

No I Don't Want To Be Your Facebook Friend
by Wendy Hammond

OK, so the night we had sex was more than forty years ago now and maybe you don't remember. I didn't remember either until I saw your name on that Friend request and found your awful chatty cheerful Facebook message in my Inbox. Then it all came rushing back. Vivid details. Which I would like to forget again, push out of my mind, go blank, suppress, drive back down into sweet unconsciousness, but that will require that you never try to contact me again, never ever.

Let me back up a little. A week ago, out of the blue, you sent me a Messenger Chat that started with hi, it's Ted Samson, I don't know if you remember me (I do now!) but we acted in a play together when were young. I'm a full mathematics professor (OK, impressed) with grown kids and now two grandkids. I see from your bio that you're an adjunct playwriting professor and that you have a son, so it seems we have a lot in common. (No we don't. See below.)

You went on about your just-published book on fast linear algebraic methods, and your passion for hang-gliding, and how we really should reconnect, and you attached a photo from the play we performed in that black box theatre on the fourth floor of Trolley Square in Salt Lake City. I clicked on the attachment and there we were: me at 18, plump-faced with long brown hippie-hair, and you at 20 with your goofy smile and long ginger hippie-hair.

We were both members of The People's Rep, a group of wanna-be actors who did all the jobs: sets, lights, box office, cleaning. Barbara, the artistic director, was the oldest of us at 31. She dubbed you the official Tech Director because you had learned carpentry from your dad.

About a week before our play opened, you stayed after rehearsal to finish building the set. I was the newest member of the ensemble and, desperate to prove I belonged, I stayed late,

too, to help.

You were power sawing a board when you noticed the trouble I was having putting a flat together. You turned off the saw, placed your right hand over mine and showed me the proper way to hammer a nail. You were gentle and patient. You hadn't taken a shower in a while and your odor was sharp.

An hour later, you unbuckled your toolbelt and announced it was time to get a beer from The Dead Goat, a bar on the first floor. You ushered me into the elevator. The doors closed. We had descended a floor when you suddenly turned and pressed the red emergency stop button. Hoping this was a joke, I laughed and reached past you to unpress the button, but you caught my wrist and held it. Tight. "You don't want to do that," you said, mischief in your eyes, "do you?"

Before I could answer, you slammed into me, your body a wall of male muscle pinning me against the elevator wall, groping me, the handrail digging into my back. I said no no *no* and squirmed as hard as I could trying to get away but this was like trying to push away a bulldozer. You kept shushing me. "But you'll like this. It'll feel so good." And then you smashed your mouth hard against mine. Did you mean that as a kiss?

It occurred to me that if I fought too hard you would be angry and there might be payback. Barbara adored you, and she needed your tech skills, and she would certainly kick me out of the Ensemble if you asked her to.

Seems ridiculous I stopped fighting because I didn't want to get kicked out of The People's Rep. But you all were the only people I had (see below), and I couldn't bear to lose you.

I don't remember much after letting myself go limp. I stared at the red emergency button. It hurt when your penis rammed into me. Your hair smelled greasy and sour. You zipped back up, then unpressed the stop button grinning like you'd achieved a great feat. My pants and underwear were still around my ankles. Dazed, I was still fumbling to cover myself when the

elevator doors opened on the first floor.

You must have known something was wrong because you didn't talk to me after that night except onstage when you had to say a line to me. You didn't nod hello when I came into the dressing room, and you sat as far as you could from me when the director gave us notes.

I didn't mind. I didn't want to look at you, either.

No I don't want to be your Facebook Friend but I do want you to know a couple of things. When I stopped fighting, went limp, it wasn't because it felt good, as you kept insisting. It was because I was trained. My Mormon tradition taught me women should be pure, should be "passive vessels for their husbands," and yet my home was full of sexual violence. I ran away from that home, lied about my age to get menial jobs to support myself, and was molested or sexually assaulted by several bosses and co-workers. I got used to letting men do what they did because it helped me survive.

I needed The People's Rep. I had no one else. One act of coerced, slightly painful sex was a small price to pay for a family.

So I'm not going to be your Facebook Friend but I would like to know some things about you. What did your dad teach you about sex? Did he tell you no means yes? Or that girls just need a little convincing? What you did that night, was that normal sex for you? Your idea of free love?

Or were you trained? Statistics say five to ten percent of boys are sexually abused before they're 18. Were you one of those boys? What you did to me, had someone done that to you?

Or had no one taught you anything at all?

Decades have passed. You are bald—I googled your bio pic—and my hair is short and white. We've had some time to think, to change. What did you teach your children about sex?

About women and honor? What will you teach your grandchildren?

My son is the exact age you were that night. He and I discuss sex, consent and respect, though we both get painfully uncomfortable when we do. Once, when he was just 16, we watched a documentary about campus rape together, then we sat on opposite ends of our dining table and tried to talk about what's different between sex and sexual assault. My son stared down at the table cloth the whole conversation, his cheeks splotched pink, and I squirmed in my chair, my eyes tearing up I felt so embarrassed and inadequate, but in between silences we managed to speak some words back and forth until we thought we'd figured out a few things.

So yeah, it's a bad idea to be Facebook Friends, a very bad idea, yeah, but do you think we might talk on the phone sometime? You owe me an apology, a sincere one, a real one. Then maybe it's time the two of us white-haired, bald, sixty-somethings had a discussion, even if it's the most awkward conversation two people ever had, even if I'm so embarrassed my cheeks splotch pink, even if you feel so inadequate you squirm in your chair, your eyes tearing up. I want you to know what it was like for me that night when I was 18, you 20, and how ashamed I was afterward, how disgusting you made me feel.

Were you ashamed afterwards, too? Is that why you didn't talk to me? Did you feel disgusting? Or guilty?

The night you assaulted me was over forty years ago now, but I still need answers from you, Ted Samson.

And no, I don't want to be your Facebook Friend. I want answers.

(Lights fade to black.)