



Reluctant Press presents:

The Lone Wayfarer

Laurel Galen



ILLUSTRATIONS BY C PAGANI

AN 'ADULT TV' NOVEL

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The Lone Wayfarer

By Laurel Galen

Prologue

Charles Spencer Morgan felt he really had it made.

He had a beautiful wife, a lovely home and a career that was hitting on all cylinders. Five of his novels had been best-sellers. Three of them had been made into hit movies, and the money had rolled in, in amounts that he would never have dreamed of when he had grown up in a hardscrabble town in Arkansas.

It had taken three different architects and two different builders to come up with a design for the home they had caused to be built for themselves several miles north of Bozeman, Montana, in a densely forested, very private, area.

He had met Elizabeth at a book signing. When she had asked him to inscribe one of his books for her, he had taken one look at her and fallen like the proverbial ton of bricks.

Under the inscription, he had written, "Could I see you to tonight?"

She looked at him in astonishment.

What she saw was a ruggedly handsome individual with sandy brown hair. Even though he was seated behind the table, she could tell that he was solidly built, with wide shoulders, although for all she could see, he could be a shrimp from the waist down. However, she has seen pictures of him in various publications, and knew that was not the case.

At the moment, she had no attachments, so she saw no reason why she should not at least meet him for coffee. She had loved his books, and she thought it might be interesting to spend some time with him.

She leaned across the table and whispered, "I'll meet you outside the bookstore when the signing is over."

Charlie, who never thought of himself as the rather pompous-sounding Charles Spencer Morgan, except for the purpose of covers and title pages of his books, could hardly wait to finish up with the book-signing chores. His scribbled signature became even more indecipherable as the line of book buyers wended its way past his table.

At last it was over!

He wondered if the girl would actually be there as promised, and was incredibly pleased when he found her outside the front door of the store, waiting for him.

"Thanks for waiting, Elizabeth," he said, remembering her name from her requested inscription.

"Call me Betty, Mr. Morgan," she said, "I only like to use Elizabeth for formal occasions."

"Like book-signings?" kidded Charlie, "...and please, call me Charlie," he added. He continued, "I'm hungry. Why don't we go over to DeHaven's?" he said, mentioning a local family restaurant, which was located about a block away.

"Sounds good to me," replied Betty, who had been standing and waiting for a while till Charlie was done in the bookstore, and was pretty hungry herself. Taking her by the arm, he walked with her the intervening distance, and they entered the restaurant.

Charlie was well-known in the restaurant, and the maitre-de showed them to a table immediately, and within minutes, a waiter was at the table with a pair of menus. Charlie was pleased to see that she had no hesitation in ordering a substantial meal.

She apparently had a good metabolism, since she obviously had a stunning figure as well as a ravishing face.

As the meal wore on they fell into a conversation that lasted and lasted, and after several hours, Charlie was astonished to see that the restaurant was about to close up. A busboy was mopping the floor and waiters were placing chairs on the tables. Except for Charlie and Betty, the restaurant was deserted.

He called for his check, and, embarrassed that he had kept the waiter late, added a substantial tip when he paid the bill.

Leaving the restaurant, he walked her to her car, which was parked near the bookstore.

“I have to see you again,” he said, “soon!”

Apparently as smitten with him as he was with her, she gave him her telephone number, and said, “Call me tomorrow. I’ll be home all day.”

He did exactly that. He called her as early as felt he decently could, and made a date with her for the following Saturday evening.

This was the first of many dates, and it was after only about two months that he proposed and she accepted. A few weeks later they drove to Las Vegas and were married in one of the many wedding chapels. Their honeymoon lasted about two weeks, during which they had a wonderful time, seeing every show on the Strip

She had been living in a small apartment at the time, so, when they returned from Las Vegas, she moved into his apartment, which, because he had plenty of money, was a good deal larger.

However, they decided that they wanted to have their own house, and after a lot of time, effort, money and aggravation were spent, they had their hearts’ desire on a road that ran like a twisting snake north from Bozeman. Theirs was one of only five on large, secluded lots along the road.

