HARRY

With a girl? PETE

Yes. HARRY

I never thought I'd see the day. Congratulations! PETE

Thank you. HARRY

Gloria, huh? Gloria what? PETE

Gloria Kenny. Ever heard of her? HARRY

I don't know. PETE

I doubt it. HARRY

PETE

Why's that?

HARRY

She's not the type to circulate with your crowd.

PETE

Hey, we're not such a crude bunch of bums.

HARRY

Oh, no offense intended.

PETE

In fact, you can eat your words, 'cause I do know her.

HARRY

Yeah? From where?

PETE

I sure as hell wouldn't recognise her from your description. Are you sure that's her name?

HARRY

Absolutely. I think so...

PETE

A good looking broad? About "five-four" or so?

HARRY

Yeah.

PETE

Black hair all the way to her ass? Classy clothes? Is that the one?

HARRY

Yeah that's her.

PETE

Swell.

HARRY

You know her, huh?

PETE

I guess.

HARRY

Well, that's fine.

PETE

I don't actually know her very well, myself. I know about her from some of the guys.

HARRY

Oh.

PETE

And, I've seen her at a couple of parties.

HARRY

She's a real sweet girl.

PETE

Don't get too excited. You've only known her for a day.

HARRY

So.

PETE

You never know what they're really like 'till you've been around them awhile.

HARRY

Sure, but I'm telling you, this is the right girl for me. She's really the right type.

PETE

Great to know. Can I get some sleep?

HARRY

Sure, yeah. How about that double.

PETE

Yeah, I'll line something up. There's a party this weekend. After the Senior Ball.

HARRY

Yeah?

PETE

We'll go.

HARRY

Really?

PETE

Yes, now get the hell out of my room, kid.

*HARRY exits, as PETE lies down to sleep.
The bed goes off stage with him on it.*

BLACKOUT

AT RISE, we are at a house party. The DANCERS, a interspersed throughout as revelers. PETE, HARRY, GLORIA and PETE'S DATE enter and begin to mingle. PETE'S DATE quickly begins to blend in with the other DANCERS and is lost. PETE peels off from the group to get beer, as HARRY and GLORIA stand in awkward silence, as the party continues around them. Then, from the middle of the crowd, we hear PETE.

PETE

Hey! Last one drunk is a Lit major!

PETE approaches HARRY with bottles of beer in hand.

PETE

Well, Harry, this is your chance to prove to the world that you can take it like a man.

HARRY

I don't know...

PETE

C'mon Harry!

HARRY

I've never really drank before.

PETE

Now's the time to start. What about you, Gloria? Do you need a glass, or will a bottle do?

HARRY

I don't think Gloria drinks, Pete.

PETE

For Christ's sake, Harry, why don't you lock the girl in a chastity belt and chain her to the goddamn wall. Doesn't drink? For Christ's sake!

HARRY

C'mon, Pete--

GLORIA

Okay, cut that out. Right now, both of you. A bottle is fine, Pete.

HARRY, embarrassed, begins to drink his first beer, with a wince, then finding the liquid to be surprisingly comforting, he downs it.

The room starts to go into slow motion and silence, again, as a line of DANCERS gives HARRY a never ending supply of beer bottles, which he downs in rhythm.

SFX: underwater laughter, talking, the roar of massed voices, rising and falling.

As they continue, HARRY becoming more and more akin to his older self in the first scene, we notice that HE is being slowly separated from GLORIA and PETE, until HARRY and the dancers are the only ones left on stage. The SFX stop, and the scene resumes as HARRY is jarred back into real life.

HARRY

I've got to get out of here! Hey, where's the bathroom?

HARRY starts to walk towards where a bathroom might be, as the DANCERS ignore him.

He falls against one of them, attempts to pull himself erect, stumbles, again.

HARRY

Give me a hand, can you? I've got to get to the bathroom.

Still ignoring HARRY the DANCER pushes him in the right direction. HARRY stumbles into a female DANCER, a stranger, FLORENCE.

FLORENCE

You look like you could use a bedroom better than a bathroom. The best cure is to sleep it off.

HARRY

No, I just want to get to a bathroom if I can. Get some water or something..

FLORENCE

Florence Nightingale at your service! Hang on. We'll make it one way or another...

