

THE ASHBOURNE FAMILY SAGA

CHAPTER XXXII

and

Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month,

February, 2026.

Saturday the 28th December of 1889 found George and Annabell at breakfast together, it was a dull morning but with the curtains drawn back there was enough light. Just before nine o'clock was late for both of them especially George, but then this was a silly time of the year, some, especially those who enjoyed private means thought it a relaxing time. A more pragmatic time to recover from the excesses of Christmas Day, the Boxing Day Hunt and the Servant's Ball. A time when those who were not required to work for their living could enjoy the luxury of doing nothing. Not that George fitted this scenario, he would have preferred the life of a country squire, but he knew full well that the family finances would not permit such indulgence, certainly not for very long.

Annabell, his sister, was studying art, that is painting, drawing and art history, the works of previous great artists at the Hereford College of Art and Science fulfilling a passion and inspiration that had been with her since childhood. George was more than happy to fund her study. She would marry, of course, and the expansion of her mind would make her a delightful wife, able to converse on many subjects, not just babies, clothes and jewels. He hoped to secure a good marriage for his sister who was both pretty, vivacious and charming. So, Angie thought and he would make a rather good catch. George had been reading the 'Morning Post' in a dilatory manner, not really reading but allowing his thoughts overtake him and get the better of his consciousness.

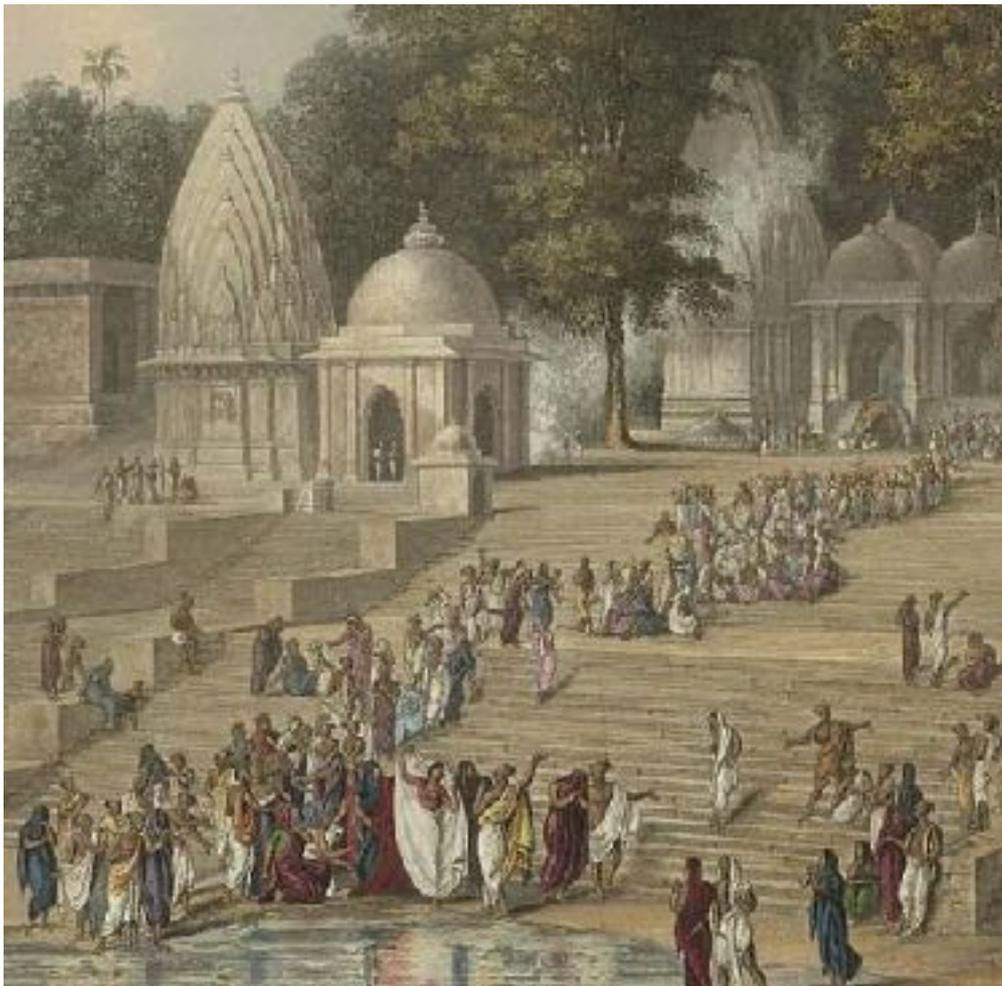


THUGS STRANGLING A TRAVELLER.

