

Mrs. Pott's Flowers

By Mary Ann Koontz

"C'mon, kick the ball," yelled a chubby boy from the outfield. Elizabeth looked across the vacant lot. Jimmy, who was still shouting at her, was the perfect target. Every summer the neighbor kids played kickball here, and every summer Jimmy took the far outfield position in hopes that no one would kick it to him; not that he could catch it if they did.

The pitcher rolled the ball roughly over the grass toward Elizabeth, who ran to meet it at home plate with a swift kick. She sent the ball hurling through the air and ran hard to first base.

"Oh, no. Not again!" Elizabeth was sure it was Jimmy's voice. She was heading for second base before she noticed no one was moving.

"What's the matter?" Elizabeth asked.

Jimmy pointed past Elizabeth to old Mrs. Potts, who was coming out of her house with a hateful look on her face. She picked the ball off her crushed flowers.

"That does it. I'm calling the police this time," she hissed between clenched teeth.

Elizabeth and her friends ran home as fast as they could. Looking out the window, Elizabeth could see the Potts' house across the street. She gasped when she saw a police car pull in the driveway and an officer enter the house. Elizabeth swallowed hard. Soon she would be arrested, handcuffed, and thrown in jail. But to her surprise, the policeman left a short time later. Elizabeth breathed a sigh of relief.

Later that afternoon, Mr. Potts came to their front door. Elizabeth had always liked Mr. Potts. In the fall, she liked to help him rake leaves, and he always let her jump in the pile before they bagged them. Elizabeth could hear him apologizing to her parents for his wife's actions. She guessed he wanted them to know that he had no part in it. Her parents told him that they understood and said little else about it. Elizabeth had nearly forgotten about the incident until the next day.

"Elizabeth, could you do me a favor?" her mom asked. "Mrs. Potts is making an apple pie and ran out of sugar. I need you to take a cup over to her. I would do it myself, but I'm busy with the baby and trying to get my coffee cakes made for the church bake sale."

"Me?" Elizabeth croaked. "After what happened yesterday?"

“Please,” her mom replied. “All you have to do is hand it to her.”

Elizabeth could see it now. Mrs. Potts would yell at her and tell her to never step foot on their property again. Her only hope was that Mr. Potts would be there to save her.

Standing on the back porch, the cup of sugar shook in Elizabeth’s hand as she rang the Potts’ doorbell. Mrs. Potts opened the door.

“Please come in.”

Elizabeth nearly spilled the sugar. She entered cautiously and glanced around the room. Their house reminded her of an antique store with so many old things everywhere. Unfortunately, Mr. Potts was nowhere in sight. But as the smell of cinnamon reached her nose, Elizabeth remembered the sugar and handed it to Mrs. Potts.

“Thank you,” she said. She looked at Elizabeth over the top rim of her glasses. “You know, I have a granddaughter about your age. I’ve only seen her twice, though.” Mrs. Potts’ eyes watered a little. “My son lives in California and is too busy to come back home to Illinois very often.”

For the first time, Elizabeth saw Mrs. Potts as a lonely old woman, more angry at her son than at any of the neighbor kids. Mrs. Potts led Elizabeth outside to the flower garden.

“My son used to love to help me plant seeds in the spring, and then tulip bulbs in the fall. These are some of those very same flowers,” Mrs. Potts said fondly pointing to her flower bed.

Suddenly, Elizabeth felt sick about how careless she and her friends had been. “I’m really sorry about kicking the ball in your flowers,” she said truthfully.

Mrs. Potts nodded and patted her on the shoulder. Then she smiled. It was something Elizabeth had never seen her do before.

“Come back and visit me some time,” Mrs. Potts said.

“I will,” Elizabeth promised. “Good-bye.”

Elizabeth ran home and into the house, letting the screen door slam behind her.

“Mom!” she yelled out of breath. “Do we have any flower seeds? I’m going to help Mrs. Potts plant some new flowers.”