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Opening extract from

Hank Zipzer: The Curtain Went Up, My Trousers Fell Down

Written by

Henry Winkler and Lin Oliver

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To Lin Oliver: A Writing Partner Sent from Heaven. And to Stacey always.—H.W.

For my sister, Pamela—with happy memories of our past and great expectations for the future.—L.O.

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CHAPTER 1

I FELL OUT OF MY CHAIR and rolled onto the linoleum floor. My ears felt like they were going to explode right off my head. They couldn't have heard what they heard. Not the words that just came out of Dr. Berger's mouth. No, those words couldn't be true.

"Hank," Dr. Berger said, looking over the edge of her desk at the floor, where I was still flopping around like a fish with a stomachache. "I wish you'd get back into your chair."

"No way," I answered. "Not until you tell me it's not true."

"I can't tell you that, Hank, because it *is* true. Would you want me to lie to you?"

"Yes," I said, without hesitation. "Yes until infinity."

"No, you wouldn't," she said. "I've made my decision and it's final. I've signed you up for math tutoring with a peer tutor. You start tomorrow."

Peer tutoring! Could anything be more embarrassing?

"Did you say *pear* tutoring?" I asked hopefully, pulling myself to my knees and resting my chin on her desk. "Why would you want me to be tutored by a fruit?"

"You know I said *peer*, not pear," Dr. Berger answered, a smile curling up at the corners of her mouth.

"Okay, I did know that," I said. "I was just hoping it wasn't true."

"Hank, we've had great success with our peer tutoring program, and I believe that being tutored by another student will make math easier for you. So I have assigned you to Heather Payne."

"Heather Payne! I'm double triple hoping that's not true!"

"Well, it is."

That did it! I flopped back down onto the floor again. This was too much information for me to take sitting up. Too much *bad* information.

Heather Payne! Miss Perfect. Miss I'd-Love-To-Do-Homework-For-The-Rest-Of-My-Life. Miss How-Many-Extra-Credit-Problems-Can-I-Do? Miss I've-Never-Gotten-Anything-Lower-Than-An-A-With-Thirty-Three-Pluses. Oh, no, this wasn't happening.

"Dr. Berger, tell me you didn't say Heather Payne," I said, pulling myself up onto the speckled green plastic chair next to her desk.

"Heather is an excellent math student, Hank, and she has expressed a desire to help tutor a fellow classmate."

"Trust me, I'm not that classmate."

Heather Payne hates me. Well, maybe she doesn't hate me, but she looks at me like I'm some kind of rodent with bugs riding on my back. Once, when I had just gotten back a math test, she glanced at my paper and saw the C-minus written in red on the top. And do you know what she said? "I didn't know they gave grades that low." I had been thrilled out of my mind with that grade. A C-minus was a step up for me. I usually live in D-ville.

Heather Payne is not only a perfect student herself, she's never even hung out with someone who isn't. She was the last person in the cosmos—or whatever is the farthest place from where you're standing right now on planet Earth—that I would want tutoring me in

math. Or spelling. Or anything, even sandwich making. I'll bet her idea of making a sandwich is wearing plastic gloves so she doesn't get peanut butter under her fingernails. She wouldn't want to get her fingers sticky because that might reduce the speed at which they can fly across her calculator while she's doing her fourth set of extra-credit math problems. Problems that look like a foreign language to me.

"Hank, I know this is a lot to absorb," Dr. Berger was saying. "Think it over and we'll talk tomorrow to arrange a time you and Heather can work together."

"In other words, 'think it over' means I'm stuck whether I like it or not," I said with a sigh. I can talk that way with Dr. Berger and she doesn't get mad. She's our school psychologist, and she believes kids should be able to express their real feelings as long as they're not being rude.

"I hear your frustration, Hank," Dr. Berger said. "But as I said, we have found that peer tutoring works quite well."

"It won't with me."

"Keep an open mind. It might turn out to be a great experience."

I've found that when adults, even a cool one like Dr. Berger, tell you to keep an open mind, there's absolutely nothing more to say. Anything you say is going to sound like your mind is closed, gone fishing, boarded up. So I gave Dr. Berger my best Hank Zipzer smile, the one that says, "You win for now, but the real Hank will be back with an outstanding Plan B." Then I left her pumpkin orange office, trying to put a bounce in my step. My grandfather Papa Pete says it's important to put a bounce in your step when you're feeling bounceless inside.

Wouldn't you know that the first person I saw when I went out into the hall was Heather Payne, who was delivering the attendance records to the office.

Boy, if seeing her doesn't de-bounce you, I don't know what will.