Their marriage was idyllic, hardly ever marred by argument. If Betty was extravagant when it came to clothes, Charlie was delighted to indulge her because, first, he could well afford it, and second, because it made her so happy. The fact that she looked marvelous in anything she wore was also a positive factor.

Although they had a lot of friends in the area, and spent much time with them, they both loved traveling, including out-door excursions where they did a lot of hiking and camping. This went on for a little more than seven years.

Betty could have been an absolute poster girl for health and adventure ads, so it came as a rude shock, when, on one of her regular self-examinations, she felt a lump in one of her breasts. She wasn’t terribly concerned at first, but, on consideration, thought it might be a good idea to have a real examination.

Both Betty and Charlie were devastated when the mammogram showed she had breast cancer. Worse than that, further examinations and tests showed that the cancer had metastasized. Repeated tests confirmed the diagnoses.

Within days, Betty underwent a double mastectomy, and started a schedule of chemotherapy. When she lost all her hair, she bought a variety of wigs, in various colors and styles, which she bravely said would help keep up her spirits, but when she was fitted for prostheses, she broke down in tears before she could bring herself to wear them.

Charlie did what he could to help ease her burden, heartbrokenly watching as she lost weight and...faded away.

He was inconsolable, sitting at her bedside, holding her hand as she slipped away one evening. He comforted himself to some degree afterwards, knowing that she had been heavily sedated, and had not been in pain at the time.

After the funeral, Charlie became something of a hermit. Unable to work, he spent much of his time reading or unseeingly watching television. His friends tried to keep in touch, but after a while, calls came with decreasing frequency.

He kept to himself, in his house out in the woods, stirring himself only as much as was required to keep himself in needed supplies. At such times, he would drive into town, visit a couple of friends, and pick up some groceries. He kept his freezer, pantry and refrigerator well-stocked at all times so that these trips could be held to a minimum.

...And so he went on, merely existing from day to day.

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CHAPTER 1

Charlie Morgan was lonely. He had been lonely for almost two years, since his wife, Elizabeth, had died from complications associated with breast cancer.

The loneliness was acerbated by the fact that his house was on a narrow, twisty road that ran through the woods north of town. His home was the third of five, which were spaced about two miles apart along the road.

He could have moved to a less sparsely-settled area, but he loved it there, and it had associations with the happy seven years he had spent there with Betty, as she had preferred to be called. He still had a few friends in town, and he tried to spend some time with them when he drove in about once or twice a month for supplies, which he stocked in his large refrigerator and his even larger freezer.

He would visit Harriet Miller, the librarian, spending some time with her after selecting a few books. He would then visit the bookstore, where he would inquire about sales on his own books, of which there were five best-sellers in print. He would buy a copy of the local paper and the TV Guide for the week's television listings. He followed this with visits with several other long-time friends, some of whom he had known as classmates in elementary and high school. Not until then would he go to the local market and pick up groceries, followed by a trip to the local Rexall drug store where he would acquire the few sundries not available at the market.

If he needed gas, he would fill his tank at the Texaco station and then drive home.

Once having arrived home, he would pull his car into the garage, and unload the frozen items into the freezer that occupied a good part of the garage's back wall. He'd then close the overhead garage door and enter the house through the door that connected to a hall next to the kitchen. He'd busy himself with putting away the groceries in the refrigerator and pantry, and go to the den, where he would seat himself in one of the two side-by-side recliners which faced the large television set. It was usually then that he would be hit with a siege of loneliness, since Betty had always occupied the other recliner, when they watched their favorite programs together. He had not been able to bring himself to remove the other chair, because although it hurt every time he looked at it, it yet remained a tenuous connection to her, and he liked to feel that she was there next to him when he tried to lose himself in whatever program he was watching.

Over the past couple of years he had tried a number of methods to help dispel the loneliness. While he was scarcely a teetotaler, when he had tried drinking to forget, it had only made him sick, rather than forgetful, so he had quickly given that up.

He had tried losing himself in work, but he discovered early on that when he sat down at his typewriter, he found that he could be staring at the blank page endlessly, but inspiration would not come. He would start a paragraph, but, after

a few lines, he would give up in disgust, and the wastebasket next to his desk was full of crumpled sheets of aborted ideas.