Thugs strangling a traveller.

Annabell had been daydreaming, the College was in recess for the Christmas holiday and whilst there were matters to attend to, there was no great urgency. Her dreaming took her in thought to the young gentleman who had gone to India, what was his name? Ahh yes, Nigel who hailed from Droitwich but had travelled to Assam to manage a tea garden. She had thought of joining him there once they were married, but somehow it did not happen. Then a friend at Hereford had loaned to her a book which claimed to be a young ladies guide for those contemplating marriage and residence in the sub-continent. It made fascinating reading, at least to begin with, the colourful dress of the natives, exotic foods, snow topped mountains, the mosques and temples covered in exquisite carving. Beautiful flowers, palm trees and gardens. Then about halfway through the book reality set in. There was a chapter describing the weather, unbearably hot, dry and dusty during the hot season followed by the monsoon when before the weather broke it became quite unbearable when many Europeans suffered awful headaches. Then came the rain. Not the gentle rain of England but absolutely torrential rain every day. Roads became impassable, drainage channels became rivers and the rivers overflowed to spread across the land in vast lakes, the speed of the flood carrying all before it, people, livestock and houses.

She read on, one chapter described the Hindu obsession with cows, the lack of hygiene of even the most basic standard, towns and villages where the stench of rotting meat, vegetables and both human and animal waste reached out into the surrounding countryside. Another the horrors meted out to Europeans during the Sepoy Mutiny, the activities of the Thuggee and much more, including the Hindu practice of ritual horrific death by burning, the widow of the deceased dying on her late husband's funeral pyre. Annabell thought that India would be all too much. She finished reading the book and gave it back to her friend with many thanks, but no other comment. India, she decided, was not for her.



Preparation for suttee, early 19th Century aquatint. Widow is shown in a white sari at the waters edge near her late husband's funeral pyre.

While Annabell was remembering recent events she also allowed her mind to wander to the visit to Worcester, the additional wardrobe items her mother and her had purchased at Whitby's where they were served by an elderly shop assistant, who was perfect at her job as she seemed to know just what they wished to see before they said anything. Annabell thought she must be at least eighty years of age, but Emily demurred saying that she did not believe Miss Tweedle, for that was the shop assistant's name as revealed when the authoritarian proprietress approached to enquire if they were being looked after satisfactorily, could be a day over sixty. Emily had continued after they had departed the shop saying that the long hours and hard work would have taken their toll. The shop probably opens at eight o'clock which would mean a seven o'clock start at least and be expected to clean the shop, be on her feet all day, and not closing until about ten o'clock, later still if there was a possibility of passing trade after the theatres closed. and very far from her meeting any nice young gentlemen when she was younger.

And then there was her brother's friend Angie. To herself she had to admit that she did like him very much and secretly hoped he would call on them as he had mentioned. It was while her thoughts wandered that she noticed a short article on the back of the newspaper, the 'Morning Post', her brother was reading.

"George." She said, he was always George not Georgie. "May I have a look please, the article about influenza in Paris." And this is what she read.

THE INFLUENZA EPIDEMIC.

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENTS.

PARIS, DEC. 27.

The epidemic of influenza continues to rage notwithstanding the notable decline in the temperature. Last night three persons, a cook, a dress-maker, and an individual whose identity has not been established, were found by the police in a dying condition in the street. They expired while being conveyed to the hospital, and their deaths, which were accelerated by the exposure, were undoubtedly due to the epidemic, which has also carried off since yesterday M. Joly, chief editor of the *Moniteur Universel*, Count Le Marois, formerly deputy for La Mancha, and the well-known humorous poet M'Nab, who has constituted for years one of the chief attractions of the Chat Noir.

A telegram from Versailles announces that three soldiers have just died in hospital there from influenza, and it appears that on Christmas Day the total number of deaths in Paris was 318, which is 122 above the average. The *Liberté* recommends as a remedy a mixture of ale and stout known in England as half-and-half.

BERLIN, DEC. 27.

Several cases of influenza in the hospitals have resulted fatally, having developed into lung disease, and the *post-mortems* have revealed inflammation of a very aggravated character of the larynx, trachea, and lungs.

