

# SCIENCE FICTION ADVENTURE MAGAZINE

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# LONG LIFE TO YOU, ALBERT!

BY WILLIAM MORRISON

ILLUSTRATED BY FREAS

Albert didn't feel so good. He didn't mind the wine loaded with strychnine—it even perked up his appetite—but somehow guns gave him shooting pains. When they began waking him up, it was time to see a doctor!

The frightening words that Albert Williams uttered after those first fifteen attempts to murder him had failed have since become classic in the annals, not of crime, but of science. At the moment, however, their only effect was to give renewed hope to his wife, Loretta, who had lived through the past weeks in a sick horror that had become hysterical despair, as time went on and Albert continued to live. When she heard those words, it began to seem as if Albert might possibly be killable after all.

His wife had nothing much against him personally. Albert was not, in her estimation, a beautiful hunk of man, but then

he wasn't very repulsive, either. And he didn't have any of those obnoxious habits that some of the husbands of her acquaintance had. He didn't belch freely at the dinner table, he didn't leave rings around the bath tub, he didn't dump his ashes on the rugs. It was simply that he was in the way.

She had married him to have somebody support her, and Albert had failed her. He had a job, all right, he would always have a job, but it wasn't a good one, and it would never be a good one. He couldn't support her well enough. Albert was one of the multitude that some writers called, "Little people."



Well, he was too little for her. Especially now that she had met Bob Meredith.

Bob would marry her if Albert were out of the way, she knew he would, because she would make him do it. Bob had money to burn, and to spend recklessly on her. She didn't know exactly what business he was in, or what racket—he was evasive about it, and she didn't try too hard to find out—but it was enough to keep him going in style. And even if he left her flat after a year or two, if he went to jail, was bumped off, or just picked himself up and ran away—all of these things, she knew, being definite possibilities—well, she'd have nothing to cry about. She'd be saving the jewelry he gave her, and she'd have enough to coast on while she picked out her next man. She still had her looks, as she reassured herself by a short inspection of the mirror, and she wouldn't have too much trouble. Only, she'd have to get rid of Albert first.

Divorce? That would take too long, was too uncertain. She wanted certainty and speed.

She began with poison. Every medicine chest is full of old remedies, long discarded, and hers was no exception. One bottle, still three-quarters full, contained strychnine in small

quantities. A teaspoonful would do no damage, even a tablespoon of the stuff would cause no more than slightly inconvenient pains. A half bottle or so, however—it would do no harm to try.

But the drug was bitter, and she'd have to put in something that would disguise the taste. Wine might do the trick—and even better would be that synthetic stuff that Albert brought home from the laboratory where he worked, a mixture of alcohol, sugar, and flavoring matter that tasted horrible enough, even without benefit of added alkaloid.

She found a bottle of the concocted wine, and that evening, when Albert came home from work, she was ready.

She met him at the door and took his hat and coat. She was, to all appearances, a very affectionate wife. "Have a nice day, dear?"

Albert grunted. "Kept me rushed," he complained. "New experiment."

"What did you have to do?"

"Lots of cleanin' up."

That was the main part of Albert's job. No research man he, not even the kind of assistant called a laboratory technician. He was just a helper, one of the men who did the dirty work without having to under-

stand too well what they were doing.

"I've prepared a nice supper."

"Don't feel hungry."

"You should have something to give you an appetite. I know exactly what, Albert," she said brightly. "That wine you brought home."

Albert was not the kind of man to notice nuances in her tone. He said, "Wine's kinda weak. How about a shotta whiskey?"

"We finished that bottle of rye, and I didn't have a chance to buy another. And you don't like Scotch. No, let's have wine, Albert. Let's celebrate."

"Celebrate what?"

"The fact that you come home to me every night and make me so happy," she said gaily. "Now, don't say another word. Here, I've got the wine all ready."

Albert wondered gratefully what he had done to deserve so charming and loving a wife. He said, "Okay. It's better than nothin'."

They lifted their glasses. Mixed with Albert's wine was a half bottle of strychnine-containing medicine. Still gay, Loretta said, "Long life to you, Albert!" And exactly as they did in those movies about Continental high-life, they clinked glasses.

Albert swallowed his wine in

one gulp, and made a face. "Tastes awful bitter," he said.

"It'll give you an appetite," she replied pleasantly.

And in fact, it did. As the meal progressed, Albert's appetite perked up. He ate like a horse.

Loretta waited. In the morning, still kind and loving, she asked how Albert felt. He felt fine. In the evening he still felt good.

