

**THE LONLEY HEART**

written by

Steven Sallie

September 12, 2020

**EXT. CEMETERY - EVENING**

Beneath a dull, cloudy sky, CAITLIN, 60s, stands firmly in front of a grave. She's wearing a thick coat and scarf. Her pained eyes are locked on the headstone.

CAITLIN

Sorry I'm late. I'm not as spry as I use to be, and you're the one who insisted on getting the plot on top of the hill. You always loved making things harder than they need to be...

With great difficulty, Caitlin takes a seat on the soft grass in front of the grave. She crosses her legs, looking up.

CAITLIN

I heard from Megan today. She's doing good. Her and Tom moved into a new house. You'd love it -- it's got a nice, fenced-in yard on five acres of land. It's the kind of place we always talked about owning. Jackson and Heather are getting so big... You probably wouldn't recognize them... They're coming to visit...

Caitlin laughs, but it's pained. Her heart's really not in it.

CAITLIN

I wish you could've seen them more.

Caitlin reaches out and touches the headstone.

CAITLIN

I love you. I miss you so much.

**INT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

The house of every grandmother that has ever existed. Ceramic figures on the walls, framed art of religious paintings. Old furniture and rugs with patterns you wouldn't see anymore.

On the couch sits JACKSON (12) and HEATHER (14). Both are dressed up, and both look very uncomfortable.

Jackson nervously fidgets with his hands, looking around the room.

JACKSON  
Why do we have to waste a week  
here?

Heather rolls her eyes at her brother. She looks away from him, so use to their arguments at this point she couldn't care less.

HEATHER  
Mom said she's worried about  
Grandma so we have to stay with  
her for fall break.

JACKSON  
But I don't want to.

HEATHER  
I don't want to either. But Mom  
said we have to.

JACKSON  
This is bull crap.

HEATHER  
I agree.

They quiet down as Caitlin enters, carrying a tray of HOT COCOA. She sits it down on the coffee table, then takes a seat across from them.

Beat.

Caitlin stares at them, waiting for someone to speak.

Heather and Jackson stare back, hoping they don't have to be the ones to talk.

Caitlin, unable to handle take it anymore, clears her throat and breaks the silence --

CAITLIN  
Are you kids enjoying school?

Heather and Jackson share a look. Then shrug.

HEATHER  
School's okay. I like it, I  
guess...

JACKSON  
It's okay for you. I hate it.  
(to Caitlin)  
She's got a boyfriend.

Caitlin's eyes widen. She smiles as Heather looks down to avoid her gaze.

CAITLIN  
A boyfriend. Does your father  
know?

HEATHER  
He's not my boyfriend. He's just a  
boy... who's a friend...

JACKSON  
Sounds like a boyfriend to me.

HEATHER  
Shut up.

JACKSON  
Make me.

HEATHER  
I will.

CAITLIN  
Kids!

Heather and Jackson frown, crossing their arms.

Caitlin tries to stay mean, but can't help but smile. It  
actually looks genuine.

CAITLIN  
I missed you two.

HEATHER  
We missed you, Grandma.

CAITLIN  
Even if you're both a handful.

Heather stares at her. Not sure if she's joking or serious.

HEATHER  
Thanks.

CAITLIN  
So... tell me about this boyfriend  
of yours.

Jackson smiles. Laughing wickedly.

HEATHER  
Ugh... He's not my boyfriend.

**INT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - GUEST ROOM - DAWN**

Heather and Jackson sleep across from each other in twin beds. It's early.

Suddenly, a BLENDER GOES OFF. Grinding loudly.

Jackson and Heather wake violently. Looking around, getting their bearings.

**INT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAWN**

Heather and Jackson enter, rubbing their eyes.

Caitlin stands by the sink, blending a smoothie. She's wearing a tattered bathrobe over her pajamas. Fuzzy slippers.

Caitlin looks up at them.

CAITLIN  
Did I wake you?

HEATHER  
What are you doing?

CAITLIN  
Making breakfast. I can't tolerate  
solid food anymore -- it goes  
right through me.

Heather and Jackson recoil at the thought.

HEATHER  
It's like five in the morning.

CAITLIN  
I know.

HEATHER  
And you're awake?

CAITLIN  
I overslept.

HEATHER  
You overslept?

CAITLIN  
I usually get up at four.

HEATHER  
Oh...

JACKSON  
Why would you do that?

CAITLIN  
That's what you have to look  
forward to when you reach my age,  
kids.

JACKSON  
Great.

