



**Lost to the World**

*Libby Sternberg*

# LOST TO THE WORLD

by

Edgar-nominated author

**Libby Sternberg**

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This is a revised edition of the original novel of the same title by Libby Sternberg, published in 2010.

This book is a work of fiction. Characters and places are either made up or, if real, used fictitiously. Any resemblance between fictional characters and real people is entirely coincidental and not intentional.



## Chapter One

March 1954

JULIA DELL BIT THE INSIDES OF HER CHEEKS. The smell of a damp wool coat made her gag. She swallowed hard, concentrating on the bland tiles on the floor, the crack in the wall, the soothing voice of the nurse kneeling by her chair, asking if she was all right.

*It's March – why is he even wearing it? Wet from rain, warm from the overheated hallways, it smells like –*

*Pain.*

She shook her head. "There's a coat rack down the hall, sir!"

The nurse was asking her if she needed smelling salts.

"No, no thank you. I'm fine."

But the smell of that wool coat—it made her sick to her stomach.

"What did you say about my coat?" The detective stood in front of her.

"It...smells. From the rain."

He sniffed his shoulder and shrugged. "I won't be here long." His voice was sharp, but at least he moved on. And with it, the odor receded.

Hot packs were made of woolen strips soaked to scalding. She'd never forget the smell—and the fear it had come to trigger.

"You've had a shock, dear. Close your eyes and breathe."

She did as she was told, and a happy memory flooded her. A happy memory? Dear God, it was the memory of the moment she'd discovered Dr. Lowenstein's lifeless body!

She had entered the room, let out a yelping scream, and then—she shivered as the sensation returned—she'd quickly *turned* and fallen.

one sliver of time when she turned, that tiniest moment. Holy mother of God, wonderful feeling! She'd turned. She'd turned! She'd moved as if...

She sucked in her lips. *Oh God, it was gone now.*

But in that instant of surprise, she'd felt again surefooted and strong, able to turn away without a second glance. She had forgotten about her withered leg with its smaller forgotten she couldn't walk without will. One precious moment.

*want it back. I want it back, oh please. . .*

Her left hand had brushed Dr. Lowenstein's arm when she fell, while her right had pried the broken glass on the floor, scraping and cutting her palm, making an embarrassing mess so that she had to explain, when the police and doctors came, that she'd fallen on her own.

There had been the usual mixture of pity and recoil. The detective with the coat, a burly reddish hair, had glanced at her with narrowed eyes and tight mouth. You mucked it up, that look had said. You mucked it up because you were stupid enough to—and here it had been sure what to fill in. She'd been stupid enough to forget about her brace? Or so she'd thought to catch the damn disease that led to the brace?

She viewed each possibility with a curious aloofness, a detachment that had plagued her since she had been afflicted with "the summer plague" itself.

The serious illness, Julia had decided when she'd lain in bed with the awful onset of polio earlier, invites the sufferer into the threshold of death. Afterward, you feel as if you are writing your obituary. *Julia was such a fine girl, strong in adversity, resilient in the face of catastrophe at work . . .*

Everyone else in her family was healthy as the proverbial horse. Even the usual childhood diseases—the poxes and measles and mumps—had whipped through her parents' household in a matter of days, leaving Julia and her two sisters miserable for a few days and weak for a week and then, poof, the suffering was forgotten. There were movies to see, boys to giggle with, bands to dance to, and the war's end to celebrate.

No more. She'd missed a lot of that.

"Are you feeling better now, Julia?"

Julia opened her eyes. The kind nurse from one of the patient wards beyond the residential ward sat by Julia's chair with ammonia spirits ready. She sat in the hallway, just outside Dr. Lowenstein's Hopkins office, where the detective had allowed them to place a chair for her to sit on while he waited for his questions.

Smoothing her gray flannel skirt, Julia shook her head. "Yes, thank you." It was a plain skirt, all like the softly feminine and extravagantly full skirts so fashionable now. She didn't pay attention to her legs.

It must have been the shock of it." The crisp nurse straightened and placed the ammonia bottle in her pocket.

"Yes," Julia murmured as the nurse wrapped a bandage on her bleeding hand. Yes, it was a shock. A miracle, that shock had been.