Loretta gulped, and faced the truth. The strychnine hadn't made a dent in Albert's abounding vitality. What now?

The next day, Albert worked late, and she went out for a date with Bob. There was all the difference in the world between Bob and Albert, and the difference was not, to her mind, in Albert's favor. That reminded her again of what she was missing, and now she had no qualms. There was an old can of unused rat paste she had meant to throw out, but hadn't got around to. It contained phosphorus, and the label had dire warnings of what would happen to you if you swallowed it. The fact that it fumed in the air frightened her, and at the same time gave her confidence that it would be effective.

Opportunity offered the next day, when Albert relaxed in front of the television set to

watch his favorite three hours of crime programs. When he had his eyes glued to the set, he could eat anything without noticing what it tasted like.

She spread the rat paste on a piece of thinly sliced pumpernickel, covered it with jam, and gave the delicacy to her husband.

Albert ate the whole mess without lifting his eyes from the set. At one point she was horrified to see that the piece of bread was fuming, but Albert himself noticed nothing. There happened to be a couple of shootings going on, and not even a medium-sized earthquake would have induced him to take his eyes from the screen.

Nothing happened to Albert. Absolutely nothing. Loretta shuddered. The man was incredible.

She tried once more, using the powder from a heavy dose of sleeping capsules. She put the powder in a tasty beef stew, which she spiced heavily and fed him with her usual loving care.

Albert swallowed the stew and smacked his lips over it. Once again nothing happened.

By this time, Loretta was beginning to be frantic, and the next steps she took were rather silly. One night, while he was sleeping, she covered his

face with a pillow and leaned on it heavily for ten horrible minutes. Albert offered no resistance. When she removed the pillow, he scratched his jaw, as if it itched, and turned over on the other side.

She lay awake half the night, trembling, and thinking what to do about this fool husband of hers who absolutely refused to be killed. What kind of monster was he anyway, what kind of lunatic to persist in living when any normal man would by now have died at least three deaths?

Crossing the street with him one icy day, she intentionally slipped and pushed him in front of an approaching truck. The driver braked, but the truck skidded, and Albert was thrown thirty feet. The shaken truck driver almost fainted. But Albert picked himself up unhurt, annoyed only because his suit had got dirty. His lack of concern about himself was so complete that Loretta almost fainted.

From then on, throwing caution completely to the winds, she tried everything she could think of. Pretending to be playing a game with him, she waited until Albert took a bath, and then held his head under the water as long as she could. When she let him up, he didn't even pant for breath. Apparently he liked games. He didn't notice that

her own face was white with terror.

She knocked him out of a third floor window. Albert picked himself up at the bottom, unhurt. She waited another night until he was sleeping, and hit him over the head with a rolling pin. The rolling pin broke, and she picked up a kitchen knife and plunged it at his chest. The knife turned aside and tore a hole in the blanket.

Despair clutched at Loretta's heart. What was wrong with the fool? Why was he making her bungle things?

Finally, after several more attempts, all equally futile, she decided that only one instrument of death would do the trick—a revolver.

Revolvers were not easy to buy, however. Not if you were a respectable housewife. You couldn't go shopping for them the way you could for a table and chairs. There were all sorts of questions asked, and later, when Albert was found shot, the police might want to ask her about it. She'd have to get a revolver in some way that wouldn't arouse suspicion.

Here she decided that Bob could help her. And on their next date, she broached the subject. They were in his apartment, and it was getting late when she looked at the clock.

"I hate to leave you, Bob, Honey," she said. "But I have to get home."

Bob, Honey, yawned politely. "You don't want that cluck of a husband of yours to get any ideas. Better hurry."

"Oh, he couldn't get an idea if it came up and smacked him in the face. Bob, will you take me home tonight?"

"Look, Baby, I'm dead tired. Got an important deal tomorrow. I'll call up a taxi as usual, and pay the driver to take you home."

"But what if the driver—Honey, I've been reading in the papers about taxis. Did you know that some of the drivers are crooks?"

"You're crazy, Baby."

"No, really, Hon. And there have been so many robberies in our neighborhood the last couple of weeks."

"You oughtta move out of that dump you live in."

"Do you think I don't want to? But Albert—oh, it's no use talking about him."

"Then don't."

"I don't want to, really. But about going home—Honey, could you give me a gun or something? Just in case the driver or somebody tries to hold me up? And show me how to use it?"

"A gun?" He laughed. "You lay off those things, Baby."

"Just for tonight, Honey. I'll give it back to you next time I see you."

Honey was tired, and rather than argue, he gave in. Loretta got her gun.

