

THE ASHBOURNE FAMILY SAGA

CHAPTER X

and

Saucy Sophia's Snippets plus trailer for next month.

February, 2024.

Edward awoke on the morning of the 1st of January, 1888 in the room allocated to him in the west tower of the Schloss Lansdorf near the village of Elbenshausen, in the German province of East Prussia. Save for the cheery fire happily burning in the grate which one of the servants had lit an hour or so earlier, the room would have been freezing cold, as it was the chill had been removed, and a little later a maid brought him a jug of hot water which she placed on the wash stand ready for use. She wished him a good morning – Gutten Tag and a few other words of greeting some of which he did not understand although he was making progress with Deutch, and certainly understood Alles Gute zum neuen Jahr (happy new year).

The morning had dawned with a clear blue sky and sunlight glistening on the snow-covered landscape beyond the small lattice window of his bedroom. Edward lay in bed reminiscing of the events of Christmas of which he had participated after his arrival at Lansdorf in early November.



The lattice window in the West Tower, Schloss Lansdorf.

Alexandra had informed him that the Schloss had originally been built by the Teutonic Knights as a frontier fortress in about 1250, during their period of expansion into the lands to the north bordering the Baltic Sea, often referred to as old Prussia, and the introduction of Christianity by the Knights. She had also mentioned that her father knew far more of the history of both the schloss, and the Order of the Teutonic Knights and that Edward should ask her father to tell him, adding that she felt sure papa would be only too happy to discuss the matter with him.

Stone built, originally with all the rather primitive inconveniences of medieval life, from the seventeenth century onwards vast improvements had been made so that now all the

principal rooms are wood panelled which greatly increased the warmth in winter, whilst the panelling provided opportunity for the creation of cupboards and wardrobes within the panelled walls. Further comfort had been provided by the construction of chimneys and fireplaces with mantle pieces in all the important rooms, that is the dining room, drawing room, parlour, library, hall, morning room, billiard room, gun room and principal bedrooms. Previously there had only been a massive inglenook fireplace in the great hall. The most significant and beneficial modifications were introduced after 1721, that is after the cessation of hostilities at the conclusion of the Great Northern War (1700 - 1721).



The shield of the Teutonic Knights.

Edward was grateful for the improvements that had been achieved over the last 160 years, although only now, having recently inherited the schloss and estate, was Andrius, Alexandra's father, making arrangements for the installation of flush toilets or water closets, a great innovation not just at home but in Prussia, and throughout the civilised world, though the expense of these newfangled contraptions severely restricted their widespread adoption.

He had arrived in Elbenshausen by railway from Berlin on the 10th of November, met by Alexandra at the nearest bahnhof or railway station at Insterburg and therefore just in time to take part in the festival of Martinsfeuer, or Martinmas sometimes known as Old Halloween. The young Englishman was to spend far longer at Schloss Lansdorf, the Martinkus family home than he had anticipated, receiving the warmest welcome imaginable. He was still there in February, but meantime he occupied his time between making himself useful about the castle, its grounds and entertaining Alexandra.

On the 6th of December they had celebrated the feast of Saint Nicholas, and there was a procession through the village or small town of Elbenshausen in which someone performed the part of Saint Nicholas, whilst another acted that of his assistant Knecht Ruprecht (later to be known as Santa Claus in the northeast of the continent). On the way back to the schloss Herr Andrius explained to Edward that Knecht Ruprecht (Farmhand Ruprecht, or servant Ruprecht or Rupert or Robert) was unknown until appearing in a Saint Nicholas Day procession in Nürnberg (Nuremberg) in the seventeenth century. He can be a manifestation for either good or evil, in that for children who have been good he brings fruit, nuts and/or sweets, whereas for bad children they receive only sticks or stones, sometimes sticks for their parents to chastise them with.



Knecht Ruprecht

The events of the 6th December were followed by preparations for Weihnachten (Christmas). There was a careful selection of a suitable Christbaum (Christmas Tree), a fir tree from the forests that were part of the Lansdorf Estate. Having made their choice, the tree was marked and left to be felled during the week before Weihnachten. There was also an Advent Wreath to be prepared, the concept was instigated by Johann Hinrich Wichern, the great Lutheran reformer in 1839, with four large candles for each of the four Sundays prior to Christmas, and twenty-four small candles for the days in-between. This was essentially to involve children in the celebration.



