

Life Long Bet by Caitlin Sippel



“I moved here three weeks ago, and I’ve noticed it never rains.” Mason said.

He was a short kid, and kind of nerdy looking. He was just as skinny as I was, which was weird because I’m a girl. His reddish brown hair shone in the sun, and if I could guess he had at least two million freckles give or take.

“Yeah, it’s the dry season. That’s why there isn’t any green grass practically ever,” I said, trying to avoid eye contact.

“That’s interesting, I always thought Arizona had monsoons during this season. I guess there is a dust storm stirring up from

down south.” He said confidently like he knew what he was talking about.

I’ve lived in Arizona all my life, which was a total of 13 years and, it seems like my neighbors always moved out for some horrific reason. I give it 9 months until Mason’s family shimmies out of here, because the last two couples only lasted about a year and a half. No one truly knows why they moved, but everyone around town said they didn’t feel very welcomed.

My dad and I got this bet going on, you know to see how long the neighbors will last in the *forbidden* house. If I win I get to pick the dinner for a Friday night, and if he wins I have to sweep all the dust off the front porch every Sunday. My dad is always into betting on things, mom told me that he use to go to the fancy casino outside of town a lot back when he use to drink alcohol. You can tell in her voice how much hatred she had towards that casino.

Anyways, this family has one kid, Mason like I mentioned before. He’s about my age, and I’m sure my parents are going to make me

befriend him, and show him around our tiny washed up town. Clarksdale, never really had newcomers, but it seemed like someone new was always trying to move next door. It seemed like generations of people lived here, and everyone knew each other. It's so small that everyone knows everything about your life. It's literally a bubble! Like last week my parents got into yet another fight and pack-a-day Donna who works the cash register at the grocery store asked me if they're still on okay terms. It's so annoying that as soon as I turn 18, I'm leaving and never coming back. My aunt Jan left our town and lives in Florida now, I think I'm going to go move in with her, or maybe some city. I've never seen a city before, I want to go to one of those. My dad told me since I'm a special kind of smart and like to read a lot I could go to a nice university where ever I want to go.

“Hey Grace!” Mason shouted from his backyard

“Hey.” I said in a monotone voice

“Your mom told my mom that you’re going to show me around. Want to go to the gas station and buy some soda?”

“Not like I have any choice. Let me grab my quarters.”

I guess modern times haven’t hit us yet because I can buy a can of soda and a bag of those BBQ chips for only \$1.00. I think that’s why my parents pay me in quarters for chores because everything is so damn cheap around here. Excuse my language, I guess I pick that up from my dad.

“What’s there to do around this place?” mason asked with fatigue in his voice “and why is it always so hot here?”

“That’s just the way it is. I usually go to the park and read or sometimes walk my dog.”

10 minutes pass, and 50 questions later there was an awkward silence neither one of us wanted to break.

“Hey grace I have a question.”

“Yeah what is it?” as I kicked a crushed beer can.

“Do you ever get that feeling like someone is in the room with you but no one is there?”

“Uh... I don't know what you mean.” I said. For a split second I realized that this could relate to his house. The kids at school use to tell ghost stories about how a ghost haunts the house seeking for revenge on the people who try to take his land. I always thought it was an old farmer's tale, well that's what my dad told me at least.

“Well, I was sitting in my room the other day, with my closet open, and I just got this creepy feeling like someone was watching me.” Mason explained. You could tell that he wasn't making it up, because his face resembled that faint look of experiencing something that shakes you to the core.

“So like a ghost? Are you sure you aren't just freaking yourself out. I watched one of those ghost movies with my dad last month I'm still scarred from it.” I said in an eerie manner. Pretending like I had no idea what he was talking about. I wanted to gather more details

before I mentioned anything that would really freak him out.

20 minutes later, we got to our neighborhood. I couldn't stop thinking about what Mason had said. That scary movie I watched crept back into my nightmares that night, it was probably the goriest film I've ever watched. It was one of those movies you plug your ears so you don't have to hear the actors fake scream. So naturally I slept with my night light on from when I was 6 years old. I know now that I'm 13, I shouldn't be scared of the dark but I can't get those images out of my head. I picked up one of my Stephen King books and started to read. My dad passed down his collection of books to me, because I'm getting old enough he said. I guess I fell asleep when reading because I woke up with drool all over the book, pillow, and my face. I went downstairs for breakfast, and as usual the smell of fresh bacon filled the house.

"Mm... my favorite. Mom you always make the best food, I hope to be a good cook like you one day." I said as I stuffed my face.

“One day honey, one day. Now get off to school! And grab Mason on your way!”