The house itself reflected his state of mind. While he occasionally roused himself from his lethargy, and made a few passes at the floors with the vacuum cleaner, he was unable to follow through to any great extent and there was dust everywhere. He barely managed to keep himself in clean underwear and socks, since Betty had been the one to operate the washer and dryer. These machines had been a great mystery to him when he had found himself faced with having to make use of them, and his first few efforts had found him with many pieces of underwear shrunken to several sizes smaller than he could wear. He had countered this problem by purchasing a large stock of tee-shirts, boxer shorts and socks, and when these had run out, he finally decided to find the instruction books and he learned how to use the washer and dryer! He never did get around to doing any ironing, and his shirts and other garments were clean but creased. If he lost a button, he'd throw away the garment.... it was easier than trying to sew the button back on.

His inertia had shown itself in his failure to dispose of Betty's clothing. While she had never been what one would consider to be extravagant in other ways, she had loved clothes. She had looked good in good clothes, and Charlie, earning plenty of money, had been happy to indulge her when she had gone on buying sprees. She had had a walk-in closet packed with her clothes, and a dresser full of lingerie. Charlie could not bring himself to do anything about either. A psychiatrist would probably say that he somehow kept her near by his attitude on the subject.



And so he tried to pass the lonely hours, reading and watching television, although he could scarcely remember what he had viewed, within an hour after a program had ended.

CHAPTER 2

And so he went along, living one day at a time, lonely and bored. His days went by, each like the last, and each like the next, punctuated by his infrequent trips to town for supplies and to see a human face and hear a live human voice. His attempts at writing, because that was the only thing he was good for, uniformly ended in failure, his loneliness shattering what little moments of inspiration came to him.

One day, noting that his refrigerator and freezer were both low in contents, he decided to drive into town for replenishment. As usual, he made a careful list of his wants and needs, and got into the car.

As he started off, he noted that the sun was shining, but that clouds were forming as he was driving south. He was aware that, in this part of the country, weather could change rapidly from sparkingly beautiful to downright miserable in a short space of time, so he decided to pick up his speed as he drove along the rapidly darkening road. After a few moments, he passed an individual walking on the road in his direction. He had no choice, since there were no sidewalks in this very rural area. He noticed that the man seemed to be rather nondescript, and he was plodding wearily along. If he had been going in the same direction, Charlie would have offered him a lift.

As he passed the man, Charlie wondered who the man was going to, since at this point there were only three homes he was heading for, Charlie's and the further homes of Jack Green and Mary O'Neill, two and four miles, respectively, down the road. It had to be one of them, since a quarter mile past Mark's house, the asphalt petered out to a cow path, then dead-ended.

As Charlie proceeded toward town, the rapidly-gathering clouds made the day gloomier, and just as he reached the outskirts of town, it began to rain lightly. He decided to forego his visits to his few friends, made his purchases as quickly as possible at the market and pharmacy, and started to drive back home.

The light rain had turned into a light snow, with an accompanying cold wind that buffeted the car as drove homeward. Almost immediately, the snow began to come down so heavily that his wipers could hardly keep his windshield clear, even with his defroster going at full blast. He found himself slowing down to a crawl. He turned his brights on full, and it was fortunate that he did because he almost ran over an obstruction in the middle of the road, which was blocking his way.

Cursing, he got out of the car in order to move the log, or whatever it was, out of the way so that he could proceed. The object in the road was already partially covered with a layer of snow, which, when Charlie brushed it off, revealed itself to be a man!

He appeared to be unconscious. Charlie thought he might even be dead, except that a small amount of vapor escaping from his open mouth showed him to be still breathing.

For a moment, Charlie didn't know what to do! He couldn't leave him there and go for help, so he did the only thing he could do. He opened the back door to his station wagon, and picking him up, carried him and wedged him in on the deck between the groceries. He was surprised by how light the man was. Under what Charlie discerned were poor garments, the man seemed to be mostly skin and bones.

Returning to the driver's seat he began to drive, very slowly, because of the darkness and snow, now sleet, on the road. He would have stopped at the first house and tried to get help, but he was far enough along the road that the next house was his own.