As HARRY and FLORENCE make their way to "the bathroom," The DANCERS disappear.

FLORENCE

Here we are.

HARRY

Yeah?

FLORENCE

This may not be the master bath, but it has all the basic facilities.

HARRY

I just need some water.

FLORENCE

You'd better hop into that shower. Might do you some good.

HARRY

Just water...

FLORENCE

Let's get you out of that monkey suit. You're probably broiled alive in there.

HARRY

No. I'll be all right. Thank you.

FLORENCE ignores HARRY and begins removing his jacket, then, tries to kiss him.

HARRY

Please, no. I'll be okay. I just need to stay in here for a little while.

FLORENCE

All right, junior, all right. I'll go. Wouldn't want to offend your modesty.

HARRY

Could you do one more thing for me?

FLORENCE

Sure.

HARRY

Find Gloria Kenny and tell her I had to leave for a minute?

FLORENCE

Okay.

HARRY

Tell her that I'll be right back.

FLORENCE

I'll take that bet.

FLORENCE exits. HARRY is alone. He takes off his shirt and pants, as the movement slows down and we are back in the fog of sound effects of canned laughter while HARRY mimes taking a shower. By the end of it, he is shivering on the floor in a ball. He gets out of the shower, puts on his shirt and pants.

Carrying the rest of his clothing, he finds himself amidst all of the DANCERS again, who continue to ignore him, as they part ways, we discover that the bed is back, there is a couple in the bed, but the figures are in tableau, indistinguishable. As HARRY enters “the bedroom,” the speed and sound return to normal.

PETE

Hey! Get the hell out of here!

HARRY continues to enter the room, as he gathers his bearings.

PETE

I said, “get the hell out of here buddy!

HARRY

Is that you Pete?

PETE

Shit! Harry? Get the hell out of here!

HARRY

Pete, I’m sick. I’ve got to lie down or I’ll throw up. Are you alone?

HARRY turns on the light as PETE makes a leap from the bed, and the bed’s other inhabitant cowers beneath the sheets. PETE grabs HARRY by the shoulders, pushing him out of the room.

HARRY

What’s going on Pete? For god’s sake!

HARRY sees GLORIA in the bed. PETE notices the look on HARRY’s face and releases his hold. GLORIA goes back under the sheets.

PETE

I told you to get out, Harry. Why the hell didn't you just leave, get out, when I told you to?

HARRY brushes by PETE, taking a seat on the edge of the bed, as he puts the rest of his clothes on. The three of them sit in silence for what seems like far too long.

Then, we hear GLORIA begin to sob. PETE is standing, half naked, in the doorway. GLORIA pokes her head out.

HARRY stands, on the verge of tears, but holding them back to retain his pride makes his way towards the door. He approaches PETE who thinks there might be violence in his future, then begins to speak in a gentle, almost apologetic tone.

HARRY

Well, kid. I'd like very much to stay for my turn, but the line is so long and the hour so late that I think I had better take a rain check. I'm really very sorry. Good night.

HARRY turns and makes an elegant exit. PETE follows him out.

GLORIA exits the bed, remakes it, and walks to center. DANCERS enter and transform her back into the Gloria from now.

The mirror reappears as HARRY is once again carried in by the DANCERS, This time he is in control, not passed out, almost as if he has just won the big game and is being carried off the field, only the DANCERS set him down in the exact same spot where he was passed out in the second scene.

He gets up, again. Wipes his face.

HARRY

Well, I must say I'm not at all sorry that they sent you. You're a pleasant change from some of your colleagues. You don't talk very much, do you?

GLORIA

(As she turns to face HARRY)

Is there anything in particular you'd like me to say?

HARRY pauses for a moment, in thought, then gives a take to the audience... Maybe even a wink.

GLORIA

Are you about ready mister? Or are you planning to sit there all night?

HARRY looks again to the audience. Smiles.

HARRY

Mister?

GLORIA

What?

HARRY

Nothing. Nothing at all. I must beg your pardon. I'll be with you presently.

GLORIA

Fair enough.

HARRY gives another take to the audience as he removes his tie.

HARRY

I always try to be a perfect gentleman... particularly with a new girl.

BLACKOUT.

THE END