She shook her head. No self-pity. She was one of the lucky ones. The late president spent most of his adulthood in a wheelchair. And others she'd known at the rehabilitation center spent their last days in the torture chamber of the iron lung. *Yes, count your blessings.* But she only remembered to do that after first being tortured by her losses?

ward, telling the nurses she'd "try harder," but it had been too late.

What?"

Dr. Lowenstein. . . " She waved her hand toward the lab where the doctor's body lay  
t involved in the research. But others are. It's almost polio season." She sat up straight  
nportant work and her boss was part of it, if only in a small way. She wouldn't let  
ives delay it.

he detective stooped to talk to her as if she were a little girl, and she found herself me  
g back. Did he feel the need to affect this pose for her because she was a cripple, akin  
o a child or mental defective?

Could you describe to me what happened when you found your boss?" he said, igr  
uestion. He pulled out a notebook and pencil, preparing to write with grubby fingers v  
were ragged from chewing.

Not my boss," she said. "Dr. *Jansen* is my boss. Dr. Lowenstein's secretary isn't in."

He sighed. "What time did you discover Dr. Lowenstein?"

I came in early—before eight—and I was the only one here," she said. She'd already  
er detective the story. And Mrs. Wilcox. And the nurse. And . . . others she co  
nber now. "Dr. Lowenstein was in his lab with the door shut. He sometimes comes in  
d voices. Someone was with him, a man I think—"

Do you know who it was?"

No. I just heard them talking—"

Arguing?"

Maybe. I don't know. Their voices were muffled but...strong." Dr. Lowenstein was a  
so any rise in tone, even to what most would consider normal, stood out as unusual.

Did you hear any of it, make out anything?"

he looked down, thought. She'd been rushing to her office to finish typing Dr. Jai  
. It didn't matter that it was for a small journal. She always felt that any kern  
nation about polio could be the one piece of the puzzle that solved it all, that l  
eries and cure. Her mind had been on that. To her right, behind the pebbled glass wi  
: Lowenstein's door, she'd heard them. Two men. She'd thought at first it was ar  
r. They could be quite passionate about their various theories, and she'd assumed they  
ig over the amount of CCs to be used in an experiment or how to attenuate a strain  
or how to get the best tissue from the monkeys they used. But Dr. Lowenstein did  
research, so she'd discarded that theory, or rather, filed it away to be pondered later  
finished her work for Dr. Jansen.

Dr. Lowenstein said something like 'I've had enough, Buck' at one point. That's  
nber."

Buck?"

I think that was it."

Anyone by that name here?"

Not that I know of."

The other man—was he another doctor?" He shifted his weight.

I know all the doctors on our floor and then some. I didn't recognize the voice."

You didn't hear anything else?"

Like I said, I heard them when I passed the office. Once I went into mine, I didn't hear

And that's when you..."

Found him dead on the floor. Yes." She raised her eyebrows, daring the detective to speak as soft.

You knew immediately he was dead?"

She straightened her shoulders. "No, I just saw him on the floor, bleeding, not moving. I thought he'd passed out, maybe had a heart attack. "It wasn't until I felt that I determined he wasn't breathing." She looked around. She wanted to talk with Mrs. Wilcox, to make sure she would move forward despite this calamity. Perhaps she should help move them along. "How much longer will you be here?" She tilted her head toward the hallway. "The detective has work to do."

He ignored her question, flipping a page after writing some notes. "So you came in, saw the body on the floor, fell, and then determined he was dead."

Yes!" She cleared her throat as her face flamed with irritation. If she'd been able to, she would have bent over, shook the doctor's shoulders and tried to rouse him. But, no, she couldn't because of her brace. What did the detective think he was proving by eking out this information?

He looked up at her eyes, as if probing for something. "Just needed to have the sequence of events," he said as if reading her earlier thoughts. "My boss would ask me." He shrugged his shoulders as if to apologize, then stood.

Not liking him towering over her, she pushed herself up as well, but without her cane she wobbled. When he saw her reach back to balance herself against the wall, he lightly grabbed her arm.

Steady," he said, his eyes narrowing in concern, "you've had a big shock."

My cane—it's still in the lab." He had a strong, kind grip. She regretted her quick judgment. She was always doing that—seeing people's reactions through the filter of her affliction. A thousand times she told herself to stop.