Snow was already piling up on his driveway when he arrived, but when he pressed the control on his remote opener, the door struggled a bit, then pushed away the piled-up snow and swung open. Charlie gratefully closed the door, turned off his engine and pulled the lever next to his seat, which controlled the rear deck lid.

Hurrying to the back, he pulled the man out, lifted him to his shoulder in a fireman's carry, and awkwardly brought him into the house.

As he had been driving homeward, he had given the matter a certain amount of thought, so he carefully laid the individual down in front of his fireplace in the den, and with the fire starter he kept handy, lit the fire, which, although it was a gas fire, he always kept stacked with wood logs. With enough kindling underneath, and with the gas jets at maximum, he shortly had a roaring fire going.

Running to the linen closet he grabbed several wool blankets that he immediately brought into the den. He was about to cover the man when he noticed that the man's clothing was absolutely sopping from the melted snow. If he covered him as wet as he was, the blankets would serve no purpose. With a sigh, he strode into the kitchen where he kept a variety of implements in a utility drawer. Finding a pair of shears, he brought it to the den, where he began to cut away the man's clothing. The cheap materials cut away easily, and in a few moments, he was lying on the floor in front of the fireplace, completely nude. Charlie had only a moment to note how thin he was before wrapping him in the blankets.

That done, Charlie sat back on his haunches for a moment to catch his breath, since he had been on the go from the moment he had entered the house. He observed that the man was breathing very shallowly, and immediately there was another emergency.... the man stopped breathing! Unfortunately, Charlie had never been trained in CPR, but he had observed it enough time on television that he had an idea of how to go about it.

Clasping and closing the man's nostrils with one hand, he forced open his mouth with the other. Putting his mouth over the other's, he expelled his breath into the man's mouth, forcing air into his lungs. He repeated this several times until he was rewarded by seeing him gasp, then take a breath and continue on his

own. Charlie was very proud of himself, since he knew that he had just saved the man's life. Once again he sat back and observed that the man was breathing more regularly, and seemed to be out of danger. The fire had by now warmed the room considerably, but Charlie didn't feel that the floor would be the best place to leave the man indefinitely.

At this time it had occurred to him that it would probably be a good idea to see if he could get some medical help, so he went to the phone in the kitchen and dialed 9.1.1. He was rewarded with silence....not even a dial tone!

Charlie was exasperated, but not surprised. With the primitive phone service in his area, especially out in the "boondocks" where he lived, it was a frequent occurrence that the lines went out with the first snow, and there was no knowing when service would resume. The last time it had taken three weeks!

He now knew that it was up to him to do what he could for the man. He looked in on him, and noted that he was now apparently breathing without difficulty, although still unconscious. That worried Charlie, because he couldn't know whether the state of unconsciousness had resulted from freezing or from perhaps having hit his head on the pavement. He took a close look, and could see no lumps on the forehead, and after feeling the rest of his head, determined that there did not seem to be any external trauma.

Feeling that he could safely leave him for a few moments, he went to what had been the spare bedroom. The bed was already made, since Charley had always had it ready for the very infrequent guests who visited him. He turned down the cover, and switched on the electric blanket, since the sheets were ice cold. Returning to the den, he unrolled the blankets from the man, and prepared to carry him into the guest room. At this point, Charley noticed the offensive odor emanating from him, and, wrinkling his nose, for the first time, noticed how actually dirty he was! He had probably not bathed for the longest time!

Charley decided he was not going to put this filthy individual into the nice clean bed, so there was nothing for it but to clean him up!

Securing a basin from one of the kitchen cabinets, he filled it with warm, soapy water, and another with plain warm water. Selecting a couple of towels from the linen closet, he began to wash the man, first with the soapy water, then with the clear. Charley was astounded at how quickly both basins turned black with the dirt from his body..... What had he been, a coal miner?

After several changes of water, Charley had gotten him reasonably clean....at least to the point where he was no longer evil-smelling. He had very gingerly cleaned the area about his private parts.....Charley had never handled any others but his own, and it gave him a strange feeling when he did so!

Strangely enough, the man had slept through it all without awakening. Charley hoped that it was not a sign that he was in some sort of coma. If that were the case, he had no idea what he would be able to do about it, since he had never had any kind of medical training.