Caitlin finishes blending her smoothie. Removes the lid and holds it up for Heather and Jackson to see.

CAITLIN  
Would you kids like some?

Heather and Jackson stare at the contents of the blender. Fighting the urge to gag.

HEATHER  
Thanks, Grandma, but I think we're  
good.

Heather grabs Jackson by the arm and starts leading him from the room.

HEATHER  
I think we're gonna go back to  
bed.

CAITLIN  
Suite yourself.

Caitlin hums as she pours her breakfast into a glass.

**INT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - GUEST ROOM - DAWN**

Heather and Jackson lie under the covers. Both of them stare blankly up at the ceiling. Unable to get back to sleep.

JACKSON  
Heather?

HEATHER  
Yeah?

JACKSON  
Old people are weird.

HEATHER  
I know.

**INT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - MORNING**

Breakfast time.

Heather and Jackson sit across the table from Caitlin. Both look exhausted, barely able to hold their heads up.

CAITLIN  
I'm sorry for waking you up this morning.

JACKSON  
(low)  
You should be.

Heather KICKS Jackson's foot under the table.

Jackson fumes up at her.

Heather plays it coy.

HEATHER  
It's no problem.

CAITLIN  
Did you get back to sleep?

HEATHER  
Yes. We fell asleep as soon as our heads hits the pillow.

She looks sideways at Jackson.

HEATHER  
Right, Jackson?

Reluctantly, Jackson nods. He picks up his fork and silently picks at his scrambled eggs.

Heather looks down at her breakfast.

HEATHER  
So what are we getting into today, Grandma?

CAITLIN  
Oh, I've got something special in mind for you.

**INT. GARAGE - MORNING**

Heather and Jackson clean out the junk, organizing, gathering trash. They're both dirty and sweaty. Miserable.

JACKSON  
Mom didn't say we had to clean the  
garage for her.

HEATHER  
Will you stop whining?

Jackson thinks about this. Shakes his head.

JACKSON  
Nope.

Jackson drags a particularly heavy bag of trash across the  
garage, slinging it in the corner with the rest of the trash.

JACKSON  
Isn't this capital punishment?

Heather rolls her eyes. Sighs.

HEATHER  
The more you talk, the longer this  
is gonna take.

JACKSON  
Well I'm sorry for trying to bring  
some enjoyment to the day.

HEATHER  
I do not except your apology.

JACKSON  
So just because Grandpa died a  
couple months ago, we have to kill  
ourselves cleaning up his mess?  
How's that fair?

HEATHER  
Don't say that!

JACKSON  
I'm sorry!  
(beat)  
Do you even remember Grandpa?

HEATHER  
A little. We hadn't seen them in a  
while. How about you?

JACKSON  
A little. He bought me a remote  
control car once.



HEATHER  
So you only remember people who  
buy you things?

JACKSON  
If I say yes does that make me a  
bad person?

HEATHER  
Pretty much.

They go back to cleaning, this time in silence.

Heather pulls down an old SHOE BOX off the shelf. Can't fight  
the urge to look inside. She removes the lid --

-- and pulls out A THICK WAD OF PICTURES, WRAPPED IN A RUBBER  
BAND.

HEATHER  
Look at this.

Jackson hurries over to Heather, looking over her shoulder at  
the pictures.

Heather thumbs through them:

Various snapshots of their GRANDFATHER wearing MILITARY  
FATIGUES. A couple of him smiling with a younger Caitlin before  
shipping off.

HEATHER  
Grandma was so pretty. Did you  
know Grandpa was in the army?

Jackson shakes his head.

**INT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - DAY**

Heather and Caitlin stand at the island, making lunch.

Jackson sits at the table. He gets Heather's attention.  
Gestures for her to "go ahead".

HEATHER  
Hey, Grandma, we found these while  
we were cleaning out the garage...

Heather hands the wad of pictures to Caitlin.

Caitlin takes the stack, looking through them. A smile spreads  
across her face.

HEATHER

Grandpa was in the army?

CAITLIN

Yes. He was drafted into the War just a few months after we got married. It nearly killed me to say goodbye to him, but he told me that it was his duty to serve his country, and he wanted to do his part.

HEATHER

Weren't you afraid you wouldn't see him again?

CAITLIN

Of course. But with the draft, he didn't have a choice.

Jackson gets up from the table and joins them at the island.

JACKSON

They just made him go?

CAITLIN

That's how the draft works. If your number came up, you're next in line.

JACKSON

That's not fair.

