

Alone With Me by Your Side

By Emily Trend

Characters:

Beth: 18 years old and any ethnicity. She suffers from multiple personality disorder. She only responds to being called Elizabeth when she is experiencing/believing she is no longer Beth. When she is Elizabeth, she has no knowledge of Beth. She lives in a fictional past.

Grace: Around 20 and any ethnicity. Grace is Beth's sister. She attempts to play along with Beth's fantasy but desperately wants her sister back--the sister that she knows.

James: Elizabeth's long lost son who died out at sea. A part of Beth's created world. Only mentioned.

Setting:

A general, unidentifiable outdoor location; preferably a porch or park bench.

Curtain opens

Beth, currently "Elizabeth," is sitting outside on a bench or porch swing talking to herself. She holds herself very proudly.

ELIZABETH:

James was my boy and James was a sailor. He knew all the stars and could tell ya them all by name.

Grace enters

GRACE:

Hi, Beth. Watchya doin' out here?

ELIZABETH:

I'm sorry, sweetheart, I don't think I am who you think I am. My name's Elizabeth.

GRACE:

I'm sorry, Miss. Can I sit with you?

ELIZABETH:

Sure.

Grace sits

GRACE:

What were you talking about? Something about the stars?

ELIZABETH:

My son, James...he used to tell me all about the stars. Yessir, he'd rock on that swinging bench we had on the back porch. He'd be gazing up into the barren sky as if he was gonna find something he'd lost. His left shoe, his ivory comb, his favorite shirt. It was the black button down with the red trimmed collar. He was very neat, very organized. He still managed to lose everything though. Even managed to lose himself once or twice.

GRACE:

Well Elizabeth it sounds like you love your son very much. It's getting kinda chilly out here though, don't you think? Would you like to come inside with me and maybe get something to drink? I know we've only just met but I'd like to get to know you a little more. It sounds like you've had a very...eventful life.

Beth completely ignores her offer and instead, looks up at the sky.

ELIZABETH:

The lightning bugs in the Summertime would make their private little specs of light. But against the dark canvas their little gleaming yellow couldn't hold to the burning warmth of the stars; the stars that made you wanna roast a marshmallow right over top of them. But we could never reach that high. Never got close enough to do that...

GRACE:

Miss Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH:

Hmmm?

GRACE:

James sounds like a terrific boy and you two must have a lot of fun together. I have someone just like James in my life too, Miss Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH:

And who would that be, child?

GRACE:

Well she's my sister. Her name is Beth and she loves stories more than anything. When she was little I used sit at the very edge of her bed and read her books about all the different types people and places there were in the world. She always use to ask all these questions about the fantastical places we would read about. I could never answer any of them though. I never was very creative.

But Beth could always come up with something perfect to say--a better way to end the story, even. She was so optimistic. Anytime the story ended badly she would find some way to make it happy. The bad guy wins? She'd say that five years later he went to jail. The innocent man gets convicted? New evidence appears months later and he's released. She had a talent for shining when everything was dark. I think that's why she loved little kids so much. They are always bright--just as bright as she was. When she got older she would go and babysit this little boy down the street and read him all the same stories. She, of course, could answer all his questions. She loved to be other people- to live their lives, live where they live. Do what they do. Love what they love. You remind me very much of my sister.

They have both entered their own world but are happy to be talking "at" each other.

ELIZABETH:

Well I use to read James stories out on our porch. In the Summertime the air would be warm up against ya and cuddle in right beside you, making sure you were feeling comfortable. It would sometimes get a little humid out there, the air would start to smush up against you like a hug. I always thought it was awful quiet out there on the porch most evenings. But my boy, James, he would say he could always hear the ocean out there tumbling and falling all over itself. Heard the way she took a breath in and then let it out as a sigh as the waves came rollin' in onto shore.

Always found a way to find some company. Months would go by before I saw him again if he had gone out on the ocean. I was always a little selfish with him--I wanted him to myself all the time but I couldn't bear to tear him away from the sea 'cause it make him so happy. Even happier than I made him, sometimes.