I'll fetch it for you," he offered. But she shook her head.

I can do it!" She pulled away, nearly tumbling with the effort.

I don't want you in the crime scene," he said, irritation now coloring his voice. "Stay out of it for you." He walked past her without a second glance and disappeared into the hallway. She heard him talking to others—another detective, a coroner—and in a few seconds, he returned with her cane out to her. She took it with a quiet "thanks" and slipped the metal band around her arm while grabbing the handle grip.

What happened to the caller—the one who asked for Dr. Lowenstein?"

I don't know. I assume he hung up eventually."

You were the only one around this morning?"

I didn't see anyone else. I was in early, before the offices usually open."

This whole lab is involved in the polio research?" He swung his pencil around indicating the quiet hallways. This part of the hospital wasn't a hospital at all. It felt more like a library with a few voices in labs and offices. The researchers could work for hours without saying anything. It was leagues. Sometimes Julia had been surprised to come upon a doctor in a lab so small and so quiet. It had been a tomb.

A part of it. Most of it is in Pittsburgh where Dr. Salk is working. But the doctors all have their own theories, different methods, different tasks." She felt weak, as if a weight were coming down on her.

Where do you live?"

What?" She leaned on her cane and stared at him. Was he being fresh?

In case you go home early, I'd like to know where I can reach you if I have ones." He had his notebook open again with pencil poised to write.

I won't go home early."

He sighed heavily, and his jaw muscle worked. He flipped the notebook closed with a click. "Fine. I can get it from your office anyway." He turned away from her and walked back to his desk.



Two hours later, she found herself with a bad case of the shakes, sitting at her desk shivering as if it were twenty below zero.

You should go home," her office mate, Linda, said, looking up from her typing.

Maybe she would...but the phone rang, pulling her out of her anxiety.

Are you the cripple?" a man's voice said as soon as she answered. "The one talking to the man?"

She sucked in her breath. "Who is this?" Her voice trembled. Linda noticed.

You okay?" Linda got up from her desk and came over.

Who is this?" Julia repeated, but the man just snickered and hung up, the dialing his ugly voice.

Julia?" Linda asked, reaching out for Julia's arm.

It was...nothing. A prankster." But her hand shook so much that she didn't get it into its cradle, and it fell on to her desk. "I think I will go...I don't have any time now."

I'll tell Mrs. Wilcox." Linda scurried to pick up her own phone and dial the number. While Linda talked to Mrs. Wilcox, Julia called home to arrange a ride.

Mrs. W. said that's fine," Linda said, hanging up. "She said Dr. Jansen called to say hello and the weather, too."

Julia frowned. The man hadn't had the courage to call Julia after he'd berated her for writing the paper he was not present to pick up, nor to offer condolences over the shock she'd experienced. Typical. She swallowed her irritation. It wasn't for her to question these things. Writers worked like artists, listening to their inner muses. They had important things to do. Mrs. Wilcox—having to deal with such a temperamental crew. But she'd already handled Mrs. Wilcox's husband was gone five years now, and her only child, a son, had died at Normandy.

You've been a trouper. I wouldn't have stayed," Linda said, watching her get ready to go. Julia noticed her staring at her collar. There was a little drop of blood there, on the neck of the sweater set. It was from her fall. One more reason to go home early—to properly wash it before it settled in. It was a new set, too, soft white cashmere, as light as air, with a beautiful brocade embroidered near the shoulder of the cardigan. Julia spent an inordinate amount of money on clothing that drew the eyes upward. White set off her curly, chin-length chestnut hair and the best of her good features.

I hate the idea of the investigation stopping things," Julia said as she limped to the door. Linda beat her to it, pulling down her soft gray cloth coat and helping her into it.

Don't worry about that. Things are already kinda stopped."

Julia froze and looked into Linda's eyes.



is polio. I was going to tell you this morning. I just heard it."

"Oh, no. Julia slumped. The monkeys were used to test the vaccines that were being produced in the labs for the upcoming vaccine trials. Everything had seemed so hopeful. And now...

"That's awful." Despite her effort not to show her grief, she felt tears well in her eyes. Thinking of the morning's terrible events, that was it, a delayed reaction.

"Oh, honey, don't get upset." Linda put her arm around Julia. "It doesn't mean things are bad. Dr. Bodian just needs to check things out, straighten 'em all up."

