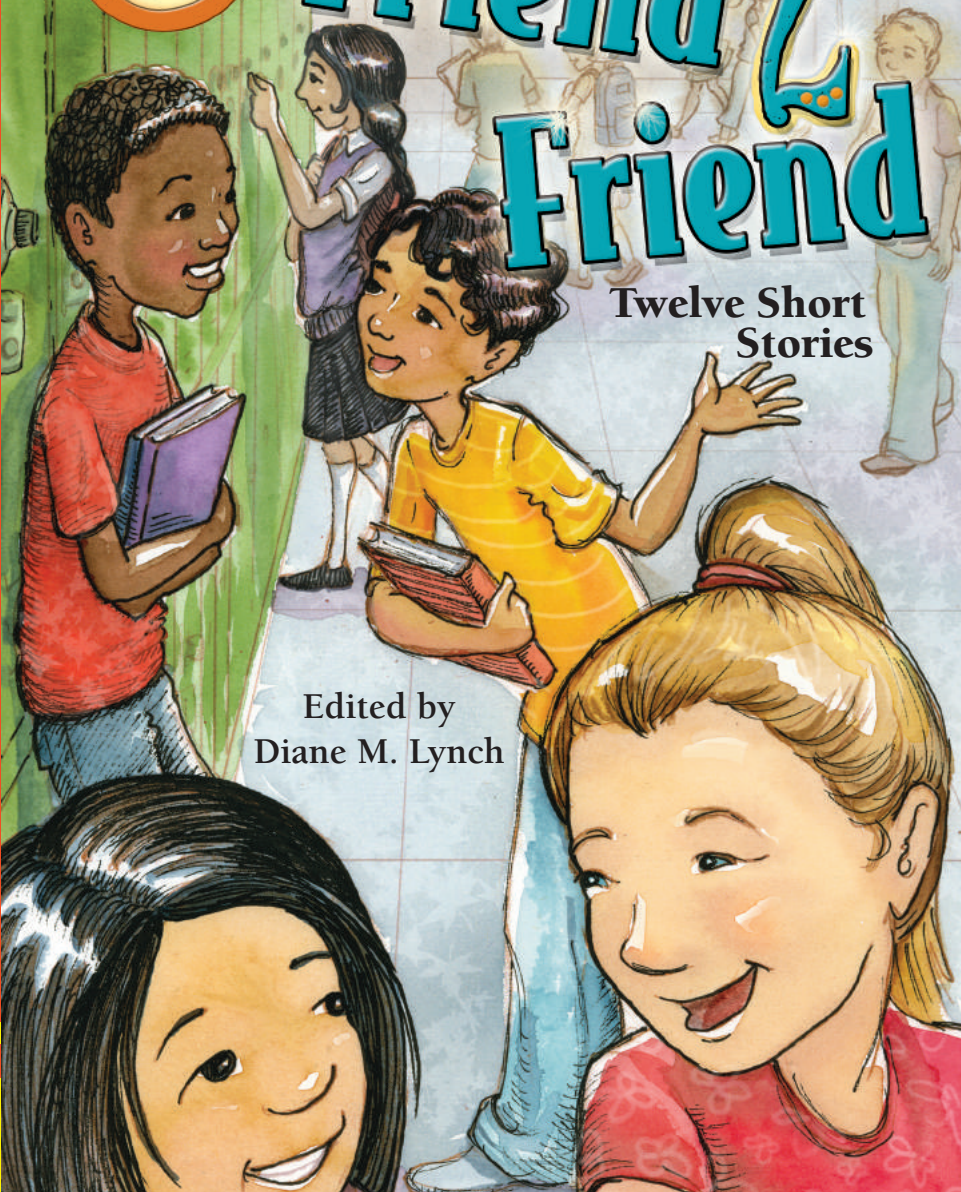




Friend & Friend

Twelve Short
Stories

Edited by
Diane M. Lynch



Friend 2 Friend

Friend? *Friend*

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Face to Face

By Valerie Hunter

“Just a quick ride,” Julia said to PB, patting the horse between the ears. “Then I’m going to the bus depot to meet Amanda. We’ll be with you all weekend, though—I know Amanda will love you.”

Normally Julia hated to shorten her afternoon, but today she didn’t mind. She was going to meet Amanda!

When Julia’s grandmother had visited last fall and mentioned that the granddaughter of a friend of hers was looking for a pen pal, Julia had taken the name and address reluctantly.

She'd written half-heartedly about school and PB, certain this city girl would think she was a hick.

Then she'd gotten Amanda's first letter, and writing letters didn't seem so bad after all. Amanda loved horses, too. "Of course I'm not lucky enough to have my own horse, but there are stables here where people can go riding," she'd written.

They'd exchanged e-mails and texts all school year and into the summer. Then Julia had invited Amanda to visit, and after their moms had talked on the phone, the plan was finalized. When Julia finished settling PB into his stall, she ran inside to read Amanda's last e-mail again.

Date: Sat 25 Jul 16:53:20

From: <MandaPanda@uvwxyzserver.com>

Subject: Can't wait!

To: <Horsecrazy532@abcdanyoldnet.com>

>Hey Julia! It's all set—I'll be there at 2:30

>Friday. Have you shown PB my picture so he'll

>know me? I won't tell you to pat him for me—I'll
>do that myself!

>Love, Amanda

>P.S. RHT: There were tiny horses on Earth 60
>million years before there were humans!

