

***EDWARD  
DYSON***

***AS LUCK  
WOULD  
HAVE IT***

**Edward Dyson**

# **As Luck Would Have It**

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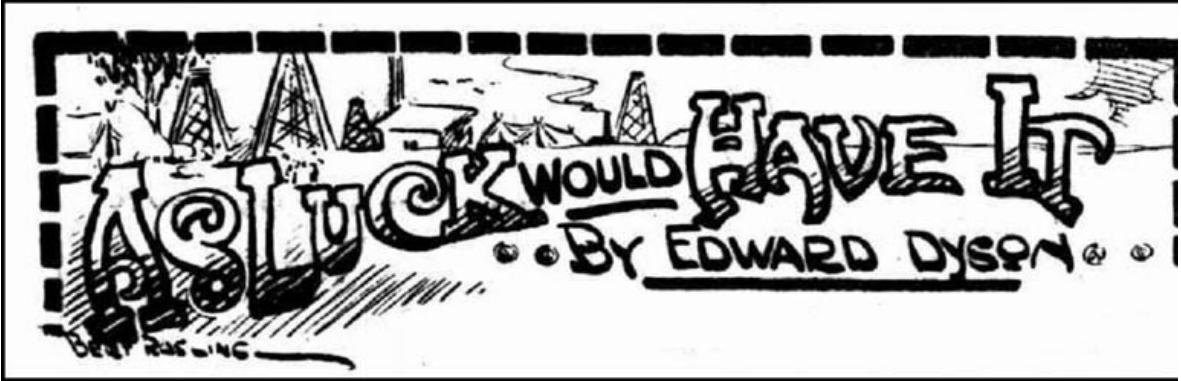
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# CHAPTER I.

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THE late-comer, homing at 2 a.m., sat on the edge of his bed, and made crapulous noises, regardless of inarticulate complaints from the three sleepers. There were three other beds in the room, a bunk against each wall: in each bunk a tired man rolled in an amorphous bundle amongst miscellaneous bedding.

"'Oh, Lieutenant Holland,' says she, 'I'm sure you are a hero.'" The young man whooped, and taking his military cap from his head, with a fine flourish, adroitly tossed it on to the toe of his left foot. Jerking off his collar, he cleverly ringed the other toe, shouting hilarious appreciation of his skill. "'My dear Captain,' she says, 'there is nothing I admire in a man like courage. My dear Captain,' says she, 'you really must come and see me.' Whoop!" Holland tore off his coat, and whirled it from him. The coat fell over the Baron's face, and the Baron, stifling in its folds, dreamt of a monstrous growth assailing him, and fought feebly in his sleep, making the noises a man makes with a bone in his throat.

"'Major,' she says, 'you are a charming man.' Inglis, sit up and listen. Damn you, your poor 'ink-slinger,' where are your manners? 'Oh! here's the darling Colonel telling me such stories,' says she, and she a big buck-up with the deadliest dark eye you ever saw in a human woman, and 'Colonel,' says she—Colonel! So help me Abraham, if I'd stayed another ten minutes I'd have been a General! Rapid promotion—what?" The soldier threw his shirt aloft with a

barracker's howl of rapture. The shirt settled on the battered and superannuated gas bracket in the centre of the room, and hung there like a poor, suicidal ghost in the dim light cast by the heavily smoked and intolerably smoking oil lamp.

"In the name of the ancient devil shut up, and go to bed!" Inglis was thrashing about among his welter of blanket, Wagga rug, and articles of daily wear. "What the hades do you mean by coming home at this ungodly hour, and hooting like a zoo, dragging respectable people from their sleep?"

Robert Holland took hold of himself, he became very cool, and remorselessly articulate. "Jimmie," he said—"little Jimmie Inglis, the small weekly sheet you now edit was always the dullest, and most stupid and illiterate of its awful sort, but I will say this of you, old man—under your able editorship it has not deteriorated." He uttered another unmeaning yell.

"Go to sleep, you besotted idiot!" from the third bed.