He carried him to the guest room and laid him down on the bed. He was about to cover him, when he decided that it was somehow inappropriate for him to be there nude.

He would have gotten a pair of his own pajamas, but he realized that, first of all, his clothes would be about five or six sizes too big for him, and that, second, he was not up to a struggle to get him into both tops and bottoms.

The guest room contained Betty's walk-in closets, which were packed with her clothes. He opened the door, and, for a moment, nearly fainted when he was assailed by the fragrance that swept from the closet. It was as if she were there for the moment.

Searching through the clothes, he came to a section that held some of Betty's nightgowns, of which she had had a large selection. He was primarily looking for warmth, so he found several woolen ones. He discarded several with sleeves, since he didn't wish to have to wrestle with the problem of getting his arms into them. He selected a sleeveless one, and after sweating through a struggle of pulling it up over the man's body, and getting the arms through the armholes, finally succeeded in getting it all on.

He then pulled up the cover, and to be on the safe side, covered him with the extra blanket that had been folded at the foot of the bed.

Seeing that the man was now breathing freely and regularly, he felt that he could leave him for a while. Leaving the light on in the room, he went back to his car and finished the chore of bringing in the supplies and storing them in the appropriate places.

Exhausted, he sat for a while until he felt a bit rested.

He went back to the den, where the man's clothing lay in a sodden pile on the brick hearth of the fireplace. He tried to check the pockets, but found nothing but a few odd coins and a wallet. The wallet was soaked, so Charley decided to leave it on the hearth to dry out, after which he planned to examine it. Once again looking over the clothes, he noted that they had been little more than cheap clothes to begin with. When he had cut them off the man's body, they had become no more than scraps of useless, (and dirty!) rags.

Picking them up with his finger tips, he took them to the bin in the garage, which held rubbish and dumped them in.

He looked in on the man again, and since he seemed to be sleeping naturally, he left him and went to his recliner and read the paper for a while.

Tired, he fell asleep while reading the paper. The last thing he remembered was wondering whom the man was, and where he had been going to on this road.

Chapter 3

Charlie was in the kitchen, having breakfast. Betty was at the stove, her back to him. He kept trying to pick up and eat the food in front of him, which consisted of bacon and scrambled eggs. However, each time he took a forkful, it fell off the fork on the way to his mouth. He tried to ask Betty why he was having this trouble, but he was unable to get her to turn around. Finally, he stretched his arm, which had suddenly become elastic, to her apron strings. He pulled on them, and she finally turned around. He was immediately sorry that she did because she looked the way he had last seen her, so thin as to appear skeletal. Her eyes were terribly deeply set, and her mouth had become a gaping circle.

Charlie shrank back in his chair. She came toward him, spatula held menacingly in her hand.

*“What’s the matter?” she cried, “You look like you’re seeing a ghost!”
Suddenly she began yelling, “Help! Help! Where am I...Hey! Hey!”*

Charley awoke with a start. What had awakened him was the sound of the man calling weakly from the guest room. He was finally awake! That was certainly good news!

He arose from his recliner and hurriedly walked to the guest room.

The man was feebly trying to raise his head from the pillow, but all he was succeeding in doing was moving his head back and forth.

As Charley loomed over him at the bedside, he shrank back and said, “Wh...who are you?” He looked about him and continued, “Where am I?”

“Take it easy, fellow; you’re going to be all right.”

“But where am I, and what happened to me?”

“You fell down on the road, and I almost ran over you because you were lying there covered with snow.”

“Snow?...What snow? When I was walking it had just started to drizzle.....and that’s the last thing I remember!”

Charley said, soothingly, “You must have blacked out for some reason.”

Thinking about the emaciated condition of the man, he asked, “When was the last time you ate?”

“I...I can’t remember.”

“Let me get something hot into you,” said Charley, and he rose. At the door, he turned and said, “By the way, what’s your name?”

“Luke....Luke O’Neill.”

It struck Charley then, and he asked. “Are you related to Mary O’Neill?” This was the woman who had lived at the furthest house on his road, a house that was now vacant.

“She’s my sister. Do you know her?”

“Why....yes,” replied Charley. He didn’t have the heart to say any more. “I’ll be right back with some hot tea.”