Julia grinned. Amanda always included an RHT, or Random Horse Tidbit, when she wrote. Julia had started posting them on her bulletin board; so far her favorite was about Theodore Roosevelt's sons sneaking their pet pony into the White House.

"Julia? Let's go!"

Julia hurried downstairs to accompany her mom to the bus depot. She was so excited that she had butterflies—no, horses!—jumping around her stomach.

She recognized Amanda from her picture. They smushed into the front of Julia's mom's pickup and chattered about the fun they were going to have. "We'll go riding first," Julia said. "Did you bring your riding helmet?"

Amanda stopped smiling. "I—I forgot."

"You can borrow my old one," Julia said, but it took a while for Amanda to smile again.

When they got home, Julia pulled Amanda to the stable. "Here's PB!"

"He's so big!" Amanda gasped.

"Not really. Only fourteen hands."

"Oh," Amanda said. She reached out to pat his nose, but when PB tossed his head she put her hand down.

Julia laughed. "It's okay. He doesn't bite."

Amanda laughed, too, but she kept her hand down. "He sure is peanut butter-colored."

"Yup. Mom says I picked the perfect name. Then she named her horse Jelly, even though Jelly's not the color of any jelly I know!" She nodded to the big dark horse in the other stall. "So let's go riding. You can have PB since he's more easygoing. I'll take Jelly."

Amanda chewed her lip. "Julia? I'm sorry, but my stomach really hurts. Can I go lie down?"

"Sure." Julia gave PB a pat and led her guest inside.

Amanda lay on her stomach on Julia's bed and they talked. Amanda noticed the RHTs on Julia's bulletin board and told her another one: It takes ten men to haul the amount of weight one horse can.

Amanda was feeling well enough by suppertime to eat the spaghetti Julia's mom had made, plus a brownie for dessert.

"We could go riding now," Julia suggested. "The sun sets late this time of year."

"Ride after eating all that? I'd hate to throw up on your horse," Amanda said with a giggle.

They watched TV instead. It was okay, but Julia missed PB. She wondered if Amanda was enjoying herself. She sure seemed quiet.

The next morning, Julia woke early and went downstairs. "G'morning, Mom. Can Amanda and I ride the horses to the north pasture for a picnic breakfast?"

"Sounds fun! I'll pack the food while you girls get ready."

Julia shook Amanda awake and explained her idea. Amanda didn't seem very enthusiastic,

but maybe she wasn't a morning person. She got dressed while Julia saddled the horses.

"This is going to be great!" Julia cried as she went back inside for Amanda and the food. She led her friend to the stable and handed her a riding helmet.

Amanda looked at the helmet in her hand, then at PB. "I can't," she whispered.

"What do you mean? Are you sick again?"

Amanda looked like she was about to say yes, then shook her head. "I can't ride. I'm scared."

"Of PB?" Julia asked. "He's not scary at all. He's got great manners."

"I mean I'm scared of all horses. I've never ridden one before."

"What? Yes, you have! You told me, in your letter. You said there were stables where you live." Julia paused. "You lied to me?"

"I didn't lie," Amanda said quickly. "There *are* stables. I've just never been to one."

"But you made it sound like . . . I can't believe . . ." Julia spluttered. "Why'd you even bother coming?" she finally managed to say.

“I thought we were friends,” Amanda said. Her face was red, but Julia couldn’t tell whether she was angry or about to cry. “I guess I shouldn’t have come, though.” She ran back into the house.

Julia watched her go, then turned back to PB. “What a phony! She made me think that— Why would she ever—” Julia sighed and began to unsaddle the horses. She’d liked Amanda so much by e-mail. Why did things have to change face to face?

Her growling stomach interrupted her thoughts, and she made her decision. She headed to the house with the picnic breakfast and took it upstairs.

Amanda was sitting on the bed with her bag. “If your mom could take me to the bus stop, I could go home today.”

Julia began to unpack the picnic, spreading it out on the floor. “You don’t have to go.”

“I don’t think you want me here.”

“Well . . . I’m just wondering why you were untruthful.”

Amanda slid off her bed and onto the floor across from Julia. "I didn't want you to think I was some dumb city girl. I love horses, honestly . . . I mean, I love to read about them . . . I couldn't afford to go riding, but I was sure I knew enough from books to fake it when I came here. But I've never been so close to a horse before, and PB just seemed so big . . . " Amanda buried her head between her knees. "I'm really dumb, aren't I?"

Julia shoved a bagel at her. "Of course not. Who else would know the ancient Norse people believed a giant horse pulled the moon?"

Amanda giggled. "Lot of good that does me."

"You know more about horses than I do," Julia said, "except when it comes to riding them. I can teach you that. PB's not scary once you know him."

Amanda took a bite of bagel. "You'd really teach me? You're not mad?"

"Course not. But don't eat too much breakfast." Julia grinned. "I don't want you throwing up on my horse."

Questions to Think and Talk About

Face to Face

1. Do you think Amanda was right to have been less than truthful with Julia? What would you have done in her situation?
2. What clues are given that Amanda isn't very comfortable around horses? Why do you think Julia doesn't catch on to these clues until Amanda tells her outright?
3. What do you think makes Julia change her mind when she's mad at Amanda? Would you have changed your mind?
4. How do you think the rest of Amanda's visit would have gone? Do you think the two girls will remain friends?