"Ello, ello! 'Sthat you, Fryer, my boy. Fryer, why will you draw lil' women who look like enraptured spooks? You ought to have been with me to-night. God love you, you all ought to have been with me to-night. 'A party in a parlor, all silent and all damned.' Not a bit like it. A real, rousin', rorty shivoo. And she says to me, 'Colonel, you're just the loveliest soldier ever. I'm sure you've got fifty medals,' she says. Fryer, you should see her—solid as a house, a pack of black hair, and an eye—pew! You'd never draw attenuated and beatific visions for women. Oh, she's the fruit—a real, ripe mango. Mangos for Bobbie. Whooroo!"

"Oud!" The Baron had awakened, subdued his monster, and was sitting up. "Oud heem."

Three scant shirts and three pairs of graceless legs descended upon Lieutenant Robert Holland. He was taken up bodily, and tumbled without ceremony through a door into the kitchen of their bachelor establishment, his tick and his blankets were thrown on top of him, the door was closed and locked, and three weary Bohemians dived back into their bunks, and slept again, quite regardless of the muffled eulogies of a certain overpowering dame with a billow of black hair, coming from the depths of the bedding in the back room.

Fryer was first up in the morning; Fryer always was first up. Temperamental defects and certain proficiency in the handling of foods, called cooking for the lack of a more accurate definition, had marked him out immediately after the organisation of their small fraternity as head housekeeper, cook, and comptroller. He found Holland sitting desolately among the ruins of his bed, his arms embracing his shins, his chin resting on his knees. No, you couldn't do it, but Lieutenant Holland was 26, and thin and limber, and the attitude was easy to him.

"What happened, Fod?" Fryer's Christian name was Hilary, and that was reason enough for calling him Fod, which, as I understand it is a corruption of Fred. Holland did not wait for explanations. "Is there a bottle?" he queried plaintively.

"There's the taste and the smell in one that was opened yesterday," answered Fryer, with grudging sympathy.

"Then for the love of heaven, old man!"

Fryer produced the bottle, and poured beer into a handleless cup. At the Hut all cups so crippled were promoted—they became tumblers. Holland drank with the air of a man taking his medicine, and groaned aloud.

"Why do I do it, Fod?" he asked miserably.

"That happening to be the peculiar kind of idiot you are."

"No, no, no!" the soldier rocked his head on its pedestal of knees, winced, and desisted. "After the first drink I hate it, but one goes on." He groaned again, and curling down on the tick dragged the blanket about him.

"Here, here!" cried Fryer, "you've got to get out of this. I can't have my kitchen all littered up. Hike!" He look Holland by one leg, and dragged him towards the door. Holland clutching his bedding, and submitting unconcernedly.

"How did I get here, anyhow?" moaned Bob, in transit.

"You were chucked out for being a common nuisance. There was something about a piratical dame with wild eyes and a tussock of black hair. Fryer had dragged the sufferer and his bedding half into the adjoining room. He left him there in the doorway, an impediment to traffic, and resumed his domestic duties, lighting a fire on top of the colonial oven in the Hut's large, battered kitchen fireplace.

"A woman?" said Holland. He had jerked himself on to his hands, and looked reproachfully at Fryer, as if he suspected that young man of letting him in for this. "Not a woman, Fod?"

Fryer nodded. He was filling the kettle at the kitchen sink. "Oh, yes, and all very fine and large, I gather. You were full of her—her and other things."

"Lord, yes, I remember—I remember. She called me 'Colonel.' Great Gohannas! I asked her to go to the theatre, and I haven't a bean." He was staring wildly at Fryer, in his eyes a piteous appeal.

"No," said Fod determinedly—"not if your tongue was hanging out a yard."

"But I asked the woman to go. I even mentioned supper. Fod?"

Fryer banged the kettle on the smoking pile of wood. "See here," said he, "there's just five and ninepence between the household and defalcation and dishonor, and not haporth of credit for us in a whole cityful."

"But I've got to get the money."

"And a durned good thing, too. You'll have to work."

"Work! Work with a head like seventy leagues of flaming desert, and ten thousand policemen doing a route march through it, every man Jack with spiked boots on. Work!" Bob howled at the thought of it, fell face downward in his tick again, and murmured faint evil words.

