Accidentally had an Accident

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“Accidentally had an Accident”
Folk Speech

Informant:
My name is Alyssa Burdett and I’m from Lehi, UT. I’m twenty-years old and I am currently attending Utah State University and living in Logan, UT. I’m a few semesters away from receiving my B.S. in Elementary Education with emphases in social studies and language arts. Until then, I’ll continue working part-time at a local grocery store. Each Sunday I attend LDS church services (something I’ve grown up doing) and throughout the week I’ve been known to play the piano or read a romance novel during my free time.

Context:
This piece was collected in part at the deli where I work when I was on my half-hour break. It was also collected in part at my apartment. There isn’t a particular setting or a particular time that this story would usually be told. Normally if it comes up outside of my immediate family, it’s because I used the phrase “accidentally had an accident” out of habit and feel the need (and desire) to explain myself. For that reason, I have to be cautious around my extended family. I can’t use that phrase unless I want to be questioned, and I’m not about to rehash the entire story and admit to my cousin that I insulted her kid. Therefore, this kind of story is not one to be told at extended family get-togethers on my dad’s side of the family.

Text:
In the summer of 2016 I stayed with my older sister for nine days. She needed me to help her babysit my cousin’s kids. My sister has four of her own, and babysitting four more by herself was a bit too much. I agreed to come. At first it wasn’t too bad, but I came to realize that I’d always taken my sister’s kids for granted. I mean, they have their moments, but my cousin’s kids were so difficult. Three of the four were technically “potty-trained,” yet only one of the four acted like it. The second youngest who was supposed to be potty-trained didn’t use the potty a single time. In fact, every time she went potty in her pull-up, she would ask where “Dan-elle” was and say, “I accidentally had an accident.” We came to find out she didn’t know the meaning of the word “accident.” Towards the end of our nine days with the kids, mocking them became our coping mechanism. The second to last night, when the child again came up to us to be
changed, I asked her a little condescendingly, “Did you accidentally have an accident?” And rather than responding to me, she gave me the stink eye and started crying about how she missed her mom. After all the grief she and her siblings had caused me, I felt no shame. I have a little bit of shame now, but not a whole lot. So now, whenever something breaks or something happens that can (even loosely) be termed an “accident,” my sister or I will say to the other, “Did you accidentally have an accident?”

**Texture:**
Had this story been told aloud, it would have been told with a mischievous smile. Knowing that what I’m saying would be slightly offensive if heard by particular people, I take great pleasure in telling the story because it’s kind of thrilling to say things that might be frowned upon. There would be laughter and mocking tones when repeating what the child had said and an overall portrayal of slyness.