Annabell was alarmed and did not hesitate in expressing her concern to her brother. George looked up from that part of the 'Morning Post' he had retained listening to his sister sympathetically, then he said.

"Just a moment, there was a similar notice a day or two ago, I kept the piece intending to write to Edward." And reaching for his wallet produced a small cutting and passed it to Annabell which read as follows.

SPREADING RAPIDLY.

**An Aggravated Form of Influenza
Prevalent in Germany.**

BERLIN, Dec. 25.—The public health authorities report a great increase in the number of cases of influenza, and an aggravation of the disease, with an increased death rate. The fatal effects are produced by complications of pneumonia and laryngist. From Bremen there is news that the gas works are short of hands in consequence of the number of employes down with the epidemic. In Munich the disease is increasing and the hospitals are full. The epidemic has appeared at Bucharest, Galatz and Braila.

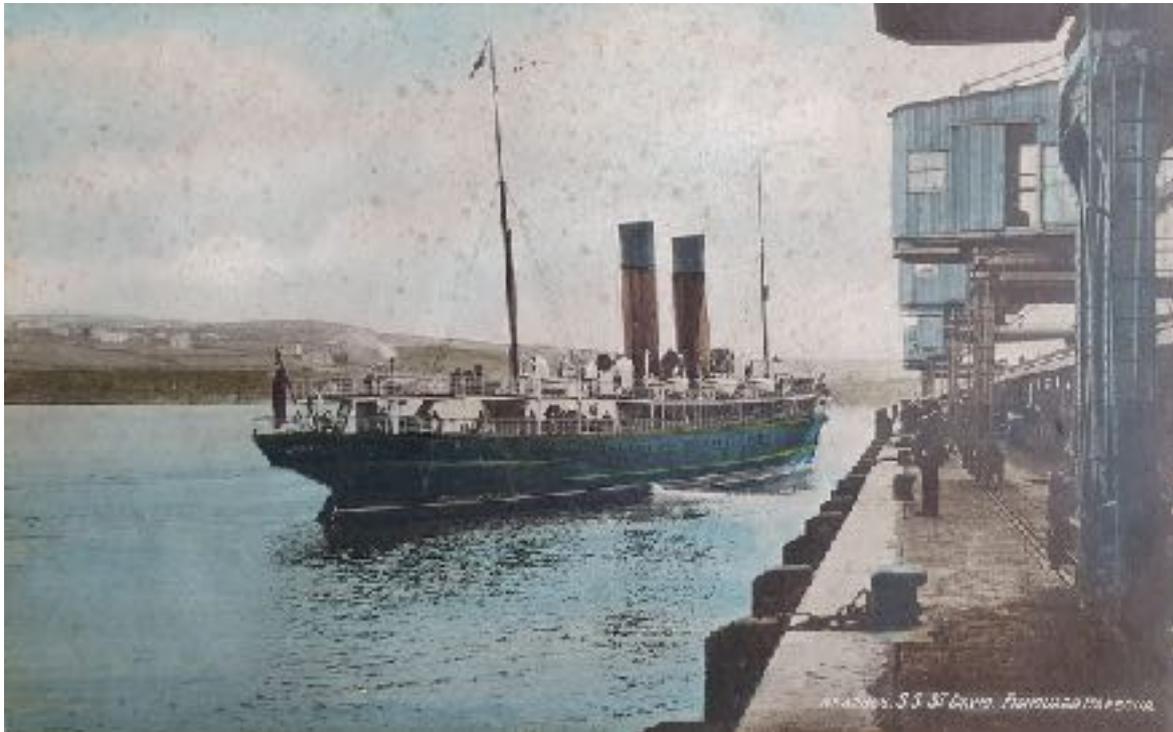
"Oh George, we really must write at once to Edward to enquire how they are in Berlin."

"Yes, of course, I will send a letter this morning," And with that he immediately wrote a letter which was posted within the hour.

Meanwhile and a few days earlier, across the Irish Sea in the Emerald Isle a certain Irishman whose jovial good nature, as some had discovered to their cost, belied a deep-seated gift for portraying the most convincing lies as profound truths, was making his way to Queenstown, the port in the south-east of Hibernia. Life had become just a little too hot for Liam O'Shanahan and he was on his way to take the "Great Western" packet boat the S.S. St. David to Fishguard in Pembrokeshire from where he would travel via Cardiff and Gloucester to Weston-under-Penyard. When he rapped on the entrance door of the Ashbourne residence he was wearing the same loud yellow check suit that George had seen him in a few months earlier.

