

**THE ASHBOURNE FAMILY SAGA**  
**CHAPTER XXIV**  
**and**  
**Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month,**  
**May, 2025.**

It was late evening when the Imperial German party arrived at the Hauptbahnhof in Vienna where there was an icy cold wind blowing from the east, and although the main thoroughfares had been cleared of snow, in early February there was still plenty to be seen on rooftops, side streets and public gardens. Carriages had been supplied by the Austrian government, but not enough for the whole delegation, thus Edward and four other more junior officers found themselves sharing a fiaker to the Imperial Hotel on Karntner Ring, part of the Ringstrasse where the whole of the second and third floors had been reserved for the delegation. Although Edward had little time to marvel at the building's splendour, it being dark and they were immediately ushered into the grand dining room, he would later discover that the hotel had originally been built for Duke Philipp of Wutternberg in the renaissance style in 1863, which explains the ducal coat of arms over the entrance.



Hotel Imperial, Karntner Ring in 1880.

Edward had scarcely started the desert course, which was followed by coffee, schnaps and cigars when he was summoned to the admiral's aide de camp's office, a small bedroom that had been pressed into service as a private office. He saluted smartly clicking his heels as the Naval Officer rose from his chair and thanked Edward for coming at such short

notice and apologised for taking him away from the hotel's excellent dinner, but a matter of great delicacy had arisen, and his excellency believes you are the best officer for the task ahead. 'More flattery to get me to undertake a mission no one else wishes to do' thought Edward, but to his superior only thanked him for the trust they were bestowing on him a task he would undertake to the very best of his ability.

"The situation is this." Began the Aide de Camp. "Certain senior diplomats were attending a preliminary meeting in Ruthenia at the schloss of Graff von Henna when a telegram was received informing them of the death of the Crown Prince whereupon the party broke up and they made their way here. Unfortunately, in their haste to depart they seem to have failed to bring with them a case containing various documents of a particular sensitive nature. It is vitally important that the case and papers are recovered without delay. Your commanding officer has recommended you for this mission. It means, of course, that you will be away from Vienna for the funeral, and you must never speak to anyone about this affair, the honour of the service rests on your young shoulders. Whatever happens, do not fail."

Then taking from his inner tunic pocket he produced a package in a white envelope. "Inside are your orders, but no mention has been made of the true purpose of your mission. There are government travel passes for the railway, 250 Austrian Gulden, a letter of authority signed by the assistant chancellor and a separate letter addressed to the Count's valet who is in command at Schloss Vinderhoffen while his master is away. A telegram has been sent to Herr Handler requiring him to expect you and to extend to you every courtesy and assistance and to accept your authority. There is an express train leaving from the Hauptbahnhof in thirty-five minutes, make sure you are aboard. Also, there is a railway map in the package."

Edward saluted smartly and was about to depart when the Aide de Camp held up a hand to forestall the young officer and gave him a large and volumous fur coat saying that it would be wise not to exhibit his naval uniform as it could draw unwelcome attention to one traveling alone.

When our young hero entered the reserved second-class carriage of the Kaiserlich – Königlich Staats Bahn or kkStB the six seats of the compartment were unoccupied, it being a corridor train. He had bare

ly seated himself stowing his small attaché case containing several spare socks, change of underwear and several clean shirts., plus a razor and other shaving accoutrements when he heard the guard's whistle and was aware rather than actually saw the guard wave his green flag. Moments later there was a blast of smoke and steam from the locomotive's chimney and the train began to move, slowly at first as the engine gathered up each of the loose coupled carriages in turn. It was at this moment that the man entered the compartment which Edward occupied.

