

Accidental Friends
by Y York

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Time: Fall, leaves, pumpkins, costumes, early darkness, change.

Place: Outside of a school and in a hospital room.

Characters: Jonathan, Marcy, Willie, and Hilda are all in the eighth grade, almost teens.

Scene 1; two days before Halloween, outside of school. Marcy and Willie, two semi-cool eighth graders, carry books, wear jackets.

WILLIE If nobody does the homework, what can they do? They can't put us all in detention.

MARCY It isn't that hard, Willie.

WILLIE It is unbelievably hard; she can't even explain it. How are we supposed to do it if the teacher can't do it?

MARCY Why don't you try studying?

WILLIE Oh, yeah, big shot; you're not worried because your Mom explains it.

MARCY Your parents can explain it.

WILLIE My parents don't do math since they got an accountant.

Enter Hilda Meisberg, also eighth grade, a loser. Stands nearby.

WILLIE If I fail I can't go to Yellowstone.

MARCY So don't fail.

WILLIE It doesn't make sense. "Pick a number." What number? "It doesn't matter what number, Willie." How can it not matter what number I pick?!

They notice Hilda.

WILLIE And I suppose you think it's easy.

HILDA Equations make more sense when you substitute an actual number.

MARCY An actual number?

WILLIE (deep sarcasm) Silly me, I must have been using a non-actual number. (beat) What are you staring at?

HILDA How come you dress like that?

WILLIE You should talk.

HILDA You shouldn't wear that coat.

WILLIE (can't believe it) Why shouldn't I wear this coat?

HILDA Somebody might knock you down and take it.

WILLIE What are you talking about?

HILDA When personal items inspire envy, people do that.

MARCY Not around here.

HILDA How come he didn't write us back?

WILLIE Who?!

HILDA I expected a reply.

WILLIE Are you even speaking English?

HILDA I'm Hilda Meisberg.

MARCY We know who you are; we don't know what you're talking about.

HILDA We all wrote him. He's your pal. How come he didn't write back?

MARCY ...Jonathan?

HILDA Yes. I've been waiting for a reply.

WILLIE (as an insult) Well, I wouldn't hold my breath if I were you.

HILDA Is he dead?

MARCY No, he's not dead!

HILDA Then where's my reply?

MARCY He's not going to write to you.

HILDA (beat) Thanks for the information.

Hilda exits.

WILLIE Turn down the heat! What was that!

MARCY That's somebody can explain math to you.

WILLIE I'm not that desperate. What a geek.

MARCY So what, if she can help you?

WILLIE I'd have to be nice to her.

MARCY Just 'til you figure out equations.

WILLIE Not worth it. She'd never go away. They're like dogs; throw them a bone, and they're always sniffing around your door.

MARCY I can't believe she's Holly's sister. Holly wasn't geeky even a little.

WILLIE Yeah, see, I don't remember this Holly person at all.

MARCY She's regular. You'd never know she was a brain. She went to California right before fifth grade; that's when we got Hilda.

WILLIE Well, no wonder I don't remember. Fifth grade!

MARCY (sarcastic) Oh, yeah, light years away. (beat) So how is Jonathan?

WILLIE Haven't you seen him?

MARCY No.

WILLIE Some friend you are.

MARCY I don't like hospitals.

WILLIE Afraid you'll catch something and die?

MARCY Die of boredom more like it. How is he?

WILLIE I don't know; I haven't been either.

They think this is funny.

WILLIE Jonathan wouldn't want us to be bored.

Scene 2, later that day. A hospital room. Jonathan, sitting in a chair, head wrapped in bandages, can't see. Hilda enters, stands quietly for a several seconds, then closes her eyes and holds her breath. A pause.

JONATHAN Is somebody here?

HILDA (Big explosion of breath.) It took you long enough.

JONATHAN Who is it? Who's there?

HILDA Almost a minute, I'll bet.

JONATHAN I recognize your voice.

HILDA I thought maybe I was losing my touch.

JONATHAN (annoyed) What touch?

HILDA My telepathic touch. I am Hilda Meisberg thinking thoughts of my presence into your mind.

JONATHAN I heard you breathing.

HILDA I wasn't breathing.

JONATHAN Then I heard you stomping around. You didn't think thoughts into my mind.

HILDA (an explanation) My sister and I are telepathic. Sometimes with other people, too.

JONATHAN You and I are not telepathic, forget it.

HILDA Is it dark in there?

JONATHAN In where?

HILDA Under those big bandages.

JONATHAN Yeah, it's dark; what do you think?

HILDA I hope you're not too scared of the dark.