The maid answered his summons and before she had a chance to enquire after the strangers

business Liam, never a one to let the grass grow under his feet said.



The S.S. St. David arriving at Fishguard Harbour.

“Now you are a pretty maid, what’s your name my dear? Bless my soul, by St. Patrick and All the Saints, you must be the prettiest lass I’ve seen today, so you are.”

Stammering at the unexpected compliments the maid replied. “I’m only Morgan, sir.”

“Well now ‘Only Morgan’, do you have a Christian name too, a comely young maiden like you must have a Christian name.”

Liam was smiling knowingly at her with a definite twinkle in his eye and the girl was both unnerved and attracted to the Irishman, she attempted to reply with. “My full name is Alice Morgan.” Which she accompanied with a bobbed curtsy.

For a few seconds, which seemed much longer to Morgan, the pair stood looking at each other, then suddenly, as though feigning to have remembered why he was there he became quite business like and enquired if the Gaffer is at home.

“Do you mean the master Mr. George Asbourne, sir?”

“Why yes, my old friend George, yes that’s right, may I see him a moment?”

Alice Morgan smiled sweetly to the rather forward but engaging Irishman and asking him to please wait in the hall she departed to make enquiries. Liam was duly shown into the parlour, which doubled as a study at times, as George stood to receive his unexpected guest and once Liam was seated there followed the usual pleasantries of polite conversation. It soon became obvious to George that his visitor from Ireland had not just

called for old times' sake because he was passing, there was an ulterior motive, but what was it. It was then that it dawned on George that he should offer Liam some refreshment and having established that Liam would appreciate a cup of tea he rang for the maid. When Morgan appeared he requested tea for them both and was not slow to notice the apparent friendship between his maid and visitor which was reinforced when Morgan

returned with a laden tea tray.

Liam twittered on with a collection of narratives concerning people known only to Liam, and humorous stories. He described Shamus O'Leary whom he claimed to have known since childhood, who once had a job lighting streetlamps, 'lampie' we used to call him. Then. "What do you think he goes an' does next? He's off to London, that he is – to seek 'is fortune. At Fishguard 'e gets the express to Paddington Railway Station 'an as 'e walks out Station what does 'e see right in front of 'im, a sovereign right there on the pavement. Now most 'o us would simply pocket the money – no not doolally O'Leary, h' gives it to a man selling newspapers who looked hard up with his second-hand stained suit, grey to white hair and clearly visible missing teeth. "I ai'nt got change for a quid sir." No, no i' 'yous keep it, there's plenty more where I'm going, the streets are paved with' em." Course 'e finds out later that the streets of London ai'nt paved with gold."



Paddington Railway Station in the 1890's. The triple rails can be seen on the vacant tracts to the left of the picture to accommodate both broad and standard-gauge rolling stock,

George wondered for how much longer Liam would maintain this monologue, he showed no sign of coming to the point of his visit and even less of when he intended leaving.

"Did you ever meet Shamus? No, I suppose you wouldn't, what with him going to London and you being here. Course 'e mi'ent be in London, what with finding out them streets ai'nt paved wi' gold. Did I tell yer 'e had a job working for the Council once,

Dublin City Council. Well.” It was a drawn out ‘well’ as Liam sat back in his chair with his thumbs in the arm openings of his waistcoat. “’e has this ‘ere job an’ one morning the boss sends ‘im and another bloke, one Sligo, forgotten ‘is last name, any road theirs sent up this ‘ere hill on the outskirts of town to measure the height of a flagpole what’s on top o’ hill “ How long Liam would have droned on for with his tales of life in Ireland is difficult to say, but George was beginning to become quite bored with the monologue. Liam eventually completed his narrative with the information that Mrs. O’Rielly carrying

two bags of provisions which she puts down demanding to know what the two troublemakers are doing. On being informed that they had been sent to measure the height of the flagpole and could not see how to do it she pulled out the pin at the foot of the pole, lowered it to the ground, and picking up her shopping told the boys to get on with measuring. Whereupon Shamus said to his pal Sligo Sid, known as ‘Paddy’. “Ai’nt that just like a woman, we wants the height an’ she gives us the length.”

How long this rendition of stories might have continued is a matter of mere speculation, but suddenly, just as George was about to put an end to a seemingly pointless meeting Liam suddenly changed tack with.