Dressed in almost total black he had boarded the train as it moved along the platform, seizing the door handle and opening the door which opened inwards while scaling the steps. Stepping into the compartment he doffed his black round fur hat to his fellow passenger and in an accent which Edward failed to recognise greeted him with a friendly "Guten Abend Mein guter Mann." There was something strange about the gentleman which Edward found not a little alarming. He would have preferred to be alone to study the map he had been given and plan what he hoped would be the final phase of his mission to recover the documents, but that would have to wait, perhaps the man would depart at Bruck where the train would be stopping, a junction where a line run south to Znain. In the meantime, Edward endeavoured to engage in polite conversation remarking on the weather in Vienna which had been extremely cold with a more than chilly wind blowing from the east. As they passed through open country leaving the environs of the grand dazzling capital behind, by the light from the train windows, through the darkness it was possible to observe a snow bound landscape and to perceive the occasional building, villages, farms and sometimes an important mansion or schloss. Being only second class,

unlike the first-class carriages there was little heating, but the seats were comfortably cushioned unlike third class where seating was of wooden slats. Edward was grateful for the fur coat he had been given at the hotel and wrapped in its insulating warmth he was reasonably comfortable. The man seated opposite, for some reason which Edward could not have explained, gave him concern, there was just something about the man which made him uneasy. Edward was young and strong, quite capable of taking care of himself, so why the apprehension?

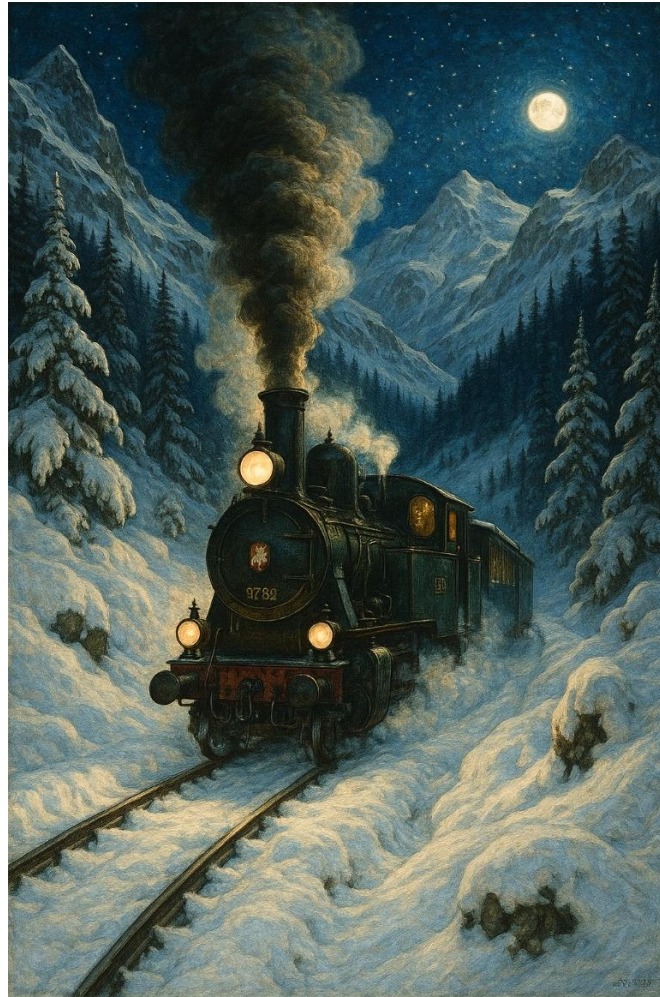
After a while the man attempted further conversation, asking Edward how far he would be travelling, but so as not to appear over curious he added that he planned to travel as far as Lemberg (Lvov). In answer to Edward's question he stated that his occupation is that of a commercial traveller in furs. "Plenty of business in the winter, but in summer when no one thinks of next winter I usually switch to summer clothing, but jewellery is best, what is your profession?"

The Naval Captain had prepared for just such a line of enquiry and staying with what he knew but not his actual employment he responded with a detailed and elaborate explanation of the family firm in England changing a few details and adding that there seems to be a demand for English built carriages in parts of the Continent. The answer seemed to satisfy the man, though privately Edward thought the man did not believe a word of the story.

