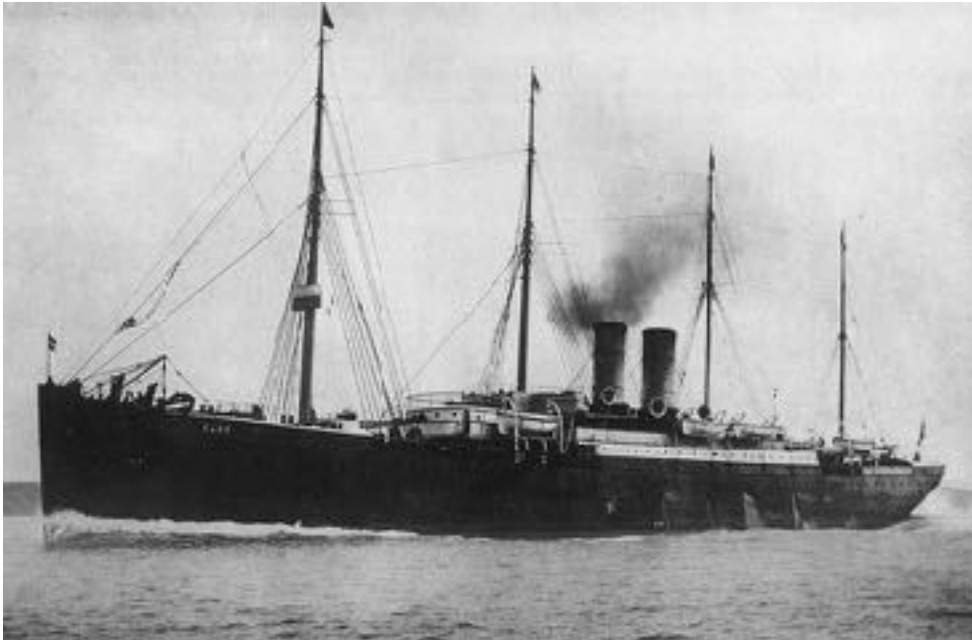


THE ASHBOURNE FAMILY SAGA
CHAPTER XXXIV
and
Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month,

April, 2026.

Edward stood by the taffrail on the starboard midships section of the 'Prince of Baden' as she slipped her moorings and manoeuvred downstream towards the open sea on the ebb tide. A cold wind was blowing from the German Ocean which acted as a warning of rough weather ahead. Glancing at his pocket watch he noticed that it would be dark within the hour, although the skies would be lightening gradually in the pre-dawn before they had cleared the estuary of the mighty River Elbe, it being some sixty eighty miles of river between the Hanseatic League medieval city of Hamburg and the sea.



The SS Fürst von Baden (Prince of Baden).

Although a captain in the Imperial Navy, Edward was dressed in civilian clothing as he did not wish to draw attention to his presence. The ship was part of the 'Otto Friedmann' fleet a twin funnel single screw ocean going steamer designed to convey both passengers and cargo. She was not a tramp steamer wandering the oceans collecting cargo from wherever and delivering the shipment to wherever it was consigned, but operated a liner service between Deutschland and the countries of South America although calling at the home nations protectorates on the west of the African continent namely Togoland and Kamerun (German Cameroons) whilst occasionally venturing as far south as Deutsches Südwestafrika (German South West Africa).

Captain Ashbourne had been allocated one of the second-class cabins on the boat deck, port side where it would be away from the heat and glare of the African sun once they rounded Cape Palmas on the frontier between Liberia and the French colony of the Cote d'Ivoire. He had obtained a book describing the Protectorate he was traveling to which he planned to study whilst at sea where he knew there would be nothing to see but the sea.

Reflecting on the previous few days events he cast his mind back to the interview with Kommodore Stien, and the more he thought about the meeting the more convinced he

became that he had been despatched to Togoland not so much because the Governor had requested assistance with the provision of harbour facilities but a roust to get rid of him and hopefully he would commit some blunder and thus, in the eyes of Kommodore Stien, the Englander could be dismissed from the service. When he had returned home after purchasing a bouquet of hot house grown red roses for Alexandra and related the events to her she had immediately seemed to remember having heard that an officer by the name of Stien was not regarded favourably by others in the Imperial Navy. To obtain further clarification she had insisted that they both call on her uncle Hans Hoffmann at his house in the Grunwald. Uncle Hans had taken the pair into his study for greater privacy and after enquiring after baby Wilhelm, on being assured that he was in the gentle and competent care of their maid he explained that what he was about to disclose must not be mentioned to anyone.