“You remember that Irish whiskey you took a fancy to at the “Marshal Schomberg”, well now yous making good Scotch whiskey but now you can add Irish to your range, what do you tink?”

George did not know what to think, he had his hands rather full at the moment, what with the collection of taverns he had bought and the gentleman he met at Oxford who wished to build horseless carriages, and now this Irishman prattling on about whiskey. In response, and playing for time, George merely said.

“I’ll need to know a great deal more about the distilling process and the ingredients, then we will have to consider the practicalities of producing Irish whiskey here in England.”

There followed a lull while Liam considered his next move. He urgently desired to escape Ireland, he was wanted in almost every county and not in a friendly manner, but he needed money, and lots of it. He knew about whiskey or thought he did and he needed to persuade this Englishman to part with some of his obvious wealth. All he had to do was persuade him to start making Irish whiskey. Now Liam needed to play the long game, ‘gently gently catch a monkey’ but Liam was impetuous by nature, he would have to curb his temper.

A glance at the mantle clock informed George that the time of day was approaching three o’clock when the maid entered. She bobbed a curtsy and said.

“Begging your pardon sir, but Cook wishes to know if there will be an extra guest for dinner?”

Quick as a flash, before George had a moment to reply, Liam responded.

“Thanks that’s most uncommon kind very good, thankee kindly.”

And so, the persuasive Irishman, who had certainly kissed the Blarney Stone, and very possibly more than once, invited himself to dinner that evening. At about six of the clock the whole family assembled in the dining room where both Cook, and the maid served the family. There were two extra for dinner as Annabell had invited a friend from Hereford College of Art and Science who would be staying for a few days, and they all enjoyed pre diner drinks, a glass of sherry all round, a custom George had introduced which he had acquired at one of his wealthier clients. Liam was like a dog with two tails enjoying the company of Annabell, her friend Ducas and the maid Alice Morgan whose bottom he patted whenever she passed which caused the girl to giggle until Cook spotted what was going on and put a stop to the flirtation by serving the side of the table where the Irishman sat herself.

Observing what was, or seemed to be, in progress between Liam and the maid both the girls were affronted by his over forward manner, this unwelcome gregarious and rather uncouth Irishman was taking advantage of their hospitality. Ducas thought that her father would never behave in such a way whilst Annabell was sure that neither of her brothers would ever stoop to such appalling bad taste.

William, George's father, took an instant dislike to Liam and did not improve matters by embarking on a lengthy narrative regarding a cousin that none of the other family members could remember ever having been mentioned before who was a trooper in the 6th Regiment of Horse, the Inniskilling Dragoons, and took part in the charge of the heavy brigade at Balaclava. Just as William expected, Liam hated the army, and Irish regiments in particular, he, Liam, fell silent for a while, much to the relief of Emily who seated next to George, in an undertone reminded her son that 'patience is a virtue, find it if you can, seldom in a woman, never in a man', George smiled and nodded, keeping his counsel, he had been about to explode at Liam for his insolence.

It was Emily who restored the good humour by ordering Cook to bring a bottle of Drambuie to accompany coffee after desert had been served. Liam was intrigued, to everyone's surprise he had not seen a bottle of the spirit of the '45 before, and when William explained the origin of the whiskey-based liqueur, the Jacobite rebellion of Bonny Prince Charles Edward Stuart of 1745, he was positively delighted and declared it to be the best ever.

Later the family retired to the Drawing room, joined by Liam. He had not been invited but came anyway. He annoyed Annabell and her college friend Ducas with his constant over friendly advances until both William and George pointedly mentioned that the last train to either Ross or Gloucester would be leaving the local railway station soon and if he did not get there in time he would have a long cold walk to his lodgings. Liam, remembering that he desired George to support his whiskey venture thought it wiser not to object and with great aplome thanked the pair for the timely reminder and promptly departed.

The ladies heaved a collective sigh of relief, but George reminded them that it was Liam who had befriended him after Emma had been killed in that dreadful railway accident in Ulster.

Saucy Sophia's Snippets



The first cold of winter.

Trailer for March, 2026.

There are more revelations concerning the Ashbourne family, their business success and loves as the 1890's progresses, but firstly our attention centres on Edward and Alexandra, their life in Berlin and Edward's career.

Dorian M. Osborne

1st February, 2026.

