

# **THE ASHBOURNE FAMILY SAGA**

## **CHAPTER XXVIII**

**and**

### **Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month,**

### **October, 2025.**

It was the day after the terrible railway accident on the embankment outside Armagh, somehow George had stumbled back to the “Marshal Schomberg” hotel. The news of the accident and fatalities had spread fast, and the staff and fellow patrons as usual fell into two groups. There were those who convinced themselves that George would prefer to be left alone to mourn the loss of his wife, whilst a few tried to do their best to provide some form of diversion and comfort. A chap in a loud yellow check jacket and trousers who spoke with a pronounced accent of the south slapped George on the back in an entirely friendly way and gave him a large tumbler of Jameson whiskey. George only discovered the amber coloured nectar to be Irish whiskey later, and that his benefactor hailed from the County of Tipperary. The Irishman spoke so fast with an accent that he found most difficult to comprehend, but he was friendly enough, talked almost nonstop and the broken-hearted widower was only too grateful to be relieved of thinking.

The Englishman was in the bar of the hotel, they had sat him in the most comfortable chair, one which he would not fall out of and had he been watching he would have noticed the level of whiskey in the bottle gradually going down as his glass was refilled every time the restorative fluid drained away into his throat. Time passed as the distraught and now dishevelled widower lapsed into unconsciousness still in the same winged armchair. He awoke next morning with the sunlight streaming through the partly drawn curtains with a blinding headache, the very worst he had ever experienced.

Waking from intoxicated sleep was not exactly a pleasant experience as the memory of the previous day's events flooded back into his consciousness, and then he began to wonder what had happened and how he had arrived in bed. He had no recollection of the previous evening save for the gentleman in yellow check clothes and whiskey, but here he now lay partly undressed and he could just make out his clothes neatly folded in a nearby chair. His head hurt so much he preferred not to move. His head did not just hurt, there were two railway platelayers, big strong muscular men beating his brain with sledgehammers, each blow rocking what remained of his brain. When he opened his eyes he had a limited view of the partly drawn curtains at the window through which there was a stream of sunlight illuminating particles of dust performing an Irish jig. He closed his eyes.

How long he lay there he had no idea, it could have been five minutes or five hours he did not care, perhaps he drifted off to sleep, but he did hear a gentle tap on the room door and a female voice asking if she could come in. In a dazed state at first he thought it was Emma, then quickly realised the voice belonged to someone else. The riddle was swiftly solved as the bar maid or rather the maid of all work entered. One look at the prostrate hotel guest was enough.

“Oh dear, you do look a mess, too much of the hard stuff last night, but then I'm not

surprised. Madam will know just what's good for you. 'Ave you back on yer feet again and right as rain in no time, that she will!' And with that promise she gently closed the door and was gone.

It was not long before Madam the Landlady of the "Marshal Schomberg" appeared with a medicine bottle and spoon in hand.

"Well now we can't have this can we now!" She exclaimed. "We'll have to see what we can do about you. I've brought you just the thing to make you better, it may not taste very good but by Saint Patrick and all the saints it'll do you the world 'o good." And without pausing to await the patient's reaction she poured a measure into the spoon while seated on the bed beside him and with an imperious command of "Open wide." She poured the spoon full down his throat.

"There now." She said. "That wasn't so bad was it? You lay quiet now and get some rest, you've had a very bad shock, and it'll take a day or so to get over it. Just you lay still, sleep's the best cure." And with that she was gone.

George slept for a few hours but when eventually he awoke he did feel very much better and the pain in his head was not there anymore. There was warm water on the washstand with which he cleaned himself and shaved, and feeling a new man, he carefully dressed and went down the stairs to the hotel reception. There were voices in the bar, but the smell of alcoholic beverage made him feel quite nauseous and finding Mrs. McCready the Landlady he thanked her profusely and let her know he would be back in about half an hour.

"Will you be 'aving dinner today, sir?" She enquired to which she received George's answer in the affirmative.

"That's good. Mr. O'Shanahan, your good friend from last night will be too."