Uncle Hans had revealed that Kommodore Stien, ten years ago, had commanded a flotilla of small craft and minor gun boats and he continued. "It seemed that he resented not being promoted to the command of much larger vessels including battle ships and had taken to venting his anger on the officers especially naval cadets for whom he would dream up impossible tasks and when they failed the most severe punishments. About two years ago he took a particular dislike to a young cadet, the son of the Margrave of Posen, but who had enlisted under an assumed name to conceal his aristocratic heritage. The lad almost died when he was sent aloft and made to stand on the masthead button. It was said that Stien kept him there for over two hours until he fell. Fortunately, the sea cushioned his landing, and a boat was nearby to rescue the boy. The Margrave was understandably furious and demanded in an interview with the Kaiser that Stien be dismissed the service in disgrace. Of course, he had gone too far raising the matter with his Imperial Majesty, but a Court Martial transferred Stien to an office job where he could do no further damage. He retained his rank but little else. He believes in a tough and ruthless regime to make the crew of ships fearless in action, more afraid of their officers than the enemy and he blames your country, Great Britain, for an easy-going liberal attitude, hence his dislike of you, my dear Eduard. You have been sent to Togoland to get rid of you and in his eyes make such a mess of the mission that you can be cashiered."

"There is just one thing I do not understand." Enquired Edward.

"And what might that be?" Said Hans.

"If the cadet was atop a mast, surely he would have fallen to the deck below, the ship would need to be listing to port or starboard for a chap at the masthead to fall into the sea?"

"Why, yes you are quite right, but the ship was out at sea, on the open sea, at the time and although it was very calm it still does not take much to cause a vessel to roll from side to side which must be what happened causing the lad to lose his footing and drop overboard. And now we should join your aunt in the drawing room."

Mentally reviewing the events of the last few days Edward made up his mind that he would think no more about the Kommodore but enjoy the passage and study the book on Togoland he had brought with him. On arrival he would tackle the project to the best of his ability, he could do no more than concentrate on the work in hand, forgetting Berlin, or Stien anyway.

The 'Prince of Baden' had sailed with the tide, high tide just on the turn, thus the ebb tide had born them down river and past the estray. As Edward had anticipated, as the ship

slowed to drop off the pilot there were streaks of silvery light visible on the eastern horizon in the direction of the works in progress to construct what would become the Kiel Canal. It was a somewhat precarious manoeuvre, for the pilot anyway, stepping off the accommodation ladder into the small pilot cutter with the sea rising and falling at least eight feet each time a wave passed, but he was experienced and all's well that ends well.

Steering a few degrees to port a good nautical mile out to sea in the gathering light Edward could make out the north German coast and the port, regatta location and holiday resort of Cruxhaven. The ship maintained her course north-north-west for about three quarters of an hour before veering to the west, and almost due north Edward could, with the aid of his powerful field glasses, see clearly the great island rock of Heligoland a little under twenty nautical miles away standing majestically in the early morning light and as he studied the island the sun rose a little higher in the eastern sky and a shaft of silvery sunlight illuminated the edifice now bathed in a light which revealed its true formidable magnificence. Edward was unaware of the Anglo German negotiations which in August would lead to his home country acquiring control of Zanzibar on the east African coast and Heligoland being transferred to Germany.

Fig. 159.—HELIGOLAND



Part of Heligoland in 1885.

Captain Michael Schmit, Master of the 'Prinz von Baden' set course down the English Channel for the Atlantic steering slightly north of mid channel, towards the coast of

England so that they would pass any shipping sailing in the opposite direction on their port side, that is the left side looking ahead. The practice was centuries old dating from a time before the adoption of the rudder for steering; when ships were steered by a steering oar which was secured towards the stern on the steering side which became the starboard side and it was necessary to avoid damage to the only method of steerage, thus the opposite side was used for mooring becoming the port side. Ships passed each other port to port also to avoid damage to the steering oar.



Painting of a Viking Longship with the steering oar clearly visible on the left.

