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Promise Not to Tell

**Jennifer McMahon**



# PROMISE NOT TO TELL

*A Novel*

**JENNIFER McMAHON**

For my mother, who taught me to believe in ghosts  
And my father, ever skeptical

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# PROLOGUE

**November 7, 2002**

*9:30 p.m.*

**W**HEN THE POTATO GIRL WAS MURDERED, the killer cut out her heart. He buried it, but the next day, she rose again—from that *exact same spot*.” Ryan poked the campfire with a stick for emphasis, sending a shower of sparks up into the night.

Opal inched closer to Ryan. He was fifteen, kind of cute in that farm-boy way. Tori said Ryan had a huge crush on Opal. Tori was the one who’d set the whole thing up, said it would be fun to go into the woods and make out with the older boys. Opal was twelve and had never kissed a boy before but it wasn’t like she was going to admit that to anyone, even her best friend.

“What, like a zombie?” Tori asked. Opal was quiet—she hated the Potato Girl stories.

“Yeah, back from the dead like a zombie. It’s like a potato: you cut it up into pieces, bury any one of those pieces—even a little bit of peel if it has eyes—and another plant grows.” Ryan snapped a stick as if he were breaking a bone and tossed it into the fire.

Opal shivered. She thought of the visit she'd had just that afternoon. But no, she mustn't think of these things. And she knew better than to tell the others. They'd think she was lying or crazy or maybe a little of both.

"And she roams these woods now," added Sam. "You know how you can tell when she's coming? By the smell. That rotten potato reek. You can smell her a hundred feet off."

"Oh, puh-leease!" Tori rolled her eyes. Sam was her sort-of boyfriend.

"Let me get this straight—you don't believe the Potato Girl is real?" Ryan was incredulous.

"I believe she existed once. I know she did. My mom went to school with her. She was just some poor kid who was murdered. All this ghost shit? It's . . . whaddaya call it. An urban legend."

"Jesus, Tori, are you forgetting that Dan and Chris saw her right here just last week?" Opal said. "And what about Becky Sheridan's little sister, Janey? She says the Potato Girl met her down in the Griswolds' old field and locked her in the root cellar."

*And what about me?* Opal thought.

"God, would you guys grow up? Dan and Chris were wasted, as usual. Janey was just screwing around and got stuck." Tori spread her hands in a tah-dah gesture.

"Right," said Opal. "The door was latched from the outside, brainiac. How do you figure she pulled that one off?"

"All I'm saying is, shit can be explained."

"And all I'm saying is, there's some shit that can't," Opal said.

Opal knew Tori was still mad at her about the jacket. Earlier that afternoon, before meeting the boys, Tori had found out about Opal's borrowing her cross-country jacket—without asking. That was bad enough, but Opal happened to wear it while fixing the chain on her bike, and Tori was furious about the grease stain on