

EXCERPT OF "THE CURTAIN WENT UP, MY PANTS FELL DOWN," BY HENRY WINKLER AND LIN OLIVER

"Ladies and gentlemen," Devore said, in a voice so big that it flew up to the ceiling and bounced off all the walls before it landed in your ears. "I invite you to come with us now to the ancient land of Siam, where we find that the king has hired Anna, an English tutor, to instruct his children in the ways of the western world."

Devore wiggled two fingers in back of him, which was Ashley's cue to start raising the curtain. Devore exited stage right. Or maybe it was stage left. Don't ask me. The point is, he exited and came to stand in the wings in case we needed him.

As the curtain went up, I looked out at the audience. Wow, that was a lot of people. You could hear all the parents' video cameras humming at once. I just sat there on my throne, frozen solid like a pineapple Popsicle on a stick.

*Okay, Hankster. You have the first line. Now go. Speak. Take it away.*

I opened my mouth and nothing came out. Heather was standing with her suitcase, ready for me to speak to her.

*Like I was saying, Hankster. Anytime you want to say your first line, be my guest.*

Again, nothing.

I glanced over at Frankie, who was standing in the wings. Heather was waiting. Luke Whitman and Nick McKelty stood in their elephant boy costumes, holding the door open for her. Ryan Shimosato and the guards had their swords drawn. The kindergarten kids wiggled and scratched their noses. One of them giggled and waved to her mom in the front row.

"Welcome to my palace," Frankie mouthed.

*That's sounding familiar. I wonder why? Oh, right. It's my first line.*

I opened my mouth and out came the words.

"Welcome to my palace, Anna," I finally said.

*Yes! I was off and running. This wasn't so hard.*

"My dear Anna, you must have had a long and tiring journey."

*I was on a roll, acting up a complete storm. It was fun.*

"I am honored to be in the presence of your highness," Heather answered. There they were, those words, coming out of her mouth just like they were in the script, just like we had rehearsed!

*Hey, look at us. Now we're both acting.*

"The elephant boy will take your suitcase," I said, really starting to enjoy the moment. "Oh, elephant boy, please show Miss Anna to her quarters, where she can freshen up before she meets the children."

Heather turned to Nick McKelty and handed him her suitcase. He was supposed to take the suitcase and lead her offstage. But could that big hambone ever do only what he was supposed to do?

"Let me give your suitcase to my assistant," McKelty bellowed, which was definitely not a line in the script.

With that, McKelty grabbed the suitcase from Heather and tossed it to Luke Whitman, who wasn't expecting it. It hit Luke in the stomach and knocked him over like a bowling pin, The audience laughed, but Devore didn't. I saw him standing in the wings. And if you ever wondered what a human being looks like just before his face explodes, leaving only his ears attached, that was Devore. He wagged his finger at McKelty, and although it was meant as a warning, I'm sure from the look on McKelty's face he took it as Devore complimenting him on his acting.

I wasn't sure what to do, but since Devore had always told us that the play must go on, on I went. I leaped off my throne and walked to the center of the stage. I bowed good-bye to Anna, hoping that Heather would be able to improvise a good-bye and then just leave with Luke Whitman. As you know, she's not a great improviser.

I turned to face her and bent over to begin my bow. First I swept both my arms up into the air, and then I brought them down so that my hands rested on my hips. I had seen the actor in the movie do that, and it had looked pretty darn great. As I took my bow, I was willing to bet that a lot of the audience actually thought I came from Siam.

The next thing I knew, as I was completing my bow, McKelty shot out to the middle of the stage next to me.

"Here, my king," he bellowed. "Let me help you with that."

Help me? With what?

Before I knew what was happening, he grabbed the end of the gold cord that was holding up my pants and tugged it with all his might. I started to spin like a top. For the first time in my life, I knew how Cheerio felt when he chased his tail. When I stopped spinning, I was clear across the stage. I noticed a cool breeze floating across my legs. I reached down and felt around for the gold cord. It wasn't there.

I looked down and realized that my golden pantaloons had fallen down and were lying in a heap at my feet. The only thing between me and the audience were my polka-dotted Mets boxer briefs. I was in shock. Devore was in shock. Mr. Rock stopped playing. He was in shock. The only person whose face I could pick out in the audience was Ms. Adolf. And believe me, she was totally in shock. She put her program on her head like a hat, covering her eyes with the pages. I looked over at Frankie, who was standing in the wings. For maybe the first time ever in his life, he had no idea what to do. I looked to Ashley, who was standing by the curtain, hoping that she would have the sense to lower it and end this horrible embarrassment. But she must have been in shock, too, because she just stood there and started twirling her ponytail nervously. All the kindergarten kids cracked up, even my pal Mason.

There I was, standing with my golden pantaloons around my ankles. Should I step out of them and run away? Or should I bend over and pull them up? Bending over didn't seem like a good choice. So I just stood there. Suddenly, somebody's little brother in the front row screamed as loud as he could, "Look, Mommy. He's got the same underpants I do."

The audience roared with laughter. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see that Devore had dropped to his knees. He was holding his cape over his eyes. I think he was crying. No, sobbing. Nick McKelty was laughing his head off. The golden cord that had once held up my pants was in his chubby, grubby hand.

As for me, all I could do was wave.

Why I didn't just hop off the stage and run all the way to California without stopping will always be one of the great mysteries of my life. All I can tell you is that no thoughts occurred to me. Not one little tiny one.

I promise you that in a million trillion years, you will never guess what happened next.

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