I walk 20 minutes into town every day to go to school because I guess we don't have enough funding for school buses. Mason and I quickly became friends because we bonded over the love for those BBQ chips and his mom's mac n' cheese. Mrs. Palmer would always pack me a lunch because my mom always had to rush to work in the morning, and my dad seemed to always forget. She had to be the nicest lady I've ever met, I'm sure that's where Mason gets it from. Distracted from my thoughts, I knocked on Mason's door at least 15 times before he came out. It was our first day of school, and I never was late. He looked like he just rolled out of bed, his hair resembled a bird's nest, and he had crusty toothpaste on his upper lip. I couldn't help but laugh out loud.

“Why are you laughing? Don't be a bully. I got no sleep last night” Mason said with a raspy voice like he was coming down with the flu or something gross.

“Nothing. Why didn’t you sleep? Were you too scared again, you little wimp?” I said jokingly.

“Grace I’m being serious, there is something in my house. I don’t know who, what, or even how to explain it. All I heard all night was pounding and voices in my closet.”

“Did you talk to your parents about it?”

“Yeah my dad said I was making it up, and I needed to go back to sleep.”

“That’s strange. Whenever I’m scared I read books to fall asleep. You may not like the kind of books I read they’re kind of scary. But I like them, it’s kind of like a mystery case you know? Like CSI!” I said it like, it was some kind of bragging rights that I liked murder books. “I’ll give you a book to read after school maybe it will help.” Really this time I thought something serious was going on in Mason’s house, but I was too scared to tell him. I’m afraid his parents won’t like me anymore if I tell them their house is haunted. Then I won’t be able to see Mason anymore, which would really suck.

“Okay thanks, hopefully it works. But! Nothing too scary please.”

It’s been almost 5 months since Mason moved to Clarksdale, and I’ve really never had a friend like him. I guess you can call him my best friend. I swear I don’t have a crush on him. Everyone at school says I do but I swear I don’t! They think I like him because I’m always hanging out with him at his house, playing kick the can. It’s a game we made up when we walked to the gas station one time. I think we have hung out every day but two days he has moved here, my mom told me that friendships like that are special.

Two weeks later

Friday nights at home we always had some kind of take out. I never got to pick because I always wanted pizza. Who doesn’t? Pizza is good for you. After dinner I went over to Mason’s to see if he wanted to go to the park in town. My mom said she would drive us so we didn’t have to walk like we always do.

“Hey, Mrs. Palmer! Can Mason come to the park with me? My mom can drive us today.” I asked.

“I’m sorry Grace. Mason isn’t feeling too well, I’ll tell him you stopped by.” Mrs. Palmer said.

I haven’t seen Mason for a week because he has the flu. My mom doesn’t want me to get sick, because she told me hospital bills are too expensive. So Mason and I have been talking on the phone every day for about 30 minutes because that how long I’m allowed to. We talked about how that one time he heard noises in his closet, then it went away for months. I really thought it was something dealing with the farmer's tale but really it was nothing. I’m glad I didn’t tell Mason about it because it could have affected our friendship.

A week later there was a pounding on our front door around 7 am. Mr. Palmer looked like he just saw a murder. He was standing at the front door talking to my parents. He had the same facial expressions that are always described in my books. For almost an

Immediately, I ran up to my room, and waited for my parents to update me on what the hell that was all about. Sorry I swore again, I have to stop doing that. I really don't like soap in my mouth.

Knocks on door

"Hey grace, I'm really sorry honey." said my mom.

"Sorry for what? I don't get what's going on? Why was Mr. Palmer so upset?" I've never spat words out of my mouth so quickly

"There was an accident... with Mason." My mom said with tears in her eyes.

"What kind of accident? Is he ok?" I choked up as I asked.

6 months, and 3 weeks the Palmers decided to move out. That Sunday I was sweeping the porch watching them move their belongings into the moving truck. I was so mad at them, and most importantly mad at myself. It's been weeks since the accident, but I can't get over how many signs there are of something going on in that damned house. I should have known, and said something to Mason. I read

books that described how these things pan out. Mrs. Palmer brought over my book I gave to Mason to help him fall asleep, and the recipe to her infamous mac cheese. He had a bookmark on my favorite chapter. I'm guessing he didn't finish the book. The book mark was a folded up piece of paper, with a note on the inside. His parents never noticed.

“Grace, I hear them again, I'm reading your book and I can't drown out the noise. I think it might come out of the closet tonight. Thanks for being my best friend, I never had one of those.”

I was sobbing and my tears bled the ink all over my hands. I truly feel more anger than sadness at his point. I overheard my parents talking about what had happened. Mason was found dead inside of his closet, his parents, nor the medical examiners knew how or why, but I did. Now I understand why no one wants to live in that house, and I'll be sure to never let this happen again.

“Keep sweeping girl!” my dad yelled from inside the living room. “There will be new

neighbors moving in next month. How long do you want to bet this time?"

“6 months and 3 weeks” I said sarcastically.