By late morning, just as Edward was about to return to his cabin he was approached by the steward with an invitation to join the captain for dinner that evening, which he was most pleased to accept. At the appointed hour Edward duly presented himself in the state room still wearing civilian dress and was seated opposite to a very attractive lady whom he judged to be perhaps five years older than himself. She was beautifully dressed in a satin and brocade green dress which complimented her green eyes whilst her auburn locks seemed to float around her head. Captain Schmit introduced his guests of which there were seven in total, two gentlemen bound for Uruguay, a very prim and proper lady of indeterminate age traveling solo to Argentina, a colonial official and his wife enroute for Southwest Africa. Edward was most surprised when the ship's Master introduced him as Kapitan Eduard Ashbourne of His Imperial Majesty's Navy, he had thought to avoid admitting his naval rank by not wearing uniform, but now the cat was out of the bag, it did not really matter.

The two gentlemen traveling to Montevideo in Uruguay could have been father and son by the disparity of their ages, the younger of the pair tended to dominate the conversation, a railway man through and through who, it seemed to Edward, had single handedly surveyed, designed and managed the construction of every railway in Latin America. Needless to add that the boastful Frenchman bored, annoyed and infuriated his fellow voyagers in equal measure, Maurice de la Motte was not the most amiable companion. He was of medium height, effected to pose as a man on a mission with little time for the opinions of others, in a sporty jacket, loose trousers, a loud waistcoat and over colourful necktie he was the very picture of someone determined to be noticed.

The elder gentleman could not have been more different. He was quiet, soberly black tie dressed originally from Lintz in Austria and returning to the vineyard in the hinterland

north of Montevideo he had purchased for retirement from the Humbolt University where he had been professor of ancient history specialising in South and Central America.

The prim lady, Miss Maud McKillin whose appearance of severity did not improve with acquaintance, nor did she appreciate the Frenchman's attempts to humour her was a school

mistress, one it seemed obtained some form of enjoyment from finding fault and never giving praise, was dressed in a grey skirt, off white blouse and a light brown woollen shawl with her mousey brown hair tightly drawn back in a bun. She was extremely tight lipped saying as little as possible in an accent that seemed to Edward to consist of a mixture of Glaswegian and the Gaelic of the western isles. She possessed that 'hard done to' expression often associated with Scots who resented the Hanoverian succession but had failed to support the martyred King Charles. She excused herself early and in the absence of real information, the other passengers tended to speculate as to her actual character.

Regarding the colonial officer and his wife, she could only be described as a frump, overweight, double chined with a tiresome ability to pronounce on almost every subject which went a long way to expose her abysmal ignorance. Edward found himself feeling quite sorry for her husband who suffered from a nervous stutter, an affliction which annoyed his self-opinionated wife whilst she could not resist finishing sentences for him but conveying the wrong meaning. He as a dapper 'gent' with much of interest to impart if only he were allowed to say. There would be lots of willing negro females in Southwest Africa, or so it occurred to Edward, and he wondered if the husband would find excuses to disappear up country to find brief solace and loving enjoyment. Perhaps?



The Colonial Officer's Wife, seated at the end of the table opposite the Railway Man.

The lovely lady seated opposite Edward unwittingly absorbed his full attention. The dining table being narrower than usual the pair facing each other were much closer than would normally be the case giving Edward an uninterrupted view of her beauty. Unlike the frumpy woman who seemed to be festooned in jewels, Katya wore only an emerald and gold necklace which blended to perfection with her dress, under which as far as the young Kapitain could tell, she wore few if any undergarments. Her conversation was lively and he soon learnt that she had been married at the age of eighteen to a junior officer of the Grodno Life-Guard Hussars, a dashing cavalry officer, and she admitted to having a thoroughly enjoyable time when attending regimental balls in Petersburg. Unfortunately, the glammers times suddenly ceased when he was killed two years ago.

“In battle?” Enquired Edward.

“No, though that would have been preferable, the death of a hero, with honour .”