"Yes, work," continued Fryer relentlessly. "There's that war story for Macalpin. I wonder he gives you even a look in after the way you've treated him. You promised that yarn faithfully for last issue. You swore on your honor as an officer and a gent it would be in the office in good time for this issue, and there's ten lousy slips of it fluttering about in the front room grate at this moment, and my drawings hopelessly damned under the couch, where I chucked 'em yesterday week. If you'd finish that story I could collect on the illustrations, and you could lift the three quid promised to you. Get to work, you lazy cow."

Holland moaned. "A head like ninety miles of bush fire!" said he.

"Serve you gaudy well right, too. Because he's a little gimp hero in a pretty uniform, stuck all over with bits of tin, he must get blithered every time he is asked to be toy lion at a wild tea fight in South Yarra."

"You know, Fod, I can't get to you in my present delicate state of health," said Bob feebly. "You know perfectly well I cannot rise and grind your skull on the hearth stone, and you presume upon it."

"What is it the matter is?" The Baron had come through from the sleeping apartment. He stood in the small of Holland's back, leaning on the door jamb, yawning. "Someone is hurt der feelinks of der bolt soltcher boy, der hero of all Africa, der loof of all der laties."

The Baron was a simple Pole by birth and inclination, the title was purely complimentary. He was a short, tubby man of thirty, and played a deafening brass instrument in a theatre orchestra for a bare living. The piano in the front room was his, he was the responsible man in the presence of the landlord. By reason of his steady billet and the financial stability a regular wage conferred he carried more weight in the Hut than his frivolous character, his limited inches, and his Dago-like indifference to Anglo-Saxon conventions could be held to support.

"Come down," groaned the lieutenant—"come down, you despicable Pole, you poor stick, or—or——" Bob made a threatening movement.

The Baron stepped down, one large, splay foot in the lieutenant's hair. "All ride, all ride," he said. "Eeef you weel

mislays your bed all oafers der house like a sauccpicious cat, what iss it you expect but to get der tail trod on to?" The Baron stood grinning at Bob, an elfin figure, like a podgy Thor minus the whiskers, in copious pyjamas that had seen long service, and were patterned like a hotel wallpaper, the nether section of which he held on with a deft twist of the left hand. The grin faded, and a touching sympathy settled on his singularly mobile visage. "Dit you giff der poor boy some pier, Fryer?" he asked. He seized the bottle, drained its remaining gill into the crippled cup, and administered the dose, raising Bob's head after the manner of a fond mother with her child. Bob mourned in profound self-commiseration.

"That's right, make a mummy's boy of it. Pet it instead of putting in the boot. I didn't get a wink of sleep through his amorous howlings. Who's going to hold my hand, and comfort me with strong drink?" It was Inglis, feather-headed, bedraggled, bitter with his bed, but reluctant to leave it.

"Ah, well," pleaded the Baron, "we wass all young once or twice." He raised Bob. "Der was hydropathic cures for der ill dot man endures. I treat you mit der Melbourne water supply." He helped Bob out, seated him in the large, sunken sink under the tap by the kitchen door, and turned the tap on his head.

Bob took his bath like a Briton. "Soap us, won't you, old man?" he pleaded, looking out through the curtain of spray. The faithful Pole produced a half bar of yellow soap, and setting to work on Bob converted him into a snow-white, saponaceous mass on to which the Yan Yean played again, and washed out a new man. Fryer made shrill, house-wifely complaint about the splash, and a rude little boy thrust his

head in at the back gate, and passed familiar and derisive remarks, but Bob arose, a warrior refreshed, and already the prospect of having to entertain the comely widow, and the necessity of earning the wherewithal by cumbersome literary effort had lost half their terrors. Jan Strikowski supplied a vigorous massage with a rough towel, and then washed his own visible parts gingerly in half a pint in a tin.

"Dot iss 'ow eet iss," explained Jan Strikowski, "virtuous men who dreenk water oscape de necessidy of unpleasant external excess."

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## CHAPTER II.