Falling in mid-winter, there were other, mainly pre-Christian beliefs and fears which were to be appeased, frankincense to ward-off evil, snowmen originally considered a menacing snow devil capable of causing all kinds of destruction, inherited from ancient Baltic mythology.



A Schwibbogen, a window decoration, was produced from the attics where it had been put away the previous year. Originally made by mining communities in Silesia from 1740 when the first example was produced is a decorative candleholder from the Ore

Mountain region. The early schwibbogen consisted of a single forged piece of black metal which could be painted. The number of candles varies with the size of the arc, the original design holding eleven. Produced by the local blacksmith who was also responsible for making the mining tools.

In the weeks prior to Christmas there was much other activity including decorating the schloss with foliage brought in from the estate including holly, mistletoe, and fir tree branches. There was a Christmas market in the small town of Elbenshausen, and a larger market at Insterburg in both of which children's toys and confectionary could be obtained, mostly the toys were hand made by local craftsmen working at home in their own workshop. There were other preparations mostly of a culinary nature including selecting a goose for dinner, and sweetmeats, stollen cake, gingerbread, and mince pies to be made, especially as Joutca's younger sister Klara, her husband Hans Hoffmann and their three children Otto, Ina Marie and Eitel Friedrich, aged 12, 10 and 7 respectively would be arriving soon for Christmas. Thus, they were to be a lively party over the Christmas period. The Hoffmann family arrived two days before Christmas Eve and planned to stay until the beginning of January.

One morning in mid-December over breakfast, Karl, Alexandra's younger brother mentioned that as their young cousins would be joining them for Heiligabend (Christmas Eve) they should go to the market at Insterburg to buy a present for each of them. Alexandra clapped her hands with joy and declared that to be a wonderful idea, and immediately gave instructions for a sleigh to be prepared for the journey. When Edward had arrived at the Bahnhof in Insterburg in early November he had been met by Alexandra with a wagonette and the country had been free of snow, now it was very different with a thick layer of white smothering the landscape and rendering the roads almost impassable to wheeled vehicles, hence the sleigh and a pair of horses being pressed into service. The Graf (Countess) insisted they take one of the grooms with them which proved excellent advice, together with a few guns and ammunition merely as a precaution as Insterburg was over twenty miles away through desolate open country where wild animals roamed freely and tended to rule.

The journey through the snow-covered dense forests and open plains was fortunately uneventful and on arrival at their planned destination the three of them, Alexandra, Edward and Karl repaired to an Inn in the Markt Platz (Market Square) to enjoy a warming glass or two of gluhwein while the groom took care of the horses with a bag of oats each before drinking the hot and welcome glass of wine sent out to him. There was time to eat and a tour of the Christkindl market where presents were purchased for the cousins who would be arriving soon before they set off for the return journey to the schloss. Some ten miles along the road Karl thought he heard the faint but dreaded howl of a loan wolf. At first he took little notice, but then seemingly another joined in and both Alexandra and Edward were alerted to the danger. The groom heard too, and so also the horses whose ears rose in fretful response. A dread fear seized their hearts which was only accelerated as more of the pack joined in and they saw the shapes of wolves flitting through the trees as they loped along either side of the sleigh awaiting their leader to signal the moment to strike and go in for the kill. Fortunately, once the presence of wolves had been recognised the guns were checked and loaded where necessary. Now, despite the unevenness of the track and the movement of the sleigh Edward carefully took aim with a hunting rifle and with great good