Edward was left wondering if he had unintentionally stumbled on a raw nerve, until she smiled into his eyes, and in a laughing voice said. “He was being a very naughty boy, as

most men are, as I understand the situation, he was with a group of fellow officers including the regiment's major – a very wicked man – into all manner of bad practices. It was his idea, the Major, that after drinking heavily that they all visit a particularly sordid house of ill repute. Another officer told me that my husband had wanted to return home but the Major would not hear of it. Inside there were tables and chairs arranged around a central floor space, and it was in this space that a group of two or three well-endowed young women performed despicable acts on each other. Then the master of the house called for a volunteer customer to join the floor party. The Major and two others pushed my husband forward to take part. Anticipating what he would be expected to perform he declined and attempted to leave. It was then that the circus master stepped forward deeply offended that Nicholi had refused to participate, the girls by now in a state of nakedness, attempted to encourage him thinking he was merely shy. Then everything happened quickly. The circus master quite lost his temper declaring that my husband was too fussy. "Not good enough for you are they, my lovely girls! If you're too posh you better get out before we do you some damage!" He then hit my husband. As Nicholi attempted to defend himself two strong men of the house rushed up and one of them struck him so hard that he fractured his spine causing instant death. It was terrible, dying like that in such a place."

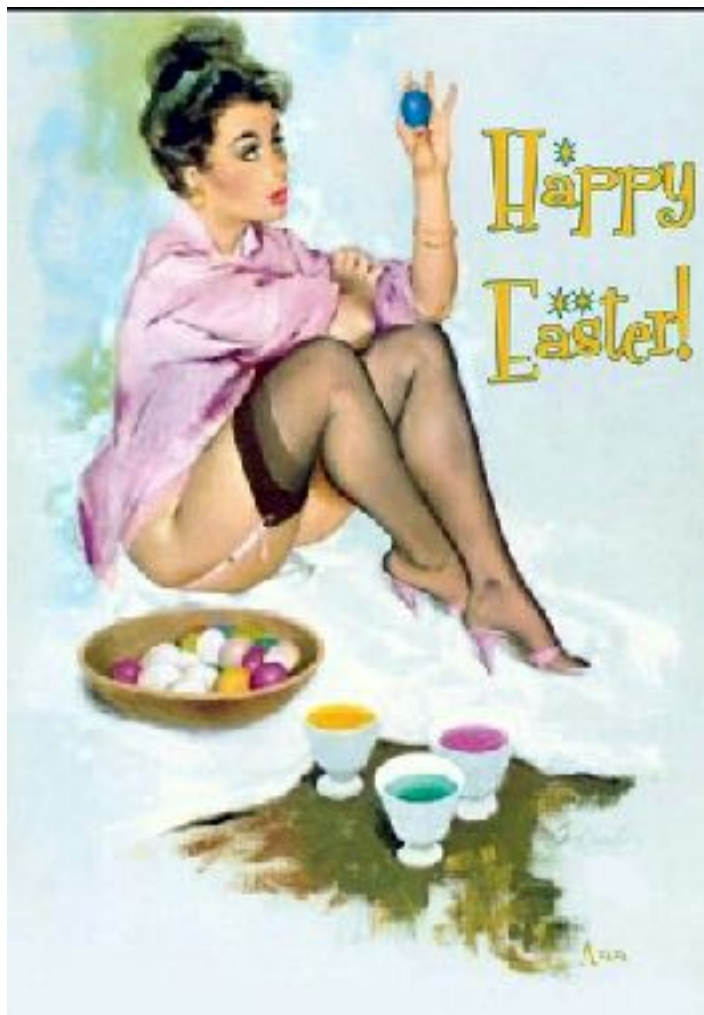
The emotion was too much for her, taking a handkerchief she gently dabbed her eyes. Edward was equally distressed, but fortunately all the while Katya had been relating this sad history the Frenchman had been holding forth at the opposite end of the table in a loud and dominant voice relating all his successes constructing railways over impossible terrain. Katya's personal story remained safe with Edward.

Around eleven o'clock, or 2300 hours the party broke up. The prime maid had already retired much earlier, but now the old frump as Edward considered her announced that it was long past their bedtime and dragged her husband, unwillingly, after her.

Katya rose and extending her hand curtsied to Edward who took the offered hand, bowed low bestowing a kiss on the back of her hand. She thanked him for a most enjoyable

evening adding that another time he must tell her all about himself which she was sure would be most intriguing.

Saucy Sophia's Snippets



Humorous Quotations

**Diane de Poitiers, mistress of King Henry II of France.
She was born on the 9th January, 1500.**

**“The years that a woman subtracts from her age are not lost.
They are added to the ages of other women.”**

Trailer for May.

There are more revelations from the passengers aboard the ‘Prince of Baden’ as they sail south.

Dorian M. Osborne

1st April, 2026.

N.B. The image of the Colonial Officer’s Wife was generated by Artificial Intelligence (AI).