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THE breakfast menu was porridge, toasted bacon, scones, and coffee, quite excellently handled. Holland came again for the porridge, he begged to be favored with a little more bacon.

"That's the curse of strong drink," commented the editor with ironical compassion, "it robs a man of appetite for wholesome fare."

"The man needs plenty of sustenance who is about to engage in continuous intellectual effort," mourned Bob. "I haven't the faintest idea what the devil I am going to do with that hero of mine. Where did I leave him, Fod?"

"Fighting like a tiger under five Boers."

"Only five? Thank God it wasn't eleven. I must get him out of his difficulties, and wind him up triumphantly, with a wife."

"I suppose he is a Scott," continued Inglis, "and you give him the Gaelic? Anything that makes a noise like a Scotchman will go with Malcolm Macalpin."

"There blows the spleen of the detested contemporary."

Jimmie Inglis bit deep into a buttered scone, and snorted his contempt. His paper, "The Native," was a threepenny society organ, devoted to frivolous comment on current affairs and conspicuous people; Macalpin's "Adviser" was a solid 6d. journal, with a reputation for sound judgment in matters of politics and finance, and affecting a serious and superior tone in literature.

Malcolm Macalpin of the "Adviser" claimed to have discovered that brilliant young literateur, Lieutenant Robert Holland, author of "Letters to Nobody," "The Test of Battle," "The House on the Veldt," "An Uncommon Soldier," "A Brother Boer," etc., etc. As a soldier in South Africa, Holland had suddenly developed an unaccountable itch for writing. Having no one to write to when all his comrades were writing, Bob conceived the idea of his series of letters addressed to no one, letters full of incident, facts of camp life, feelings in battle, vital touches breathing the hopes, the fears, the sufferings, joys, triumphs, and the anguish of a simple soldier, a dirty, hungry, ragged soldier wet from torrential rains, or burnt crisp by an African sun.

The stuff rang true, it was intimate, it dragged the reader in, made him party to the whole business, and through it all sped a weft of elfish humor, robbing of sordidness the fighting man's weary waitings in the muddy slums of war, beset by a hundred needs, beleaguered by infinitesimal enemies that took him under his shirt. It left a sense of all the horrors and terrors, the trials and tribulations, as felt by a resolute and somewhat ribald spirit rising superior to everything.

Then as Bob looked at the stuff he received a call—it must be printed. He could never quite rest until it was printed. Holland had been a miner in Westralia when the summons to arms reached him, with as much idea of ever adventuring into authorship as he had of taking wings and singeing his pate at the noonday sun. He had an ordinary, Victorian State-school, sixth-class education, plus a passion for books. Inditing a brief letter to an old-time mate had

been a source of extreme mental annoyance to him, yet after a few months' actual experience of war he felt the impulse of authorship, not merely stirring within him but raising an insistent hulabaloo, demanding the satisfaction of paternity. It was no new and peculiar thing, he had found a number of his comrades taking feverishly to the pen after big events, as though great emotion must find relief only in adequate expression.

The "Letters to Nobody" had been sent to the "Adviser" by post. He chose the "Adviser," because he had once or twice read out-of-the-ordinary articles and stories in its pages; Editor Macalpin published them, with an occasional benediction. They were liked, and when eventually Bob turned up in the "Adviser's" outer office, with the manuscript of his first story. "The Test of Battle," in his hand, Macalpin himself came forth with an affectionate greeting. The "Test of Battle" was satisfactory.

"We must have peectures for this, Holland," said the editor. "I'll gi' you worrd to Hilary Fryer. Stand over him man, see the young rascal doesna fob you off wi' mere slapdash. Choose your own subjects, and get three gude, honest illustrations, wi' the gust o' life in them. Fryer can do it if he will."

Holland found Hilary Fryer at the "Hut," Fryer received him in shirt, vest, and boots. Fryer, though no Scot, had a Caledonian detestation of trousers. His first act on returning to their bachelor habitation after a visit to the city was to tear off the detested garment, and emancipate his legs. He had read the "Letters to Nobody," and liked them. He took on the story with enthusiasm.