GRACE:

I never really understood Beth's imagination. There was always a part of her I just couldn't quite grasp. A part of her that was always just a little out of reach. I tried, though. I wanted to understand her energy and her passion and I loved, more than anything, when she shared it with me. Sometimes we used to play "pirates" in the pool we had behind our house. Beth and I would balance on a floaty toy and pretend waves were crashing into us as cannon balls soared and splashed. Beth use to tell me that it was a good thing sea monsters didn't live in pools because we didn't want our ship tipping over. She would still always look out for the Kraken though. Never sure if she believed herself...sometimes I swore that she thought she was living the story.

ELIZABETH:

James used to say the ocean could sweep up a ship so easy into her big arms and just rock it to sleep. The wind would pick up and start hummin' a lullaby. That ship was his story and he told it well.

GRACE:

One day the boy from down the street that Beth would babysit-- he came over one night in the Summer and he and Beth swam in the pool and ran in the yard. Those two were five years apart but sometimes they were closer than even Beth and I were. Beth always loved the stars, just like your boy, Miss Elizabeth. She would lie down outside in the grass and give each star a name. She didn't know their real names like James did but she could come up with the best names for sparks of light. Astor. Demelza. Nori.

ELIZABETH:

My boy James said stars was mighty good company nights when the ocean was calm. Said that all those tiny bits of light were trying so hard to peek through. They wanted a full view of the world but knew they couldn't ever get one that would satisfy them, so they settled for just a glimpse. Said that's why they were so tiny.

GRACE:

The best nights were when I would sit outside with Beth and she would invent a story for each star telling me how old it was, and what it's favorite things to do were. She would weave all these stories together until it felt like all the stars in the sky were actually alive. My sister told the best stories. Ones that would convince me that everything was gonna be fine and that any problems I had weren't as bad as someone else's. I think she's taught me enough now. I think I might be ready to finally tell *her* a story; a story just as flawless and powerful and comforting.

ELIZABETH:

Some nights when James would count the stars that shot across the sky he would spin me a real pretty tale of all the stars that flew around trying so desperately to understand what we were doing down here. Their flight never did last long though. He would say that was part of the beauty. They were too wonderful to stay around very long, and *that's* what made them so spectacular. That's what I like to think about my boy, James.

GRACE:

What happened to your son, Miss Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH:

Was just too wonderful to stay around here long. Went off on a Summer evening when the lightning bugs were starting their glimmering. Went off on his single sail with the brass sextant, headed West, and the ocean just folded him up in her arms.

Beat of silence

ELIZABETH:

And how is your sister, dear? Where is she now?

GRACE:

She's right here with me.

ELIZABETH:

I don't see anyone.

GRACE:

It's okay. You don't have to. I just have a feeling she's around here somewhere.

Miss Elizabeth can I tell you what happened to my sister? Why you can't see her? Well that little boy she would babysit. He came over one night and decided to go swimming with Beth. Beth left to go get a towel and when she came back the boy had drowned. She didn't know what happened and she blamed herself. Figured if she never left him, it wouldn't have happened.

Didn't understand how it could happen so quickly, either. She never really made sense of it. Afterwards, she started pretending to be other people *all the time*. She told me she didn't like her story anymore. She was sixteen years old. But I think she's a little better now. I think she's happier. I wish I could tell her that Miss Elizabeth. I wish I could tell my sister that I just hope that she's happy.

ELIZABETH:

And why can't you tell her?

GRACE:

Because now she's far away from me Miss Elizabeth. She's far away from me just like James is far from you.

ELIZABETH:

You said that she was near by.

GRACE:

She is Miss Elizabeth. Sometimes someone you love can be right next to you and they still feel very far away.

ELIZABETH:

That's how I feel about Sean. He's very far away from me.

GRACE: *knowingly*

Who is Sean, Miss Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH:

Hmmm?

GRACE:

You mentioned someone named Sean. You know that little boy, who drowned--his name was Sean.

ELIZABETH:

I meant James, darling.

GRACE: *gently*

I don't think you did.

ELIZABETH:

Well that's the way of children these days: questioning their elders.

GRACE:

Guess so.

Beat

GRACE:

Miss Elizabeth? Would you...could you come home with me? I mean to just maybe hang out for a little while? Talk some more?

Silence

GRACE:

Please, Miss Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH:

Alright. I'll come with you.

They both stand

GRACE:

Thank you, Miss Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: *sincerely*

Oh please... call me Beth.

GRACE:

Alright Beth. Let's go home.

Lights out.