George walked out of the hotel into a cold wind blowing across the country from the distant Atlantic and discovered that he was far less steady on his feet than he had expected. He took a turn on the common, a large area of open grassland with a scattering of deciduous trees and very few cottages in sight. The open space and freedom from human contact felt good at that moment, just a few sheep grazing and some geese neither of which took any notice of him. He would have to decide what to do next and the priority of action. He must write home to let them know what had happened, preferably before they read about the awful accident in the newspapers. A funeral would have to be arranged in Ross or Weston-under-Penyard not Ireland, transport of Emma's body, and what had he overlooked, there must be something? A jumble of thoughts crowding in on him, no – one thing at a time, the letter home first, and with that he began retracing his steps to the hotel.

It was nearly two hours later when he returned to the "Marshal Schomberg" to find Liam O'Shanahan waiting for him. That evening the grieving widower learnt the name of his new friend of the yellow check suit, and of his passion for Irish whiskey, his love of the southwest especially County Tipperary and the dramatic coast including Bantry Bay. What Liam wisely chose to omit was his liking for the pretty attractive and shapely lasses of the region. He rightly judged it better to not mention such matters; after all the grieving widower had just seen his wife killed.

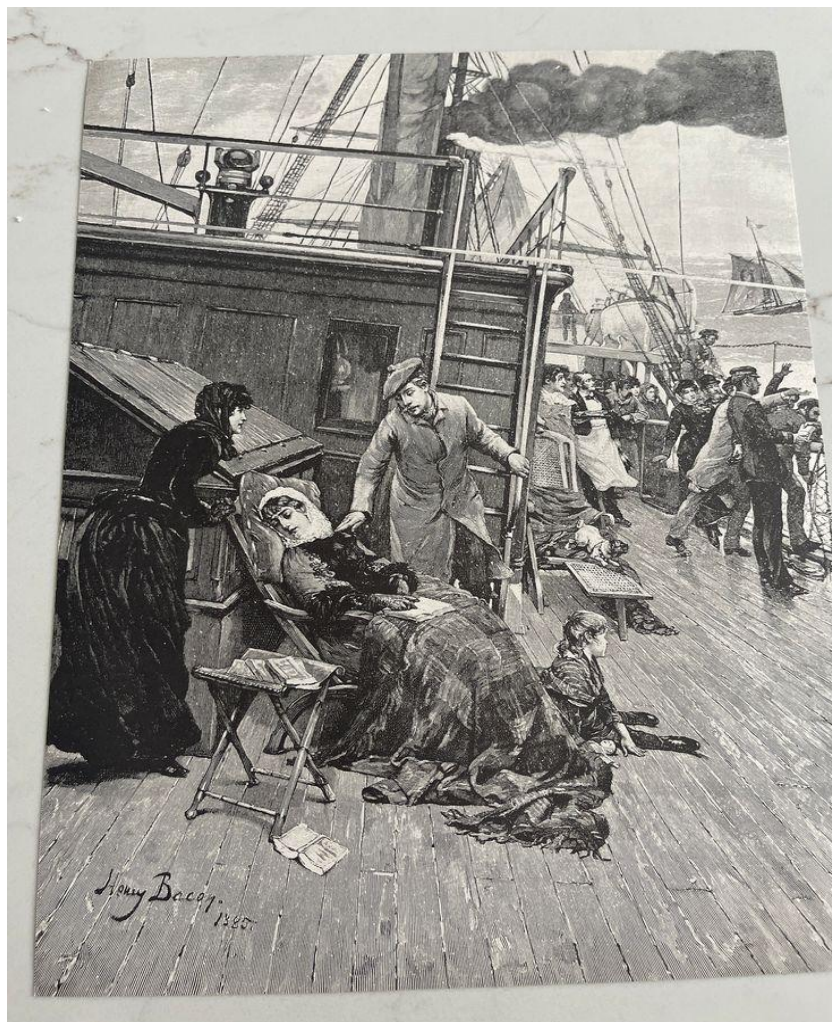
With some difficulty George managed to pull himself together as there were important matters to be attended to. He formerly identified Emma or rather Emma's corpse and

completed an application for her remains to be transported to England. Carriage was also arranged, and George would travel with the coffin to Belfast, then a packet steamer to Holly Head and finally by train, the London & North Western Railway to Birmingham, and via the “Great Western” to Hereford and Ross.

The nightmare would not leave him, in the company of others especially Liam, it faded into the background, and would leave entirely, but sleeping was particularly difficult, and even with the help of a sleeping draft the sound of the children’s screams in extreme pain would not depart. Neither would the vision of Emma lying amongst the debris of the horrendous accident with the section of gas lighting pipe sticking out of her body where the impact of wooden railway carriages and a steam engine had driven it into her heart.