"It's all-right stuff," he said, after he and the author had chased through the slips together. "That incident of the old woman and the canary makes a fine picture." He had a square of Bristol board pegged to his drawing board, his pencil was already busy roughing out the idea.

And that was Lieutenant Robert Holland's introduction to the "Hut." The "Hut" was a little, old, four-roomed, weatherboard cottage, tremulous at the knees, shaky in the roof, literally held on its feet by the interlacing vines that smothered the place. It was set far back in a narrow strip of wild garden between the sheer brick walls of modern pretentious buildings, and had escaped condemnation at the hands of the authorities by a miracle. Vines roofed in the space between the back rooms and the neighboring house on the left, and through these vines in the season two giant mulberry trees dropped their fat, black fruit. The "Hut" stood in a somewhat pretentious suburb, just through the Fitzroy Gardens, and since coming into the hands of its present tenants had afforded more or less shelter to every vagrant young scamp in local journalism, every homeless poet, artist, musician, and actor. It was warmed with congenial feeling, and lit with the spirit of youth, and although the fare was sometimes meagre, and the furniture was a jumble of rubbish, lame chairs, and decrepit tables, with Jan Strikowski's bright new piano loaded with books, half-burnt candles, cigarette ash, hats, and, possibly, boots, standing out in aggressive dignity, there was a kind of happiness to be found there that existed nowhere else on earth.

On the occasion of Bob's second visit to the "Hut" he met Inglis and Jan, and helped to eat one of Fryer's amazing

meals contrived most dexterously, and all of a sudden, it always seemed, out of the limitless disorder of that vagabond kitchen. Here and now he sampled Fod's speciality, the delicious roast lobster which alone might have served to invest the "Hut" with fragrant and grateful memories.

Holland already was envying the three their happy home life. Straight from the misfortunes of war and the vicissitudes of ill-ordered camps, there was nothing in the menage at the "Hut" he cared to object to, and much that made it highly desirable to a lonesome youth in a strange place. But it was Jimmy Inglis put the matter to him.

"I say, Holland," said the journalist, "what about your coming and pigging in with us here?"

Bob flashed, "To tell the truth," he confessed, "I've thought of it more than once, but hadn't the cheek."

"Don't be a damn fool," said Inglis curtly.

"Der wass Gus Glover," said the Baron helping Bob to beer, "but a too nice girl got a hold of heem, and convert heem to dark suits and pointed patend leather shoos der toes of which he sharpens effery mornink. Now he iss marriet, und we are lonesome."

"It we are to work together it will be ever so much more comfortable to live together," said Fryer. The meeting was unanimous.

Bob was touched. "It's blasted good and very friendly of you all," he said. "I've never had anything in the shape of a home since I was a nipper."

"Eet iss settle then," Jan offered a hand. "Enter into der home adobt der family."

Hands were shaken all round, a toast of fealty was drunk, and Bob became one of the society of the small commune, a commune of the kind that asks so little of its members and gives so much, a commune we are all glad to have belonged to, though none would be content to return to it perhaps.

Soon after breakfast on the morning following his meeting with Mrs. Longmore, Bob went sadly but resolutely to work, collected the opening slips of his new story out of the front room grate, and with a wet towel to cool his brow, and tie his mind down to the matter in hand, forged slowly ahead. He had a neat, natural gift for story telling, a true sense of character, and an impulse of honest workmanship he could not evade. The tale was told by noon. Fod fished his illustrations from under the ruined couch, furbished them up with a crust, and Bob dashed off to the "Adviser" office to collect.

In response to eager solicitations and specious arguments, with which he was not unfamiliar, Macalpin paid cash down, and Bob returned to the cottage, with Fryer's money and the amount of his own contribution to the weekly expenses.

"Which leaves me just two quid to entertain the bounteous widow," said he. "Can it be done?"

"We entertained nine people here one night, including a fat grass widow," said Fryer reassuringly, "and it cost us every penny we had—seven and elevenpence."

So Bob went off in uniform, with only minor misgivings. He was back home before midnight, and finding all his friends in bed entered with the greatest care, undressed in perfect silence, and went to bed.