CAITLIN

No... it's not. But Harold was tough. He wrote me every week for months, letting me know how everything was going. He promised me that he'd be back soon. Not long after that, the war was over and he was back home with me.

Caitlin stops on the picture of her and Harold together. Tears welling up in her eyes.

HEATHER

You were really pretty, Grandma.

CAITLIN

Thank you. If I may say so, it looks like you took after me.

HEATHER

Really?

JACKSON

No way.

Heather playfully shoves Jackson.

HEATHER

Shut up.

(to Caitlin)

How did you and Grandpa meet?

Caitlin thinks, recalling her past.

CAITLIN

I was about nineteen. I was out on a date with Drew Hader, he was a boy that all the girls wanted to go after. I noticed Harold standing in the corner looking at us. He walked right up to us and asked me if I wanted to dance. I told him I was on a date, but he said he didn't care. He said I was worth fighting for.

HEATHER

What did you do?

CAITLIN

I smacked him across the face.

Heather and Jackson stare at each other. Not sure what to say.

JACKSON

Really?

Caitlin nods.

CAITLIN

Harold could be quite forward.

HEATHER

So what happened after that?

CAITLIN

He caught up to me outside and told me that he would really like to go out with me, because he thought he'd be a better boyfriend than Drew. There was something about him -- he had a charm that he couldn't turn off. I gave in and we went out, on the condition that if I didn't like it, he'd leave me alone.

(MORE)

CAITLIN (CONT'D)

(beat)

Our first date went great, he took me to the park, and we had a picnic. We sat by the lake talking for hours -- until it was almost dark. That night, I broke up with Drew and Harold and I started dating. The next year we were married.

Heather and Jackson smile at each other.

JACKSON

Wow. Grandma had all the boys crazy.

CAITLIN

I don't know if I'd say that...

She leans in close to Heather.

CAITLIN

(low)

...even if it is true.

Heather bursts into laughter.

Jackson stares at them, out of the loop.

**INT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - EVENING**

Heather and Jackson sit on the couch under a blanket. A huge bowl of popcorn sits between them.

Caitlin pops in a VHS tape.

CAITLIN

This was always Harold's favorite movie...

She grabs the remote and joins them on the couch. Hits play.

WHITE CHRISTMAS starts playing.

Caitlin lays the remote on the armrest, then gets cozy under the blanket with Heather and Jackson.

**LATER**

They're half-way through the movie.

Heather and Jackson actually seem genuinely interested. They look over at Caitlin --

She's locked on the TV screen. Smiling like a child. Pure and utter joy on her face. She's lost in her own world, remembering the good times.

Heather and Jackson smile to each other. Glad to see Caitlin so happy.

**INT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

A RECORD PLAYER in the corner emits SMOOTH JAZZ.

Caitlin, Heather and Jackson bake cookies. All smiles and joy.

Jackson does an impromptu dance to the music. Hamming it up.

Caitlin and Heather laugh.

**INT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - NIGHT**

Jackson is out cold on the couch, a plate of cookies rising and falling on his stomach. Only a few left.

**INT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - KITCHEN - NIGHT**

Heather stands at the sink, washing dishes.

Caitlin walks in, joins her at the sink.

CAITLIN

You don't have to do that,  
sweetheart. You can go to bed.

Heather looks at Caitlin. Sincerely --

HEATHER

I don't mind. I promise.

CAITLIN

At least let me help then.

Heather side-steps, allow Caitlin to get closer.

They work in silence for a bit, then Heather looks over at Caitlin.

HEATHER

I'm glad we came to visit.

Caitlin beams at her.

CAITLIN

Me too. It was nice to see you kids again. I just wish we lived closer, so you could've have visited more when Harold was alive.

Heather frowns.

HEATHER

You really loved him, didn't you?

CAITLIN

I did. You'll see one day. When you spend most of your life with someone, then they're suddenly gone, it's like a part of you is missing. It's a weird, lonely feeling.

HEATHER

I'm sorry we couldn't come visit more.

CAITLIN

I know Harold would've have loved seeing you both more. He always talked about you, and your parents. He thought the world of you kids.

Heather smiles.

HEATHER

Would it be okay if me and Jackson came and visited for the holidays. Maybe even spend the summer with you?

Caitlin smiles warmly at Heather.

CAITLIN

I'd like that.

**INT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - DAY**

Jackson sits on the couch, looking through the contents of the shoe box.

He finds an old CLASS RING. Tarnished pewter band with a golden lion insignia.