The return journey to Western-under-Penyard had been relatively uneventful although the letters George had obtained from the various railway companies helped, especially with a particularly unhelpful guard at Holyhead who declared he would not allow “a corps in his Guard’s van.” George pointed out to the railway employee that the said guard’s van was the property of his employer before producing the “L&NWR’s” letter at which the man backed down disgruntledly. It was the home coming which George dreaded most or rather having to tell his two sons that their mother would not be coming back to them. Alfred the eldest was only three years of age whilst his younger brother, Charles, passed his second birthday anniversary on the 29<sup>th</sup> April and was thus two years of age. Emma had been only twenty-three year of age when she died, and the grieving husband remained wracked with sorrow as he remembered how Emma had seemingly changed after the birth of Charles. Could he have done more to support and cherish her, he had not been very understanding he now thought, and although the demands of business had preoccupied his mind, he could have been more understanding. Uppermost in his mind and memory remained the happy and contented countenance she displayed in the carriage with the excited children, their faces eager with excitement, until that is the coaches began their decent to destruction rolling back down the gradient. It was a living hell from which he could not escape.

It had taken rather longer to finalise arrangements, obtaining the necessary authorisation and the ecclesial authorities in Hereford had been particularly slow and pedantic asking questions to which they already had the answers if only they had read George’s correspondence. It was over three weeks before George departed the Emerald Isle with his fateful consignment and Wednesday the 10<sup>th</sup> of July proved every bit the harbinger of a deterioration of the weather. Gone were the warm sunny day of June, and as the day progressed the weather worsened until on the ferry the rain fell in sheets, or stair rods as the passengers thought. Beyond the protection of the moles the swell took all but the most



### **George comes to the rescue.**

experienced sailors by surprise, and a lady who had not been looking too happy suddenly collapsed on the boat deck. She was escorted to a chair/bed and George who happened to be nearby obtained a rug to keep her warm and away from the worst of the weather, the chair being positioned in the lee of a deck house leading to the bridge. The other passenger's attention was mercifully distracted by the departure of the pilot cutter returning to Belfast on the starboard bow. There was another lady dressed in black whom the helpful young gentleman took to be either the distressed lady's companion or maid though he was later to discover she was neither but a slightly older cousin.

George, who was much taken with the distressed young lady's beauty immediately set about procuring a small glass of restorative cognac, and a few sips at a time seemed to restore her colour and revive her senses. The young gentleman remained with the ladies until they landed at Holyhead when he thought it wiser to leave them to go their own way, after all he had a rather bulky casket to retrieve from the hold and arrange for it to be loaded onto the London train. However, before parting the ladies, now fully restored, thanked him profusely for his help and having discovered that they both resided in Hereford, George obtained their permission to call on them to ascertain that the former temporary invalid remained in good health.

The young man thought no more of the matter, having to arrange the transfer of the very heavy coffin onto the passenger train, it being lead lined in view of the summer heat and to protect against the stench of a decomposing corpse. There was nothing of note during the remainder of the journey although crossing the Irish Sea had taken longer than anticipated and he decided to leave the coffin in the left luggage office and resume his journey the following day. Arriving in Ross he had the casket transported to the carriage works and

the following day he called on his works manager in the early morning to ensure safe storage, thence he made his way to the Waterloo Monumental Works of Alfred William Ursell, the founder of the stone masonry business which had been established only four years earlier in 1885 when Alfred Ursell had been only twenty-five years of age. A tomb was ordered to be fashioned in red slate, a much harder and more durable material than Herefordshire Sandstone or Forest of Dean stone. The cost was considerably more but George assured Mr. Ursell that he did not mind and that it was to be installed in St. Mary's church graveyard when completed.

The family had taken up temporary residence in Ross whilst the remodelling of their house in Western-under-Penyard was in progress. In late October of 1888 George had agreed to a tenancy of a house at the top of Wye Pitch (now Wye Street) for a period of six months extendable at the Tenant's option. The building and decoration works had proceeded even better than they had expected and now in July 1889 were almost complete. They would be returning to their own house within the month.