A little over an hour after departing Vienna the train drew into the Bahnhof at Bruck where a branch line to the left led to Znain. Many extra passengers joined the train, and Edward was somehow aware that the water in the locomotive's tender was replenished, then they were off again. The line, which had been generally travelling in a north easterly direction, now turned northwards and after a while entered a broad valley, not that the passengers saw very much in the pitch-black outside. The engine steamed on through the freezing cold night and while the footplate crew had just the heat from the firebox for warmth, in the gently swaying carriages, especially first and second class, the passengers found the motion most soporific. Edward conscious of the importance of the mission he has been entrusted with and the secret details contained in the package secreted about his person made valiant efforts to stay awake. He was grateful for the occasional stations where the train stopped, usually to collect and deliver parcels and other goods stowed in the guard's



van as such stops gave him an excuse to alight for a few minutes when the cold stimulated wakefulness.



When he left Vienna snow had been falling and the sky overcast with heavy clouds, but as they travelled northwards between the western Carpathian Mountains of Ruthenia and the Moravian Hills of Moravia beyond which lay Bohemia the clouds began to fade and eventually while the cold intensified the sky cleared to reveal a near full moon which illuminated the snow-covered landscape. Clearly visible now were the hills to the left or west with the mountains to the right or east. Edward contemplated requesting a sleeping compartment but consulting his pocket watch decided to make do with his present arrangement, it being only three hours to dawn when he would obtain breakfast.

As the guard waved his green flag for the train to depart Edward re-entered the compartment and was relieved to see the man sound asleep. He had been careful to avoid any reference to Germany or naval and military matters not wishing to provoke any conversation which could lead to the man gaining any understanding of his situation; Edward thought the man far too oily, was he from the Levant or perhaps the Balkans. It then occurred to Edward that he could be Russian, and he remembered a certain journalist lately resident in the Sub-Continent, a Mr. R. Kipling until recently of "the Pioneer" in Allahabad who referred to "the Great Game", essentially Russian spies operating along the Great Trunk Road and our counter measures to restrict their activities.

There was no one else in the compartment and briefly Edward considered searching the man to satisfy his curiosity, but instantly dismissed the idea, too dishonest, deceitful, awkward to explain if he was observed, and the man may wakeup if disturbed. He sat back, wrapped in the fur coat and waited for dawn.

Not until 7.15am did Edward perceive a slight brightening in the sky over the western Carpathian Mountains, which gradually grew in intensity with a band of red light which

spread across the low peaks and almost imperceptible the light illuminated the heavens causing the snow and ice to sparkle. The young Captain made his way to the speisewagen (dining car) where for two gulden he was served a plate of goulash and a good cup of coffee, but not before he had sought the attention of the zugmister (train Manager) showing him his Imperial Authority and requesting a private dining compartment. The railway employee was only too pleased to be of service and immediately bowed Edward into an excellent private raum (space) where he could carefully read his instructions and study the map without fear of unwelcome attention.

The map revealed that during the night they had been following the River March and must have passed through Bars, Alt Sahl, Neu Sobl as he had just noticed they were passing through Stureck and that the next station would be Kostenberg. Edward expected that the train would be stopping at Kostenberg as this is a junction with a line running off to the east into the Tatra Mountains. He was right, and as he sat back into the cushions enjoying an excellent cup of kafe (coffee) the train did indeed slow to a halt in the station. Not wishing to be observed, especially as he had laid aside his fur coat revealing his Kaiserlich Naval uniform. His precautions soon proved well founded, as from his concealed place of observation he noticed a group of men seemingly loitering on the platform or waiting for another train. One wore the cloths of a gentleman whilst the other two had the appearance of common workmen, or perhaps their dress was a form of disguise to obscure their true purpose. Were two of the group dressed in mufti for some nefarious purpose as their deportment suggested conversation between equals, whilst Edward found the matter intriguing it was impossible to discern more. The stop here was longer than may have been expected as they had to await the arrival of another train for passengers travelling north. After a few minutes Edward observed 'the man' approaching the group, there was an exchange which became gradually heated, clearly something had not gone as planned. All this may very well be nothing to do with me and I must avoid becoming paranoid, Edward thought to himself.

There was a bell push button set onto the tabletop near the window which the Captain made use of to summons the kellner (waiter), ordering a pot of hot chocolate. He felt very sleepy after consuming the hot sweet drink and again summoning the kellner to remove the chocolate pot, cup and saucer announced he would be locking the door as he did not wish to be disturbed but required to be called when they approached the station at Jabhunksau.

