



# The Potato

by Bethany Zollman

**I can feel a tiny pebble** in my shoe the entire walk to the little white church, but my three sisters and I are running late and I have no time to stop and get it out. We're practically running, my oldest sister Celeste in front, setting a quick pace for the rest of us.

Glancing behind me, I see Pearl struggling to keep up. She's breathing hard as she grips an old wrinkly potato in one hand and Jade drags her along by the other hand.

"Give me the potato, Pearl. It'll be easier for you to run without it," I say, reaching my hand out. But Pearl shakes her head fervently and clutches the potato to her chest. Pearl was born with an extra chromosome. Mom says it makes her extra sweet and thoughtful, which is probably why she's the only one of us four sisters who thought to bring something to the church's food drive today.

I sigh, spinning around to catch up with Celeste, who is yelling at us to hurry. We make it to the front steps just as the church bell rings. As we make our way to an empty pew in the back of the church, Celeste glances over at Pearl and lets out a small cry.

"Pearl your dress! Its filthy!" she whispers. I look over and see that Pearl's light blue cotton dress is splattered with mud, as are her shins and shoes.

"She fell in a puddle after you two took off and left us," Jade says, shooting Celeste an angry look.

Pearl grins and raises her arm up in the air, revealing the potato in her hand without a speck of mud on it. "But potato clean!" she exclaims triumphantly. I smile and start to discreetly toe-off my shoe underneath the pew so I can finally get the pebble out.

After a short prayer, the pastor announces that anyone who brought food drive donations can bring them to the front. A line starts to form in the center aisle leading to the collection box by the pulpit. Pearl stands and makes her way to the end of the line, cradling the crinkly brown spud in her arms as if it's a baby. A boy sitting in the row right ahead of us watches Pearl and starts to snicker. My eyes flick to Jade.

"Let it go," I say, remembering the fight she got into the last time someone made fun of Pearl.

"He's not worth our time," Celeste quickly adds. But it's too late. Jade is already on her feet. Celeste jumps up to stop her a second after Jade grabs the boy in a headlock from behind. The boy shrieks and reaches his arms back, pulling out one of Jade's pigtails. Celeste grunts as she unsuccessfully attempts to pull Jade back in her seat. I slink down in the pew a few inches and hide my face with my hands.

Suddenly Pearl's singsong voice rings out above the chaos. "Me and my sisters want to dedicate this potato to Jesus!"

Jade freezes, her arm still wrapped around the boy's neck.

"For Jesus!" Pearl yells again from the front of the church, the potato lifted above her head with both hands. "Jade! Celeste! Lenya! Come up here with me!"

To my surprise, Jade lets go of the boy and stands up. Her dress is wrinkled and her hair is disheveled where the pigtail used to be, but she slowly makes her way to Pearl. Celeste and I exchange a look, our eyes wide. Then we follow Jade until all four of us are standing at the front, facing the congregation. It's then that I realize I only have one shoe on.

Pearl reverently lays her potato in the collection box and gives it a little pat. I know we must be a sight up here, with Pearl covered in mud, Jade's one-sided pigtail, and me missing a shoe. Next to me, Celeste starts to shake, and I think she's crying. But one look at her face and I know she's trying her hardest to hold in a laugh. Then Jade snorts, and within seconds all four of us are belly-laughing, tears rolling down our cheeks.

Pearl pumps her fist in the air and chants one last time, "Potato for Jesus!"