George now called at their temporary residence to be greeted by an anxious family busy plying him with questions only he who had been there knew the answers. There was much sadness at the death of Emma though they already knew from George's letters. But now he had another matter to attend to, Emma's parents at the Rectory. George's apprehension and foreboding of the meeting proved to be well founded. His mother-in-law when the maid announced his arrival merely said that she had better show him in, I suppose. The forthcoming interview was equally frosty. He was received in the parlour where "Madam" seated in regal majesty surveyed George with a facial expression suggestive of a foul smell.

"And to what do we owe the honour of your undoubtably precious time?" Commenced the Rector's wife.

George had expected a difficult meeting but the opening salvo from his Mother-in-Law confirmed and justified his apprehension. He seemed to be standing before her resembling a naughty schoolboy literally "on the carpet" caught playing truant or reading in bed after "lights out" a situation he despised. He was not going to allow the insult to go unchallenged, but for the moment considered discretion the better part of valour.

"I have called to pay my respects, dear lady." He began, but got no further.

"Do not 'dear lady' me!" She almost shouted.

He tried again. "I came to inform you of the arrangements I have put in hand for Emma's funeral, and I thank you for granting me this interview."

"You need not have called, do we not have a perfectly reliable postal service, a simple letter would have sufficed."

Meanwhile the maid who had been listening at the door expecting the meeting would not be a pleasant one, had made her way to the Rector's study at the opposite end of the building. A gentle tap on the door which she opened with the words. "Begging your pardon, sir, but perhaps you had better come. The Mistress has just received Mr. Ashbourne, sir, and they are having words."

The Rector was none too pleased at the interruption; he had been penning the sermon for next Sunday's service but tried hard not to show annoyance. "Very well Drinkwater, let me complete this sentence and I will be right along, meanwhile you had better return to your duties."

In the parlour the Mistress sat in what she assumed to be an attitude of disdain towards her Son-in-Law, she was not a large lady, only five feet four inches in height and extremely slim, but with a heart of steel and a vicious tongue capable of reducing most people to quivering wrecks. Needless to say, their few friends and acquaintances either admired her for her forthright attitude or were over mindful of what little they said in her company. George was not one of these he was respectful, but not prepared to be intimidated,

"Madam! I have no intention of remaining in your company to be insulted."

"If that's your attitude you had better leave, NOW! You killed our daughter and now you bring your vulgar trade behaviour into my home, its too much to bear, why have you not gone?"

George was already on his feet, but he stopped dead in his tracks. "I'll have you know Madam that I did not KILL your daughter, there was a full account of the matter in the Illustrated London News." And almost as an afterthought he added. "Emma discovered that day that the babies of poor families are not delivered by BLACK STORKS. There are no storks as you know, but if there are any they are all WHITE. I keep myself occupied making money so the family can live in comfort, or perhaps you would prefer that we attended church six times a day and lived as poor as church mice!"

At that moment the Rector entered the room and raised his hand to command an end to the angry intercourse, but to no avail.

"If you were a good Christian you would know that the Lord would provide!"

"A place in the workhouse I presume you mean, if you had not filled Emma's head with such nonsense she would still be with us!" And with that he stormed out of the Rectory and into the nearest tavern, the "King's Head", for a large whisky to calm his frayed nerves. He was furious with his late wife's mother and annoyed with himself for allowing the meeting to degenerate into such a slanging match. He found her attitude towards himself and his family quite insufferable, with her superior air condemning anyone she thought to be her social inferior by "only being in trade" had he only known the truth, she was the twelfth child of the village blacksmith at Llandontdo, an excessively poor family. Her assumed superiority was entirely false, and thus all the more exaggerated and annoying. The arrogance born of ignorance.



## Saucy Sophia's Snippets



The fruits, colours and joys of autumn. The season of Baccus, of the grape harvest and the wine that flows in abundance. A season to celebrate before the harshness of winter frosts, gales and cold. She is the maidenly personification of the fruits of the vine.

### Trailer for November.

After the dramatic events of 1889, first the wedding of Alexandra and Edward in Berlin and then the tragedy of Emma's demise the Ashbourne family were only too grateful for a long period of time during which very little happened, the phrase "No news is good news" was frequently heard in the household. But events have a way of arriving unexpectedly.

*Dorian M. Osborne*

1<sup>st</sup> October, 2025.