fortune brought down the leading wolf on their right wing. The bullet must have struck the beast in the left shoulder for it collapsed in a heap, howled once, and lay still. Karl, who in spite of his tender age had been out with his father's hunting parties, fired from the opposite side of their vehicle but failed to hit the wolf he had been aiming at, Edward standing in the swaying sleigh using the second barrel brought down the wolf as they sped onward, the horses straining every sinew of their bodies for maximum speed to escape the frightful hell hounds. Edward looked about to check for more when Alexandra screamed and he saw another wolf leaping for the rear of the sleigh where she was seated, grabbing his service revolver and with reaction born of practice he fired at the wolf hitting the beast, the bullet penetrating its open jaws and taking out the back of its head. The carcass was left behind as the sleigh sped onward. It took five more wolves were despatched before what was left of the depleted pack slunk away no doubt to search for easier prey. There was foam flying onto the occupants of the sleigh as the terrified horses galloped at their maximum speed, an effort they would not have been able to sustain for any great distance whilst the groom struggled with great difficulty to slow the two stallions and prevent the vehicle from overturning as it swayed from side to side with the reckless speed of their flight. For what seemed like ages to the much-disturbed quartet aboard the surging sleigh the only audible sound came from the pounding of the horses' hooves along the icy road and the chunks of ice and small pebbles flung against the dashboard. Eventually the groom succeeded and bringing the steeds to a standstill Alexandra and Karl descended to the ground to calm the pair whilst Edward kept watch, rifle at the ready in case of any renewed danger.

Their journey reengaged they all arrived at the schloss just as the last rays of the setting sun flickered into obscurity and darkness descended across the frozen landscape. Met at the entrance by the great door to the castle by a rather concerned Count and agitated Countess Alexandra, her eyes sparkling with joy and pride, immediately related how Edward had saved her from the jaws of death, while Karl related how he had laid two of the savage beasts low. While the groom led the exhausted horses to the stables for a well-deserved feed and rest the family and Edward repaired to the Great Hall to warm themselves before the roaring log fire with glasses of hot drinks all round.

With the arrival of Heiligabend (Christmas Eve) dinner was served earlier than usual, at about three o'clock in the afternoon, followed by Bescherung (bestowed by God) the time for the exchanging of gifts.

At breakfast on New Year's Day, served in the style Edward was familiar with in England, food and drink had been set out on a sideboard or a table and those participating came in at their individual convenience, helped themselves, and departed. This was the time when plans for the day to come would be finalised. Possibly calling on friends at a nearby property, or a visit further afield, then again, according to the season, a pheasant, grouse, geese, or duck, or possibly boar, deer or wolf hunt or shoot. In this still wild region, it remained feasible to hunt larger prey on horseback, not just foxes. Edward and Alexandra had already discussed the possibility of visiting the site of the 1807 Battle of Eylau, which lay to the southwest of the Schloss. Edward reasoned that a visit to the site of the significant battle with the country blanketed in thick snow would be truly evocative of the conditions and scene on that momentous day for Napoleon, his army, and the Polish

nobility and gentry, whilst being a fateful occasion for Great Britain and the rest of Continental Europe.

While the pair were discussing the matter Alexandra's mother Joucta entered the morning or breakfast room and catching the gist of their conversation immediately said, "Off course you must go, in winter it will be so evocative of the events and conditions in 1807," and turning to Edward continued "do you remember my mentioning that nobleman kissing Napoleon's saddle was my great uncle. Andrius had a copy made when we moved here, you will have seen it hanging over the mantelpiece in the drawing room. Not quite as good as the original by the French artist Antoine-Jean Gros, but with colour the depiction comes to life, and gives a better impression of the event."

"Mumma, where is Papa" Alexandra suddenly enquired, to which her mother informed her that he had gone out to discuss Christmas preparations with the Estate Manager and was not expected home until sunset.



The Battle of Eylau by Antoine-Jean Gros, 1808.

"I see" the young lady muttered, "But we should not go as far as Preussisch Eylau without asking Papa's permission."

"Why, yes of course. I did not mean to imply that you need not seek your father's blessing, and for such a long journey preparations will need to be made."

"We will discuss this matter with your father." Said Edward turning to Alexandra, "And meanwhile I should not sit here over a prolonged breakfast while your father is out in the freezing snow."

"But your breakfast" exclaimed Alexandra.

"I've eaten my fill for the time being." Declared Edward, and turning to Frau Martinkus, bowed politely saying "I thank you for another excellent breakfast, but now I should offer by services to your generous Husband.