Jackson holds it up to the light, taking it in from every angle.

CAITLIN (O.S.)  
That was Harold's.

Jackson looks up as Caitlin enters and sits beside him.

CAITLIN  
He left that with me when he went off to war. He said he didn't want to risk losing it. He figured it'd be safer with me.

JACKSON  
Grandpa sounds like he was really cool.

Caitlin can't help but smirk. She takes the ring, looking down at it fondly.

CAITLIN  
He was. I think you get a lot of your humor from him. He was a cutup. He was always going out of his way to find the funny side in every situation.

JACKSON  
Did it ever get annoying -- sometimes Heather says I'm annoying.

CAITLIN  
It could get tiring, but never annoying. Hearing Harold's laugh is one of the things I miss the most.

Caitlin hands the ring to Jackson.

CAITLIN  
I think Harold would want you to have it.

JACKSON  
Really?

Caitlin nods.

Jackson smiles, slipping the ring on his finger. It is too large for him -- his boney finger swims around within the band.

CAITLIN  
You'll grow into it.

**INT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - GUEST ROOM - DAY**

Heather and Jackson pack up their stuff. There's a strange tension in the air -- that kind you get on the last day of school when you're cleaning out your locker.

Heather shoves her clothing into her backpack, then stops and sits on the bed.

HEATHER

I can't believe it's already been a week.

JACKSON

I know. It flew by.

Jackson pulls Harold's ring from his pocket, runs his finger over it.

HEATHER

Don't worry, we'll be back. Grandma has a billion more stories we need to hear.

Heather gives Jackson a very quick hug.

Jackson looks surprised.

JACKSON

What was that for?

HEATHER

For being my annoying little brother. I love you.

JACKSON

I don't completely hate you.

HEATHER

I think that's the nicest thing you've ever said to me.

**EXT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - DAY**

Heather and Jackson stand in the yard, backpacks over their shoulders. Not quite ready to leave.

Caitlin stands on the porch, hugging MEGAN (40).

MEGAN

Sorry I couldn't come too, Mom. I couldn't get the time off work. Tom's about ready to pass out. He's pulled doubles all week.



They separate. Caitlin looks out at Heather and Jackson.

CAITLIN  
Don't worry about it. We had a  
nice little visit.

MEGAN  
Anything interesting happen?

CAITLIN  
Maybe.

Megan looks at her children. They smile, then quickly look away.

MEGAN  
Someone want to fill me in on  
what's going on.

HEATHER  
Maybe someday.

JACKSON  
Maybe. Love you, Grandma.

HEATHER  
Love you, Grandma.

CAITLIN  
Love you, too. I'll see you at  
Thanksgiving.  
(to Megan)  
Make sure you call me when you get  
home. I wanna know you made it  
safely.

MEGAN  
I will.

**INT. MEGAN'S CAR - DAY**

Heather and Jackson wave at Caitlin as the car backs out of the driveway.

**EXT. CAITLIN'S HOUSE - DAY**

Caitlin watches their car drive down the street, turn a corner, and disappear from sight.

She heads inside.

**INT. MEGAN'S CAR - DAY**

Megan looks sideways at Heather, then in the rearview mirror at Jackson.

MEGAN

So I take it you kids had a good time?

HEATHER

Definitely.

JACKSON

It was awesome.

MEGAN

I told you guys it wouldn't be bad.

HEATHER

You were right. We loved it there.

Heather looks back at Jackson. A shared look of mischief.

HEATHER

We almost didn't wanna come back.

JACKSON

Yeah...

MEGAN

Hey, I'm fun too.

JACKSON

If you say so, Mom.

MEGAN

I am!

HEATHER

Are you trying to convince us or yourself?

**EXT. CEMETERY - DAY**

Caitlin stands in front of Harold's grave. Happier than the last time. A smile still etched onto her face.

CAITLIN

Sorry I'm late again. The kids just left. I wish you could've been here to see them. They're good kids. Really good kids.

(MORE)

CAITLIN (CONT'D)

We watched White Christmas, we made some cookies. I even tricked them into cleaning out the garage, since you never got around to it before...

Caitlin wipes her nose as she struggles to keep the smile in place. Flooded with emotion.

CAITLIN

They're coming back for Thanksgiving and Christmas -- and they want to come back in the summer. I even told them the story of how we met. You should've seen their faces... I don't think they believed me...

Caitlin's voice trails off, getting quieter and quieter. Soon, it's all but silent as we --

FADE TO BLACK.