JONATHAN ...What?

HILDA It would be very terrible to be scared of the dark and thrust into a dark world where no light can ever enter again.

JONATHAN (is a little scared of the dark) These bandages are coming off. What do you want here, anyway?

HILDA I'm in your same class.

JONATHAN I know you're in my class. What are you doing here?

HILDA Some weeks ago, Mrs. Holcomb made us write to you. I didn't know who you are.

JONATHAN You know who I am.

HILDA Your name, actually, rang no bell. I became curious only after writing you a lengthy, interesting letter. To which I received no reply.

JONATHAN I got a bunch of letters.

HILDA Couldn't read them, I suspect, in your present state of bandage-ment. Why didn't somebody read them to you?

JONATHAN Because...I don't know...they're personal; I'm saving them. Until the bandages come off.

HILDA Meanwhile all the news grows old.

Hilda picks up letters on the floor.

HILDA These are them. Bobby O'Neill, Brenda Smoot. Hilda Meisberg, that's me. Marcy Kennedy, I'll bet this one is truly personal. (she opens it)

JONATHAN (hears) Hey! Like you said, it's personal.

HILDA You want me to hold it against your forehead so you can osmose the info?

JONATHAN ...What's that mean?

HILDA Learning without working at it. Like your pal Willie. This letter might contain an emergency. Sitting here on your floor for weeks and weeks unopened. A pressing emergency.

JONATHAN Yeah, okay. Read it.

HILDA “Dear Jonathan, sorry about the accident. Hope you get better soon. Yours truly, Marcy Kennedy.” (sarcastic, but not mean) My. What a warm and insightful letter.

JONATHAN Hey, it’s a nice letter.

HILDA (ibid) Yes, from a real good friend.

JONATHAN If you don’t know who I am, how do you know Marcy is my friend?

HILDA I’ve made observations. Marcy and Willie get a lot of attention since one third of their threesome is so mangled in the hospital.

JONATHAN I’m not mangled. Is there a letter from Willie?

HILDA (Reading envelope) Willie Johanson. (opens, reads) “Dear Jonathan. Was so sorry to hear about the accident. Hope you get well soon. Sincerely, Willie Johanson.” Don’t any of your friends know how to write complete sentences? “Hope you get well” does not contain a subject. Nor does “was so sorry to hear about the accident”; we can’t assume the subject because all singular and collective subjects fit this verb form. I was so sorry; Dracula was so sorry, Michelangelo was so sorry; the Congress of the United States was so sorry to hear about your accident.

Sometime during the above Jonathan’s negativity relents somewhat.

JONATHAN (joking) Congress? I didn’t realize I made the national news.

HILDA (smile) Sure, you’re famous. When do you get to go home?

JONATHAN They haven’t said.

HILDA (looks up -- placement of tv is as if it’s high on the fourth wall) Do you want the tv on?

JONATHAN No. It’s really stupid when you can’t see it.

HILDA (mocking tv ads) “Buy, buy, buy! buy my soap, no buy my soap. Wear this lipstick and your lips will stay dewy; wear this lipstick and boys will kiss it off you.”

JONATHAN (defensive) I like baseball on tv.

HILDA I like it better on the radio.

JONATHAN Yeah, that’s fun. It’s like old fashioned or something.

HILDA If you really want a challenge, try basketball on the radio.

- JONATHAN** Yeah, but I never know who to root for. I wish Boise'd get a team.
- HILDA** The Boise... Bombers!
- JONATHAN** (into it) Yeah! The Boise Bombers annihilate the Lakers for the championship of the world! (gestures) Yes! (beat) I'm not supposed to get excited.
- HILDA** Do you have to sit there all day?
- JONATHAN** Mostly. If I fall or something, I could hurt my eye. I have to be quiet.
- HILDA** You're not supposed to even stand?
- JONATHAN** (annoyed slightly) No, I can stand, I stand, I walk around, I just have to be careful of falling.
- HILDA** You could do knee bends. You could hold on to your chair. You wouldn't fall.
- JONATHAN** It's very different when your eyes are bandaged; you need your eyes to balance, you know.
- HILDA** I'll try it first.
- Hilda does knee bends with her eyes closed.
- JONATHAN** Try what?
- HILDA** I have my eyes closed, and I'm doing knee bends. Yes, I think this is a good idea for you.
- JONATHAN** No, it's too dangerous.
- HILDA** Give it a try; I'm right here to catch you if you fall.
- JONATHAN** (sarcastic) Oh, right! You can really catch me.
- HILDA** Give it a try. You can hold on the whole time. Just try it. Try.
- A brief pause, then Jonathan gets up, slowly to try knee bends, slowly at first, remaining close to the chair, then bolder.
- JONATHAN** (knee bends) Boy, I'm really stiff.
- HILDA** That's what happens when you veg.
- JONATHAN** (defensive) It's not like I have a choice, you know.
- HILDA** What time do your friends come?
- JONATHAN** (awkward short pause) Various times.
- HILDA** Because I want to be long gone before they arrive.
- JONATHAN** Lighten up on my friends; they're my friends.