Once in the kitchen, he put the kettle to boil, and prepared a couple of slices of buttered toast. In his opinion, Luke seemed to be the victim of malnutrition, if not starvation, and he was determined to help in whatever way possible.

Returning to the guestroom, he helped Luke sit up against a raised pillow. Seeing how feeble he was, he decided to spoon feed him the tea. Breaking off small pieces of toast, he fed them to Luke between sips of tea. Seeing a little color gradually creep into the man’s face rewarded him.

As he gained a little strength, he looked about him, and began to ask a few questions, repeating those he had asked earlier..

“Who are you.....where am I....and how did I get here?”

“My name is Charley....Charley Morgan, and you’re in my house. I nearly ran you down on the road. I picked you up, carried you to my car and brought you here. You were in pretty bad shape when I found you. It’s lucky that I did, because you wouldn’t have lasted much longer where you were. This is not a very heavily-traveled road, you know.”

“You...you saved my life, didn’t you?” said Luke, and several tears ran down his cheek.

Charley was embarrassed. “Don’t think about it! Anyone would have done it.”

“But you are the one that did it, and I’ll never forget it!”

By this time, Luke was feeling a little stronger and he finally realized that he was in a bed and was covered with a sheet and blanket. Weakly, he pulled down the cover and in a shocked voice, asked, “Where are my clothes? What’s this I’ve got on?”

In a soothing voice, Charley said, “Don’t worry about it! Your clothes were absolutely soaked and frozen. I had to cut them off you to get you warm in front of my fireplace.And I washed you off some, before I brought you here and put you into this bed.”

“You did all that while I was asleep?”

“While you were unconscious, is more like it!” Charlie didn’t mention the fact that Luke had stopped breathing at one point, because he didn’t wish to alarm him further.

“And how did I get into this....garment...” he asked.

“It’s one of my wife’s nightgowns. I wanted to keep you as warm as possible, and this was one of her warm woolen ones.”

“Your wife!” Luke looked about in alarm. “Did she help you get me into this thing?”

Charley’s face turned to stone. “She passed away about two years ago,” he said softly. “I live here alone.”

“Oh! I’m so sorry!” said Luke, contritely.

“It’s O.K.....I’m still trying to get used to it.”

By this time Charley saw that Luke was growing very tired, so he suggested, “Why don’t you rest? Get a little sleep and when you wake up, we’ll get a little more food into you.”

Luke nodded, and after Charley once again adjusted the pillow, he closed his eyes and fell asleep almost at once.

Charley went into his bedroom, which was on the other side of the house, and picked up the phone, in order to try it again. He was once more rewarded with a dead line. From past experience he assumed that the phone might be out as long as a couple of weeks. When the lines were down, the phone company sent repair men to fix up the more heavily-used circuits before taking care of the small ones like the one he was on.

He went to the front door and tried to open it. It wouldn’t budge. Apparently the snow had piled up against it, making it impossible to move for the moment. He tried to look out of one of his windows, and all he could see was a solid white blankness....it was a real blizzard! He congratulated himself on having gotten home in time. Another hour on the road would have found him stranded with no help in sight! It was also a very good thing that he had restocked his refrigerator and freezer, because there was no way of knowing how long he would be isolated here....with another mouth to feed as well!

He was grateful that the power was still on. At least he had light and power for his utilities.

By this time he realized that he himself was famished. He went into the kitchen, set a few utensils on the table, and walked over to the refrigerator. For once he was really appreciative of the fact that Betty had insisted on one of the largest ones available at the appliance store. Even living by himself, he certainly found it convenient that he was able to go for considerable lengths of time before having to restock it.

He reached into the freezer compartment, extracted a package of frozen waffles, and popped two of them into the toaster.

In the interim, he made himself some instant coffee with the water, which was still hot in the kettle

When the waffles were ready, he slathered them with margarine, and poured on some maple syrup.

With a sigh, he sat down at the table, and while he was eating, he contemplated the situation in which he now found himself.

He was pleased with himself that he had found, and rescued another human being from certain death, but he was now saddled with an unexpected responsibility. There were a lot of questions to be answered:

Would he be able to nurse Luke back to health?

What kind of person was he?

Would there be enough food and other supplies to last until they would be able to get out of the house?