Sitting back against the comfortable cushions he was soon sound asleep lulled by the rhythm of the wheels as they crossed the little gap at the end of each rail – clackety clack, clackety clack - and the gently swaying carriages, a dreamless sleep of the young and exhausted. Over two hours passed before he was awakened by the zugmister announcing that they would shortly be arriving at Jabhunksau and would he be requiring anything. Edward thanked the official profusely and gave him two gulden.

There would be just short of an hour to wait for the next train which if Edward's premonition about the 'man' proved correct could be dashed inconvenient to say the least. Casting his earlier caution to the winds he marched directly for the station master's office to be met by the station master himself who promptly informed him that the booking office is next door in an authoritative manner. Not to be put off he produced the Imperial Authority and passed it to the railway official to read.

Taking the impressive document, the station master took his time studying it, turning it over and generally giving the impression of either being illiterate or finding reading difficult. Just when Edward was about to lose patience with the man he looked up and enquired. "Just how am I to know if this is a forgery or not?"

The man seemed to Edward to be in his mid to late 50's and thinking that the Austrians may follow a similar system as in Deutschland (Germany) whereby when those serving in the armed services completed active service they were offered employment for which they were deemed suitable within the Civil Service, Railways Police and other government



departments. Perhaps the man had been a sergeant in the army. Taking a chance, Edward answered with. "You don't, perhaps you think there is only a 50% chance it is genuine, but do you really wish to take that risk when if it is the real thing and you refuse my legitimate request you can say goodbye to promotion and an increase in your pension."

The station master quickly gave the authority back to Edward and brightly enquired how he could be of service. "The use of your office and a cup of kafe until the train for Saybusch (Zywiec) arrives. The railway official almost saluted, he clicked his heels in true military style and hurried off to obtain the requested coffee.

In due course the train arrived marking the next stage of the journey which proved quite uneventful. At Saybusch another junction the railway crossed the River Sola, steadily making their way eastwards along the northern edge of the Carpathian Mountains. The snow was just as deep as before, at times up to the railway carriage windows, at others where the wind had swept the snow away a splendid view was revealed of mountains, deep valleys, tunnels and bridges over surging rivers. At Sandec there was another railway junction, but they whistled through Grybow to stop at Jaslo (Jaswo) where the train terminated. Edward had to alight and on enquiry for the next train to Sambur was informed that there were no trains to the east that day, the first would not be until ten five tomorrow. It being after eight o'clock and pitch-dark enquiring for accommodation overnight he was directed to a Gasthaus in the market square.



**Jaslo Market Square.**

Der Adler (the Eagle) proved to be an excellent recommendation, not that there seemed to be any alternative, or certainly none that the young captain would have chosen to entertain. He was served a very good repass with a bottle of local wine in the guesthouse dining room where he engaged in polite conversation with four other guests. It was not long before Edward was overcome with tiredness, and wishing his fellow guests guten abend (good evening) he retired to his room. Scarcely had he removed his uniform tunic than there came a gentle rap on the room door which when opened revealed a tall slightly shabbily dressed man of Levantine appearance. He possessed the ability to be ingratiating, contemptuous, and demanding all at the same time in the manner of many living under the benevolence of European imperial rule.

Producing a well battered book from within the folds of his great coat which had seen better days with the words. "Something to keep you warm in bed and amuse you, sir." He then opened the book to reveal a collection of photographs, one on each page, of young women all, or the ones Edward saw, completely naked and posed to expose their feminine charms to the greatest extent. Before Edward could say anything, so completely taken aback was he at such blatant trading in human misery, the oily Levantine wasted no time in profusely assuring the Captain that all his girls are clean and free from disease. Edward had heard enough, he practically through the book at the trader in fallen women and albut kicked him out. Had Edward been interested he would have observed that whilst some of the women in the Continental style were unshaved under their arms and elsewhere there were some who in the fashion of Arabian ladies whose pubic hair had been plucked.