HILDA Yes, they wrote you such interesting letters.

JONATHAN So everybody can't write a great letter; they're still my friends.

HILDA You should get them to read your letters to you. Let's walk around.

JONATHAN I can't-

HILDA Sure, we can walk around the room or down the hall or something. (takes his arm) Let's go.

JONATHAN Just around the room.

She walks him around the room.

HILDA You should do this regularly so you don't go completely stale in your muscles.

JONATHAN My mom works; she's tired when she gets here.

HILDA Get your friends to do it.

JONATHAN ...Yeah.

HILDA (pause, realizes) Do you mean to say that those good friends of yours haven't been by?

JONATHAN I didn't say that.

HILDA I am telepathic to you.

JONATHAN (makes it up) They came; they came here a lot. They...made such...a lot of noise, they said they couldn't come anymore.

HILDA Who said? they said, or the hospital said?

JONATHAN The hospital said they couldn't come anymore. Because they were rowdy. Rowdy. Besides, they're busy. Willie has practice every day. What kind of friend am I, anyway? All wrapped up like this.

HILDA A friend in need.

JONATHAN I can't help Willie with his homework- I can't play on the team- I'm gonna have a scar! What good is that?!

HILDA (brief pause, then to calm him) Don't worry about a scar; scars are in. (nods to herself, makes a decision) They'll tell you that when they visit you again. Scars are all the rage.

JONATHAN Yeah, sure.

HILDA (beat) Quite a fancy room. Private.

JONATHAN I get roommates. They keep getting well and leaving.

HILDA You should leave; you don't seem so sick.

JONATHAN There's nobody home, and I have to be bandaged. They covered both my eyes to make sure I stay still.

HILDA Does your mother come every day?

JONATHAN Yeah, she's great.

HILDA Where's your Dad?

JONATHAN We don't talk about my Dad.

HILDA Yes, us too. My sister lives with him. In California.

JONATHAN (an insult) Why don't you go live there, too?

HILDA Because I live here.

Insulted, Hilda lets go of his arm.

JONATHAN Hey, don't let go. I can't see.

HILDA Who's paying for this little vacation, anyway?

JONATHAN The construction company. (nervous) Where are you?

HILDA Are you balanced?

JONATHAN (scared, mad) Yeah, I'm balanced- I can't see!

HILDA Your chair is somewhat behind you.

JONATHAN Come on, Hilda; I could hurt myself.

HILDA You won't; I'm right here the whole time. You gotta do this. Try it, try to get there on your own. (pause) Just try it.

Jonathan slowly tries to find the chair. Unbeknownst to him, Hilda remains very close to make sure he is safe.

HILDA Colder...warmer...colder...getting warmer, warmer, hot-

JONATHAN Ouch. (bumps chair)

HILDA Bingo!

JONATHAN (sits) I bumped myself.

HILDA I got another fun idea.

She takes an award ribbon pin (with a red ribbon attached to it) from her coat, fastens it for safety's sake, and puts it in his hand.

JONATHAN (sarcastic) I can hardly wait.

HILDA What's this?

JONATHAN (frustrated) I don't know; how am I supposed to know?

HILDA Touch it.

JONATHAN I am touching it! I don't know what it is.

HILDA Figure it out. (pause) Just try.

JONATHAN (sigh) I think...it's a ribbon.

HILDA Good. What kind of ribbon?

JONATHAN Well, it's got a...it's like an award, like a blue ribbon.

HILDA Very very good.

JONATHAN That's right?

HILDA A hundred percent. I won it.

JONATHAN What for?

HILDA (taking it back) Math. (beat) I got a blind pal can tell colors by touching.

JONATHAN How does he do that?

HILDA You tell me—you just did it. Said it was a blue ribbon.

JONATHAN (laughs) I did, didn't I. (tentative) I think I'd like to get a drink of water.

HILDA Where's your glass?

JONATHAN No. I want to get it myself.

Jonathan stands.

HILDA (secretly pleased) Oh, all right. The sink is somewhat behind and to your right. Colder ...colder...warmer...warmer stiiill-