What would he be able to do about clothes for his unexpected "guest?"

Since there was nothing he could do about it, he decided to let events occur as they would, and hope that things would work themselves out.

He looked at his wall clock..... It read two o'clock in the morning. It had been a long day!

He felt that there was nothing more he could do for the moment, and decided to get some real shut-eye. He went to his bedroom, took his clothes off, selected a pair of pajamas, and after washing up and brushing his teeth, went to bed. He set the alarm for three hours later, and after tossing and turning for a few moments while thinking about his situation, he fell fast asleep.

CHAPTER 4

Charlie was awakened by his alarm. He still felt dead-tired, but, brushing the sleep from his eyes, he went into his bathroom, sloshed some cold water on his face, and rapidly dressed in underwear, slacks, short-sleeved polo shirt and loafers.

Walking to the guest room. he was confronted with a new emergency!

Luke was tossing and moaning, seemingly in great pain. Charlie felt his forehead....Luke's head was hot...he had a fever!

For a moment, Charlie was at a loss, but then he remembered something he had seen and heard at a Red Cross lecture some years ago. .He made a dash for the kitchen, wrapped some ice cubes in a towel, filled a basin with water and ice cubes, and ran back to the guest room.

He immediately began rubbing down Luke's face with the cold cloth, following up with his arms. He pulled down the covers, and pulled up the nightgown high enough to expose most of Luke's body, and began to wipe it down with the wet, cold cloth. It took a long few minutes until Luke stopped moaning and seemed to rest more comfortably.

He pulled up a chair next to the bed and spent an anxious half hour waiting for a possible repeat. Thankfully, there was none, and a little later Luke opened his eyes.

"What happened?" he murmured.

Charlie explained what he had gone through. "How are you feeling now?" asked Charlie.

Luke grinned wanly. "I feel like I've been spit at and missed and shit at and hit," he said.

Charlie took it as a good sign that Luke was able to display a bit of humor.

Charlie looked at a bedside clock, which read five A.M. He felt it was too late to go back to bed, so he asked Luke if he felt like having a little food.

Luke replied, "Yeah, I'm kind of hungry, but first I gotta go..." He stopped, embarrassed.

Charlie said, pointing, "The bathroom door is over there."

Luke tried to get up out of the bed, but fell back, too weak to make it. Charlie helped him to his feet, but when Luke attempted the few steps to the bathroom, he tottered, and nearly fell. Fortunately, Charlie was still there, and he supported him into the bathroom and over to the sink, which was next to the toilet bowl. He then left him to some privacy.

"Call me when you're ready," he said, "I'll be right outside the door."

Charlie heard the toilet flush, then a weak call from Luke. He entered, to find Luke at the sink, rinsing his hands and face.

"Whoa! I feel a lot better now," he said.

Charlie led him back into the bedroom and sat him on the side of the bed.

"You wait here," he said, "I'll come and get you when the food is ready."

At this time, he noticed that Luke was holding his arms around himself and shivering a little. He saw that the nightgown had a lot of damp spots on it, some of it no doubt from the cold water application, but he guessed that the fever had caused Luke to do a lot of sweating.

"Hey! We'd better change you into something dry," he said. He went to Betty's closet, and rummaged through the lingerie. He found another wool nightgown, and a little further in, he located a chenille bathrobe. At the base of the closet, immediately below the nightwear, he found a shoe rack on which there were several pairs of slippers. He selected a loose-looking cotton one, and brought all the items over to Luke, who had been looking at him quizzically as he had been rummaging through the closet.

"Aren't there any pajamas?" he asked. "I feel kind of silly wearing this," he said, pinching a fold of the nightgown.

"I'm sorry," said Charlie. "It's that or nothing. Betty never wore pajamas. She didn't like them." He didn't feel it worth mentioning that it was probable that four Lukes could fit into one pair of his own pajamas.

He handed the clean nightgown, bathrobe and cotton slippers to Luke.

"Put these on. I'll make some breakfast."

He started for the door, then suddenly turned back. "Will you need any help putting those on?" he asked, anxiously.

"I think I can manage," Luke said. He obviously was too embarrassed to ask for more help donning the clean items.