That same night, as soon as she got home, she put it to the sleeping Albert's head. It was an insane thing to do. It would have been impossible later to convince the police that burglars had shot him, but Loretta had reached the point where she no longer cared about such trifles. Her moments of shrewdness were reserved for wheedling her husband or lover. Otherwise, she had no thoughts to spare. Come what might, she had to get rid of Albert.

She squeezed the trigger, and there was a series of deafening explosions.

Albert sat up, looking dazed, and put his hand to his head. "Guess I musta had a nightmare," he said. And then he added the phrase, the so satisfying phrase which for the first time gave her hope. "I don't feel so good." After that he promptly fell asleep again.

Bullets had an effect on him! thought Loretta gleefully. They left him not feeling so good. She would have to get more and try again.

For the first time in years she had a feeling of affection for

Albert. Why, he really wasn't such a monster! He was going to let himself be killed after all!

The rest of that night she slept well.

Albert, apparently, didn't. In the morning he was pale and drawn, his eyes bleary. "I don't feel so good," he told her again.

"You've just been working too hard, dear. All you need is a day's rest," she said. "You just stay here, instead of going to that nasty laboratory, and I'll fix you up a nice hot toddy and make you nice and comfy. By the way, dear, what hurts you? Your head?"

"I got pains. Shootin' pains."

Her heart leaped. *Shooting* pains—the bullets had worked.

But his next words puzzled her. "All over my body. I feel funny."

"Maybe you're coming down with the flu."

Her heart did a joyful somersault. Wouldn't it be just dandy if after all those attempts of hers to kill him had failed, a tiny little germ did the trick. Flu could very easily be followed by pneumonia, and pneumonia—only they had sulfa drugs now, and penicillin, and all those other things, and some nasty old doctor might interfere with her plans. She'd have to stop him from seeing one.



But Albert had one of his rare fits of stubbornness. He didn't feel so good, and there was no use taking chances. He was gonna see a doctor, and she could like it or lump it.

Loretta decided to like it. She went with him, playing her usual role of the kindly, solicitous wife. When the doctor called him in for an examination, she even wanted to go in with him. But the old pillpusher kept her out.

Not for long, however. After a while he wanted to talk to her. "Mrs. Williams, there's something strange about your husband. He says he doesn't feel so good, and I won't wonder."

"He isn't going to die, is he, Doctor?" asked Loretta hopefully.

"No, no, don't be afraid. I mean that there have been some unusual changes taking place in his body. Have you noticed anything peculiar in his behavior lately?"

"Why, no, Doctor. He acts the way he always did." Except, she might have added, that he's developed an exasperating talent for shaking off knives, poisons, and bullets.

"You're sure he's been the same as usual?"

He continued to insist, and Loretta was annoyed. And frightened. Did he suspect? Or

worse still, had he actually found out anything?

"Albert never changes," she said. "What's the matter with him, Doctor? Is it the flu? Last night he told me, 'I don't feel so good', but outside of that, there hasn't been a thing."

"No, it isn't the flu. It's something—well, to say that it's unusual would be putting it mildly. It's unprecedented."

Loretta looked around her. On a table lay a needle with a twisted end. She realized suddenly what must have happened. The doctor had tried to give Albert an injection of some kind and hadn't been able to do it. And then he had begun to wonder and ask questions. How much had he found out?

Nothing about her, she soon reassured herself. "Where do you work, Mr. Williams?" he asked.

"I work in a laboratory."

"Oh. You do research."

"Well, kinda. I'm not in charge, but I help. They were doin' some new experiments, and I helped out."

"What kind of new experiments?"

"Can't say as I understand for certain, Doc. Kind of x-rays, or somethin'."

"I'd better find out. What's the name of your laboratory?"

Finding out seemed to take a

long time. Albert and Loretta went home, and although Albert said he felt better, Loretta made him take good care of himself. Her reckless mood had given way to extreme caution. She didn't want anything to happen to Albert now, while the doctor was so interested in every little thing about him.

To Albert she said only that there was no use in taking chances. Albert looked at her with gratitude, and wondered again what he had done to deserve so excellent a wife.

The next day he went to work, despite all she could do to stop him.

She thought over the possibility of getting more bullets, and quickly decided not to try. Not now, anyway; she mustn't do anything that might seem suspicious.

As it turned out, more doctors than one were interested in Albert. And they weren't the only people, either. Soon the entire laboratory was buzzing about him. Albert had practically to stop working, although he was still permitted to draw his wages. They put him through test after test, with results that made a growing number of people more and more excited.