Donning the extra winter warm clothing provided for him he set off in search of the Count. The estate stretched as far as the eye could see in all directions, and a great deal further, covered in deep snow so much looked the same. However, there were tracks in the snow, and enquiring of the butler who had just appeared, Edward was able to ascertain which

tracks had been created by the Count and his Estate Manager. Edward set off in pursuit and having previously been warned of the danger especially in winter of hungry wild animals, particularly wolves, he took with him a loaded rifle that had been loaned to him, and two dozen rounds of ammunition. This was to prove an extremely wise precaution.



Following the tracks in the snow, Edward trekked in a generally northern direction. He seemed to be in pursuit of two people whom he assumed to be the Count and his Estate Manager as the Butler had informed him. There was no evidence of the pair having stopped as the tracks just went on and on across a frozen landscape, although very occasionally there was a larger area of flattened snow to suggest they had stopped for a few moments, perhaps to discuss some feature or light a pipe. Edward had now been walking for over two hours, and as the time was just after 10 o'clock by the hall clock when he left the schloss the young gentleman rightly guessed the time to be about mid-day, and still there was no sign of the two he had hoped to overtake. Being young, strong, and very fit he had been able to endure the exertion which would have forced many to rest. At the same time, he was neither stupid nor foolhardy, and realising that he now faced two potential dangers, another snowfall which could obliterate the tracks, and thus the way back to Lansdorf, and/or nightfall which would enhance the risk of mistakes and following a false trail. He therefore reluctantly turned back and had been walking for about an hour or more when his attention was drawn to movement in the snow about two hundred yards ahead. Cocking the rifle and holding it at the ready he proceeded with caution making as little noise as possible. He was expecting wolves devouring some unfortunate creature and thus was surprised to observe human form, stopping to watch carefully he spied three male figures, or forms dressed in male clothing, then he saw the antlers of a fallow deer. Edward had been travelling southwards and thus the three men were silhouetted against the sun, which in these northern parts is always low in the sky during winter. In addition to the double barrel hunting rifle Edward also had a loaded derringer he had taken to carrying since his experience in Shanghai the previous autumn. With careful aim he had one bullet for each of his potential protagonists, but he would have to be very careful as the Count had warned him of the danger when out alone of armed gangs of poachers, Russian deserters, and other troublemakers.

As Edward drew closer it was obvious the group were not Estate employees by their dress and the subversive way they moved. He therefore stood erect, marched forward with his gun trained on the group, but there was a problem, whilst among the Martinkus family who all spoke perfect English communication was straightforward, and Edward had learnt far more Deutsch (German) than he realised but conversationally he was not confident with would be criminals. He therefore merely shouted "Achtung" whereupon the group looked up from their evil work, and one of their number reached in great haste for a rifle lying in the snow close at hand. Edward aimed at the weapon and fired, the man jumped back, as the bullet damaged the rifle beyond immediate use. A moment later a girl's voice sounded across the winter wilderness as she excitedly called out "Eduard, Eduard." Edward was momentarily distracted from the group of thieves, and following the direction of Alexandra's voice heard the report of a gun fired close at hand and his beloved fell to the ground. He also saw one of the group of poachers, a little rat of a man holding a revolver

aimed in the direction where Alexandra had been. Without a thought for his own safety and with what seemed like one bound the strong lythe young man plunged into the midst of them felling all three with his rifle butt, rat face went down with a broken arm, the leader of the pack took a blow on his forehead which rendered him unconscious whilst the third man suffered dislocated shoulder. They lay in the snow moaning while Edward disarmed them, adding a few extra blows with his boots for good measure, so overwrought was he at the seeming loss of his dearest girl.

Alexandra had not been alone, when the Count returned to the schloss without Edward, there was immediate concern for his safety as with the gathering gloom of night in an hour or so's time he would be very lucky indeed to survive the penetrating cold. Also there had been a significant change in the weather, the sky had clouded over during the early afternoon and now snow was falling thickly reducing visibility. A strengthening of the wind added another hazard. The search party had spread out keeping within sight of each other and it had been Alexandra who had first spotted Edward, but because of the uneven surface of the snow, which in places had drifted to over five feet in height she had not observed the three protagonists until it was too late.