It could mean far worse things than the trials being "put off." It could mean no vaccine. No cure. Thousands upon thousands of children and young people; what she'd faced. For a second, she held her breath, remembering.

"But it's getting late," Julia murmured. She herself had caught polio in early summer. The epidemics could start as early as March, and it was now almost April.

"They'll fix it," Linda said, but Julia knew she was only saying that to make Julia feel better. She didn't have the same sense of urgency as Julia did about the trials.

As was her habit, Julia forced a smile and straightened, shrugging out of Linda's embrace.

"Do you need me or Susan to do any of your stuff for you?" Linda asked as Julia pulled away.

Julia thought of Linda alone in the office without Susan. She wouldn't burden the girls with assignments when Dr. Kenneth Morton was loading her up with so much. She knew other labs around the country thought it extravagant that the doctors at Hopkins each had a secretary, but there was more than enough work to go around, and if one of the girls was out, the others often had to work overtime to make up for the absence. They didn't just use doctors anyway. They served as a general typing pool for other researchers who had secretaries.

"No, I'm caught up," Julia lied.

"You have a ride? I could call a cab for you."

"I'm fine. Thanks."

Julia turned to leave the small room she shared with Linda Marie Boldari and another girl, the other secretaries on this research unit. Susan, Dr. Lowenstein's secretary, was on leave for a few days visiting her aunt in Easton on the Eastern Shore. Julia wondered if she should think to try to contact her.

Julia paused at the door. "Do you think you could call Susan tonight—and tell her I'm fine?"

Linda nodded, frowning. "I guess I oughta. Poor Suse. Dr. Mike was a dream boss. I'll call her and went back to her desk.

Even though Linda was two years younger, Julia always felt as if the secretary were an older woman. She was certainly more experienced with men. Linda had had a string of beaux before the war, according to her stories. Now she was engaged to a day shift manager at a mental Can. Julia felt closer to Linda than to Susan, whose lack of experience and education had led to a willful rejection of the unknown.

In fact, Julia had to admit she disliked Susan. Once, Susan had refused an offer of a job to Julia, and Julia was sure it was because Susan thought she could get the disease from her. Julia tried to be nice to her, though. Why, just the other day Julia had taken care of Susan by bringing her when a smudged envelope from Susan to Dr. Lowenstein had been returned.

ling to her expectations. She'd been engaged at the end of the war to Tommy Rad  
written he was on his way home and then....

and then catastrophe. His parents had notified Helen to tell her Tommy was missin  
med dead. Some foolish parachuting exercise near Berlin that had gone awry. His  
t recovered. Helen hadn't recovered either. And the world marched on.

ometimes Julia resented that, too—the way people like Helen and Mrs. Wilcox  
ted to get over their sorrow, and the way their pain was never adequately acknowle  
world was cruel.

ulia walked from the research section into the main hospital, through hallways filled  
s and lab-coated doctors, the busy hum creating a background noise that comforte  
ts sense of urgency and importance. She nodded to some workers, said hello to others  
t man in frayed shirt, gave her a gentle smile as he passed. He, too, walked with a can  
ways seemed to be hurrying, as if to prove he could outpace any able-bodied ma  
ed when he came to her.

Did you hear about Dr. Mike?" he whispered, as if they shouldn't talk about it. Thi  
he poor soul who tended the research monkeys. His past experience with polio mad  
ally suited to the job. Like Julia, being afflicted with the disease meant he was in no d  
around it. Julia always felt a bit uncomfortable around him, though, because he assur  
arity with her that she didn't think appropriate. Just because they were both polios  
they shared anything else.

'et even as his friendliness irritated her, it also made her feel guilty. Did she shy away  
an because he was a polio, because she, like everyone else, only wanted to associate  
e who were whole?

I found him," she said. "His body."

His eyes widened. "Lord almighty!"

he looked at her watch as if in a hurry.

arl noticed her impatience. "Guess you need to get back to your boss." He spoke so  
irely heard him among the hubbub of the hospital.