Thinking the event over before being overtaken by sleep he remembered being warned of such creatures in Vienna. Subhuman they were referred to as, especially the Ruthenians who were said to be quite able and willing to sell their sisters, mothers and even grandmothers into slavery and exploitation for whatever they could obtain.

Our young naval officer rose early the following morning and bright eyed and bushy tailed he made his way through Jaslo and at the bahnhof boarded a train travelling east in the direction of Lemberg. Stopping at Sanok on the River San, then the junction station of Starasol where the line divided with one going almost due north for Jaroslav, whilst the other went eastwards stopping at Sambur on the River Dnister where Edward alighted.

Enquiring of the Station Master for directions to the Schloss Vinderhoffen, the railway official shook his head in disbelief and asked when sir wished to go there. When Edward replied that he wished to go there straightway Master said he should not try today, it being after fourteen hundred hours and it would be dark before he had covered less than half the distance. He recommended a gasthaus Der Ottoburg in the main street who could also supply horses and a guide.

Unlike the previous evening this one proved uneventful, he dined on beef casserole with dumplings and a glass or two of Riesling. The following morning in the stables he selected two horses for the journey to the Schloss Vinderhoffen, a roan mare about three years old and a black gelding of similar age. He obtained saddles for both and a guide who claimed he knew the way and came with his own horse.

Before 0830 hours the little party were on their way, clattering along the main street and out into open country, a land of narrow valleys through towering massif hills all clothed in dense forest all wearing a thick mantle of pure white snow. After two hours of trotting through this picturesque landscape Edward decided it was time to rest the horses for a little and the pair sat down on a fallen tree trunk and partook of two small pies and the remains of the wine from the previous evening.

Setting off again the countryside began to slowly change. The most noticeable difference being that they began to climb, imperceptibly at first, but gradually the track became steeper. Further on and cresting a ridge the guide spotted an encampment populated with what appeared to be ragged people, tents or shacks and various animals roaming about. Quickly the guide said to his employer that they must drop back over the ridge and make their way to the right to avoid the camp and immediately followed his advice. Edward followed and after they had covered a safe distance enquired why the sudden change of route. He had guessed it was to avoid the camp, but why, they seemed harmless enough.

"You do not know this country nor its people. They are evil, all of them. Stay clear or it will be the worst for you my friend."

Remembering what he had been told about the Ruthenians or Rusyn or Lemkos as they were sometimes know he thanked the guide for his observation and timely action. On they went until at 1436 hours by Edward's watch he enquired of the guide how much further.

"You should be there before dark provided there are no delays."

Edward noticed the answer was couched in the singular, but took no notice, perhaps a slip of the tongue, but after carefully using his field glasses to make sure they were along, they stopped for a light luncheon, then gathered their things together to continue the journey, but the guide stayed put on his horse. Looking round the naval captain saw his guide and called him to come forward, but the man replied. “Nay sir, this is as far as I go. Keep going along yonder track, cross a swift following small river and you will see the Schloss on the hillside ahead of you. As I said you should arrive before dark, but beware of brown bears, wolves and especially the subhumans who dwell in these part.”



**Schloss Vinderhoffen**

And with a wave of his hat, he was off, back the way they had come. Edward had no choice other than to continue alone. He changed to his spare horse and following the rough track arriving at Schloss Vinderhoffen as dusk was settling in and shadows lengthening.

## **Saucy Sophia's Snippets**



This post card was posted at 9.30 pm in Blackpool on the 26<sup>th</sup> July, 1915 to a Miss L (surname obliterated by the Post Office franking) of 12, Ridehalabridge Street, Colne, Lanc. The message, written in pencil as is the address, reads “We landed at about ¼ to 4. I think we shall like this woman the sun-shines all day long here to-day.”



## Trailer for June.

Edward stops at the Schloss Vinderhoffen overnight and next day, on the advice of his hostess travels south across the mountains, the small party making their way to Pressburg guarding the important documents for delivery in Vienna. Enroute they are subjected to the savagery of the wild, but it is the human beasts who give the most deadly trouble.

*Dorian M. Osborne*

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