Loretta began to worry. The strain of those weeks when she had made one futile attempt

after another to kill Albert had told on her. She was often conscious now of her heart, beating more violently and more rapidly than a heart should. And now that things were going on which she didn't understand, she was never free from fear. What kind of man *was* she married to?

It was not until her suspense had risen to almost unbearable heights that the doctor explained things to her.

"Mrs. Williams," he said, "your husband is unique. The only man of his kind."

"But what did he do, Doctor?"

"Nothing, apparently. It's what's been done to him that's so important."

"What somebody did to him? You don't think I—"

"Now, don't rush me, Mrs. Williams. This explanation is a little difficult, and I must make it in the proper order. To begin with, then, let me reassure you. Your husband is in good health."

"Oh. That's—that's fine."

"Not only that. He is practically invulnerable to harm by any means we know of. Drugs, weapons, bacteria, viruses, radiation—apparently he can disregard them all."

"But why?"

"That we're not quite sure of. Like several other men at the laboratory, he was exposed to radiations of an unusual kind.

However, in the other men these radiations produced no lasting changes, either good or bad. For some reason which we cannot fathom, they did produce changes in your husband. The so-called 'shooting pains' he had were due to a late stage of these changes. The cells were finally settling down in their new form. You will be happy to know that the pains are now gone. We hope they will not return."

"I don't understand, Doctor. You say nothing happened to the other men?"

"Nothing we can detect. Perhaps at a critical moment your husband ate something of a special nature. Perhaps he took some drug, or a mixture of drugs. Perhaps he drank a special mixture some bartender made. We can only speculate, and try to duplicate the results in our laboratory."

"Duplicate—you mean that you're trying to do the same thing to somebody else?"

"Of course, Mrs. Williams. If we could only get some hint of what your husband ate and drank—"

A hint? she thought. I can give you plenty of hints. Without me you'd never think of them in a thousand years. You'd never guess Albert took strychnine, would you? And bread spread with rat poison and jam

—no, you'd never guess that. So that's what did it. Those rays in the laboratory—and the stuff I gave him. I sure picked the right time to try to kill him.

The doctor was waiting as if he expected some suggestion from her. Loretta swallowed hard, and said, "He didn't eat anything different from what he usually does, Doctor. But I don't understand—why is it so important? You mean, for the Army, so soldiers won't get hurt?"

"Not only for the Army. Mrs. Williams, do you realize what your husband's body can do? Not only can it resist drugs, weapons, and micro-organisms, it can withstand long periods of deprivation of food, drink, and air. From all the evidence so far, it can also repel the onslaughts of old age. Your husband, Mrs. Williams, is the only man in the world who will never get old, never die. Your husband, my dear lady, is immortal."

And I did it, she thought in terror. I tried to kill him, and now he's never going to die. I'll never get rid of him, I'll never be able to marry Bob. I'm going to be stuck with him for life—for centuries—no, he'll live that long, but I won't. I won't live long at all. I can tell, I won't live—I don't want to live

with him, I won't live with him—

Without even a sigh, Loretta dropped to the floor. The doctor bent over her in surprise and alarm, but she was already dead.

For Albert, it was a very sad and unenjoyable funeral. He was already famous in certain scientific circles, and his fame was to grow and grow, but nothing would ever make up for the loss of Loretta. Never again, he knew, would he have a wife like her, so kind and affectionate and thoughtful, a wife who loved him so. Never again would he have a wife to whom he would owe so much.

He could not, of course, live alone. He was too used to married life for that. So he took another wife, and stuck to her faithfully, even after she became old and gray, while he retained his youth. And after her he took another and another.

He was the only immortal, and he remained so. No research scientists ever thought of strychnine and rat poison and a slice of pumpnickel as the

missing ingredients in the formula for longevity.

On his five hundredth birthday they gave him an extra special party. Everybody in the whole world who counted was there. Interplanetary statesmen and continental politicians, of course, as well as nuclear and subnuclear physicists, and astronogasters mathematical psychologists, and planet sculptors and threedim movie stars, and space ship designers and pilots, and a whole building full of other people whose specialties he had never even heard of.

His wife was there too—his fourteenth was it, or his fifteenth? He had trouble keeping track of them. But he had no trouble remembering Loretta. Ah, there was a wife for you. The only wife he would ever regret. And when they raised their glasses in a toast: "Long life to you, Albert!" he realized that it was she who had said it first.

Tears dimmed his eyes. "I don't feel so good," said Albert, in his immortal heart a pain equally immortal.

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