"'Sthat you, Bob?" from Jimmie's bed.

"Yes, it's me," Bob replied, not more grammatical than most of us out of business hours.

"What's the matter—are you sick?"

"No, no I didn't, want to disturb you."

"Whenle this sudden gust of virtue?"

Holland offered no reply. There was silence for ten minutes, and then Bob: "I say, Inglis."

"Huh?" out of the thickness of half-sleep.

"I say, Fod—Baron."

Two grunts and vague stirrings in the bunk opposite, "Well, well, what is it?" testily from the occupant.

A brief pause, and Bob spoke again, spoke in deep contrition. "It seems I asked her here."

"Her—who? What d'yeh mean?"

"Her—the widow, Mrs. Longmore. I asked her to pay us a visit at the 'Hut.' She is coming to-morrow."

"A woman coming here to-morrow! Suffering mothers!" The howl was from Fod.

"Yes. She's—she's bringing her beautiful daughter Miriam."

The other three were up in their beds, snorting as one indignant bachelor.

"What in thunder and hail do you think we are going to do with your widow and her beautiful daughter, Miriam in this den?" demanded Inglis.

"The fact is I asked her the night of the party, when I was two-thirds full. At any rate she says I did, and of course I couldn't contradict the woman to her teeth. I had been

talking about you all, saying how bright and fine you were, and all that—writers, artists, musicians."

Further grunts of disgust out of the darkness, and the Baron: "Here iss a musician poorer than der orkan grinters—they can afford to keep monkeys."

"Of course she was deeply interested; and full of curiosity concerning these dear artists and writers."

"It's to be a course in natural history. Why the devil don't you take the woman to the Zoo?" inquired Inglis.

"Of course I'm awfully sorry, but if you knew her you wouldn't mind. A big, downright, frank sort of scoundrel—you'd be at home with her in ten seconds."

"And the beautiful daughter Miriam?" hinted Fod.

"I haven't seen her yet. She was away at some place they have in the country. The mother asked me if she might bring her. You'll just love her, Fryer. She's your ideal Carmen."

"What, the beautiful daughter Miriam?"

"No, the mother. They've got some sort of a place of business in the city—appear to be very comfortably off."

"And you propose to entertain the rich middle class here in this crib? Where will you sit your society friend, on the three-legged couch of wire mousetraps, or in the big armchair that lets its occupants through to the floor?"

"I suppose I have taken a liberty. I'll contrive to put her off somehow."

"Ah-h, shut up!" said Fryer. "Are we a push of greasy cheese-mongers that we cannot entertain a couple of ladies without plush suites and cut glass? We'll make your friends comfortable, Bob."

"Then for the love of Lucifer, what's all the cackle about?" demanded Jimmie.

"Der one ting I haff always say is wrong mit us iss der lack of congenial female siciedy," said the Baron.

"Thank you, boys, you're all so dam decent," said Bob.

Three young men snored vigorously.

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## CHAPTER III.

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MRS. LONGMORE was coming to the evening meal on Sunday, and that involved a complete house cleaning, for the reason that the front room of the Hut was the only possible apartment for social entertaining, and the back room, the kitchen, was the one room in which a meal could be eaten. To reach the kitchen from the parlor you must pass through the spare room and the bedroom, the Hut having no passage.

"Let's serve it out under the trees," Bob had suggested. "And have great, juicy mulberries falling in the ladies' hair, and dropping plunk into the soup," replied Fryer. "No, there is no escape. A housewife's work is never done. We'll have to smoothe out and smarten up those beds, and make them look something less like an aboriginees' dump, and fake a dressing table with a couple of kerosene cases and that old window curtain."

"Suppose I drop in and see what I can borrow from the girls?" suggested Inglis.

It was a happy idea. Inglis had a sister living in free spinsterhood with a couple of girl chums, art students like herself, and a visit to their high Olympian apartments in the city produced three quilts, adequate disguise for the kerosene case dressing table, and a rug that covered the worst spots on the bedroom floor. Looking lovingly over their re-furnished dormitory, the boys were impressed by its civilised air.