Graf Andrius von Czernowitz immediately took control of the situation and ordered a temporary means of conveyance to be prepared to take his daughter to the schloss, while Edward, with the help of one of the Count's men, forced their three prisoners, now roped together, to walk in front, making for the stables. On arriving at their home, they all made for the great hall where a log fire was blazing in the inglenook fireplace, that is all except Edward, his assistant and the three would be criminals. The dead doe, a fallow deer had also been brought along and was taken to Cook in the kitchens. As the party entered the warm hall Alexandra opened her eyes and glancing around enquired what had happened, then groaned as moving her feet shot a moment of pain through her. There was mighty relief on finding that she was still alive, and when on closer examination it was found that the revolver's bullet had only passed through the outside of her right boot, grazed her calf, and was lodged in the other side of the boot where it would have exited. In fact, startled by the report she had slipped on the snow and fainted from a mixture of exertion, shock and fatigue badly spraining her ankle in the process. Edward joined the group by the roaring fire in the Great Hall having securely locked the three poachers in a spare stable, and glasses of hot Christkindl gluhwein were passed around by the butler, whose name Edward discovered was Heinrich Stein, but following the normal practice with servants was always referred to simply as "Stein."



The Great Hall at Lansdorf.

They all changed for dinner removing their wet clothing and the ladies donned beautiful flowing dresses complete with the fashionable bustle, whilst the gentlemen's dress was white tie, their normal attire on special occasions, but not necessarily every evening. There was much solicitous enquiry after Alexandra who declared that she is quite well, it was only a scratch, but thanked the enquirer kindly. She was however restricted to hobbling about due to the severe sprain.

That night there was a terrific storm which howled around the castle turrets, rattled the lattice windows, and threatened to bring down chimneys. Over dinner in the dining room the party could hear the wind outside gathering strength and by 10 o'clock the full fury of the tempest revealed itself and little sleep was achieved that night. The Hoffmanns had planned to depart the following morning, a forlorn prospect now with the likelihood of fallen trees and snow drifts blocking roads and railway lines.



Joucta, her sister Klara with Ina Marie at Schloss Lansdorf.

At breakfast Stein the butler reported that Friedrichs the farm undermanager had called to inform the household that the snow is too deep to allow movement of any kind and that with all available hands at work a passage is being cleared to the farm buildings and stables, but that it is not possible to move any of the waggons or carriages. Transport will be possible by sleigh but only after the snow has hardened as otherwise it is just too deep. When Herr Hans Hoffmann appeared some ten minutes later and was informed of the travel situation, as he has been expecting to return to Berlin that day, he was none too pleased, and muttered something that Edward did not hear well but he thought he heard 'his excellency' referring to his service superior. For the time being they would all have to stay, not necessarily an unpleasant prospect in a warm fortress with ample supplies of food and drink.

Saucy Sophia's Snippets

Last month in celebration of the New Year I brought to you a Dutch post card for the 1st of January, 1920's. However, we must not overlook the other great event of January, especially for the ladies, the January Sales. Many of you will remember that before the advent of online shopping, Department Stores, particularly on Saturdays would be absolutely packed with customers and potential customers all searching for a bargain. The shop assistants would be literally rushed off their feet, they could not ring up the cost in tills, take the cash and wrap the goods quickly enough.

A little belatedly this month, I bring you a glimpse of the sale at a major department store during the 1920's or 1930's.



The Sales.

I've just had a very nice
Day at the Sales,
It's a day that I always -
I rang up the office and
Said I was ill,
Then had lunch with that
Patterson boy.

Then off to the Sales, it was
Ever such fun,
And I got quite a lot of
 nice things:
A lovely pink girdle, a
Really tight one,
With that big thick elastic
 that "pings".

And a green thing with bows
(they made several of those)
And a white thing with drapes,
 like a goddess
And a black thing with strings,
And a blue thing, with things –
And a red thing with straps,
 and a bodice.

Can't wait 'til tomorrow,
To go in to work,
And walk in dressed up
like a toff!
But after today I'm so tired –
Oh well,
I'll ring up for another day off.

Trailer for next month.

Annabell, Edward's sister, goes to a Ball at the Chase, but does she meet her prince charming, and what follows after the ball.

Dorian Osborne

1st February, 2024.