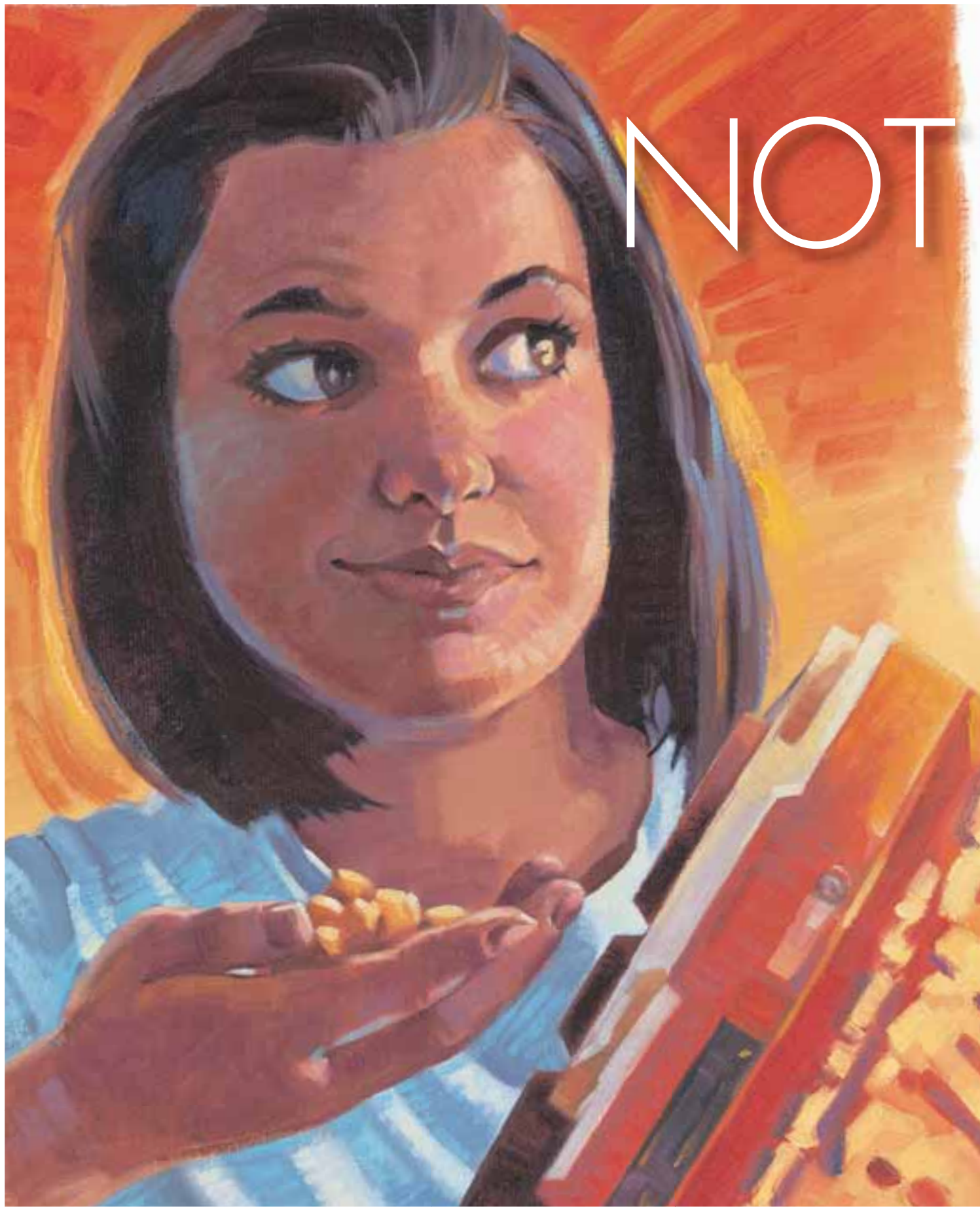


NOT



SO FAST!

BY DANIELLE NYE POULTER

I was afraid my parents would catch me breaking my fast, but luckily, I caught myself.

I froze on tiptoe and listened hard. Was that creaking sound I heard my parents' door? No, they were still in their room, getting ready for church. I sighed in relief then continued silently up the stairs into the kitchen.

On most fast Sundays I didn't have too much of a problem making it to dinnertime without eating. But this morning I had awakened starving! I decided to sneak up to the kitchen and get just a little snack before church.

I poked my head into the pantry and checked my options. "No, no, no," I whispered to myself as my eyes flicked over wheat crackers and unripe bananas.

Then I spied it—my absolute favorite cereal. It was sweet and crunchy, and all I needed was a handful to tide me over until dinner.

The cardboard box made a pleasant *thwick* sound

as I opened it. My hand brought out a fistful of cereal. My mouth watered in anticipation, but before I could pop that first sweet piece in, I froze again.

This time it wasn't because I had heard a noise. It was because I felt a gentle but persistent nudge to my conscience. I knew I didn't really need to worry about my parents catching me eating when I was supposed to be fasting. I was old enough to decide for myself whether I would fast or not. So what was it going to be?

As I contemplated that delicious-looking handful of cereal, I realized it didn't matter whether I actually took a bite. If my heart wasn't in my fast, I might as well not be doing it at all. I had been kidding myself spiritually. Even if I didn't get caught with my contraband cereal, I would know, and more importantly, the Lord would know that a little treat was more important to me than my spiritual well-being.

The pieces of cereal clattered back into the box as I released my clenched hand. I said a silent prayer of gratitude for the lesson I had just learned. From then on when the first Sunday of the month came around, I would know I was fasting for the right reasons, my *own* reasons, and not because my parents or leaders expected me to.

As I walked back through the kitchen and down to my room, I didn't creep along on tiptoe like I had on the way up.

This time, I walked with my head held high. The Spirit had taught me the blessings of a sincere fast, and I had chosen it for myself. **NE**