Um-hmm," she lied and walked away.

everyone knew Dr. Jansen was demanding, even Earl, the monkey-tender. She'd w  
or five years, only the last one for Dr. Jansen, and she'd been grateful to land the job.

because Dr. Jansen was viewed as something of a tyrant, few envied Julia her positio  
nded long hours when he had reports to write and unreasonably accused her of forg  
; he'd never told her about in the first place. But she treated him with a patro  
ment, always ready to offer the soothing word that calmed his storms. Everyone th  
as a saint, but she was really just immensely relieved. Relieved to have this job "out  
" and grateful for her parents' agreement to let her take it. It was her father, after all  
came to pick her up when she had to work late, or when she was just too damned ti  
ne bus.

efore this job, she'd worked in a small legal office near her home. Just two lawyer  
-paneled second-floor suite on Belair Road, an office as smoky and claustrophobic  
life. The steep stairway to their office had been daunting at first, but she'd me  
nge daily, strengthening her resolve for further challenges. The work, mostly wills an  
transactions, had tired her faster than the stairs.

quickly during the war when the big plant was draped in camouflage and buzzing fly.

She hurried outside, past the hushed offices of hospital administrators and the noise of patients, into the lobby where the statue of Christ the Healer ignited both awe and indignation (she always felt He was looking into her heart and finding her lacking), out into the raw rain.

There was nowhere to sit. Oh well, she'd stay put. She'd much rather be out here than in the building. Already, the air was reviving her, making her feel alive. She stared at the rows of houses and the traffic beside the hospital. It made her feel important, all this activity at this place, as if she herself were involved in the healing that went on here.

After a while, a familiar voice called out behind her.

Julia!"

She turned and forced a smile, leaning on her cane. "Will!" Suddenly, she was so relieved he worried her. It was how the polio had started — with a soul-crushing tiredness.

Villiam Beschmann came toward her through the doors. Tall and awkward, with a noticeably receding hairline, Will wasn't what most women would call "a catch," but he was the one who'd caught her. With a sunny disposition and carefree attitude, he seemed to be exactly what she'd needed when she first met him. His war had consisted of playing poker and doing paperwork for an Army unit stationed in the Philippines after the bombs were dropped, giving him the status if not the history of a veteran.

Will now worked in the Hopkins accounting office, which was where she'd met him. She had gone there over two years ago to straighten out an accounting mix-up with a grant from the National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis. They'd been seeing each other for two years and were engaged for only a month. Her left hand was still ringless, however, because Will, in a moment of disappointment, had not proposed with ring in hand. He'd left that purchase for a time when they could shop together so he'd be sure to get what she wanted.

What she wanted was her fiancé to know what she wanted, to sweep her off her feet with romantic gestures. She sometimes wondered, to her shame, if she would have said yes so quickly if she knew he didn't have a ring. But Will was a good man. She shouldn't be choosy.

"I heard about the murder," he said in a stage whisper, his eyes darting to and fro to see if anyone had heard. Like Earl, he seemed to enjoy the drama of the incident.

"I'm not sure why everyone assumes it's a murder," Julia said. She looked toward the street to spy her father's Buick. "He could have just fallen on his own."

Will quickly shook his head. "It must have been awful for you, hon. Are you headed home? I should have called me. I would have driven you."

"Yes, she should have called him. But she craved solitude. She'd discovered a dead body and needed...something.

"My father's in the area," she lied, "so he's stopping by." She gave him a mock frown. "It's cold. You should go in." He was only in his shirt and tie. Will didn't always wear a suit to work, and this annoyed Julia. She didn't see how he expected to get ahead if he acted like someone capable of being in charge of things.

Lowenstein was kind of a cold fish, wasn't he?" Will pressed, ignoring her concern. Her mouth opened in surprise. Yes, Dr. Lowenstein had kept to himself. But he'd been a success. Susan, his secretary, liked him. Of course, one of the reasons she liked him was because

he saw a dark blue Buick with a scuffed right fender pull up to the curb below. Her father said, "I have to go, Will. He's here!" She moved her cane in the direction of the curb. "I'll call you this evening—after the news!" He squeezed her lightly on the arm before getting out. "Don't worry about anything."

As she made her way down the shallow steps, she had to shake off another pang of worry. Will didn't need to tell her not to worry. She had done nothing wrong. But even when she pushed aside worry, it pushed back in. She was the person to come across the body, after all. Maybe she'd be a suspect.