

THE ASHBOURNE FAMILY SAGA

CHAPTER XXXVII

and

Saucy Sophia's Snippets, Humorous Quotations plus trailer for next chapter.

September/October, 2026.

George occupied his favourite chair in the drawing room of the house in Weston-under-Penyard. It was late summer and a light shower had cooled the air while the scent of flowers drifted in from the garden to delight and calm the senses.

The last ten years had passed akin to a whirlwind, or so George thought to himself, in a little less than four months' time it would be Nineteen Hundred, a strange feeling, no more Eighteen Hundred and something. He did not experience any form of elation at the thought, nor trepidation, just a vague numbness, as though he had lost something, which he had - ten years.

There had been enormous changes since 1889 and the Master thought there would be even more, how right he was in ways he could hardly conceive. Annabell and her Beau had married on the 18th June, 1892 in Gloucester Cathedral. Almost a "Society Wedding", officiated by the Right Reverend Charles Elliott, Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol. A combined See since 1836, but within a few years, in 1897, was to be separated again. The wedding guests, who had been numerous, it had seemed to George, came from far and wide, though in reality the greatest distance travelled was from London where the brother of the bride's mother resided, one Lieutenant Commander RN Gerald Turnbull and his wife Charlotte whose arrival in Weston-under Penyard provided for an emotional reunion.

The bridegroom travelled a comparably short distance from Cheltenham whilst his mother hailed from Worcester. She travelled alone save for her maid; her husband and Algie's father having departed this earthly life some four years earlier. Mrs Maud Robertson-Smythe presented a formidable presence, certainly one not to be trifled with and whose maid, a slender brown-haired girl, seemed to be in a state of permanent and perpetual fear lest she fail to execute her mistress's next command with the expected level of accuracy, expedience and promptitude. The quivering wreck only induced looks of utter disdain from Mrs. Robertson-Smythe. Her son Algenon, known to his friends as Algie, had long since given up endeavouring to persuade his mother to treat her maids less harshly or at least mitigate her demands, she only accused him of being weak like his father, which he certainly was not, neither was his late papa. She stated frequently that servants needed to know their place and renewed her venom towards them. Madam also could be extremely annoying with the use of her lorgnette which she used to great effect examining other guests, paintings and objects de art whilst declaring her opinion, good or bad. It was obvious to the Ashbourne family, who had all grown close to Algenon who was well liked and appreciated that he was embarrassed by his mother's general attitude of commanding disdain. George knew that Annabell had nearly called the wedding off on several occasions

following her fiancé's mother's outrageous behaviour, and secretly they all wished 'Madam' as they called her between themselves would go and live somewhere else, anywhere preferably over one hundred miles away though William suggested the Australian state of Queensland as a preferable location.

Annabell, sweet, bonnie, amiable, good, blithe and gay Annabell had wisely remained silent whilst these criticisms of her future mother-in-law were taking place. She too would have preferred that Algie's mother resided away, anywhere about three or more days travel as Worcester was only about an hour's journey time, too close for comfort.

After the wedding service the family and guests all travelled the short distance to the railway station in a fleet of hired carriages from where the train for Hereford conveyed them to Weston-under-Penyard. The wedding breakfast, though in truth it was more a luncheon, the service in the cathedral in Gloucester commencing at 1030 am, was deemed a great success, and even 'Madam' managed to smile when William described how his daughter had dismissed as a suitor a gentleman holding Her Majesty's commission for the 28th Regiment of Foot, but became rather taken with a young chap who went off to Darjeeling to manage a tea garden for 'Twinings' to which the Bride had blushed a bright Pinky red But greater embarrassment for Annabell was to follow when her father had declared.

"For my part I cannot conceive why anyone, unless driven by poverty would wish to travel to a land peopled by ungrateful natives who just over forty years ago took it into their heads to murder their benefactors the people who tried to stop their barbaric practice of burning widows and the gangs who murdered innocent travellers for the sake of their heathen goddess Kali!"

There had been a round of applause and plenty of 'Here Heres' from the guests, with the ladies clapping politely and the gentlemen banging the tabletop rattling the glasses all signifying their approval. William's speech had been far longer, but George was unable to recall any more detail. Reference to the Mutiny had struck a raw nerve with the older guests many of whom could remember suffering the loss of dear relations.



The wrecked Billard Room at the Residency in Lucknow during the bombardment by mutineering sepoys. Four cannon balls can be seen on the floor.

It had been a little later, after the Bride and Groom had departed, it was rumoured that the happy couple would be spending their first night together at the Green Dragon in Hereford before travelling on via Worcester to Birmingham for the 'London & North Western' express to Glasgow and the 'Highland Railway' to the western isles, that he had been joined in conversation by an elderly gentleman who, George was to discover, was the younger brother of Algies late father. A remarkably upright chap who had served in several theatres of war including the Taiping Uprising in China being the revolt by the Heavenly Kingdom, the Crimean War, the Ambala Campaign of 1863-4 against the Afghan Pashtuns and Egypt in 1882. Either they were the only adventures the gentleman mentioned, or the only ones George could remember in his revelry.

How long George sat there in the drawing room he could not have recalled had he been asked, but it must have been gone four o'clock when he had taken a glass of whisky with him from the dining room. He was very tired, but not yet ready to retire for the day. Anyway, his new wife would start to wonder if he was quite well and should she call the doctor. Annabell had persuaded him to marry again and had spent nineteen months persuading her quest. Against her brother's conviction that the famous Doctor Johnson had been right when he wrote that to marry a second time amounted to the triumph of hope over experience he had eventually allowed himself to be persuaded, but of course that was only the beginning. He was however fortunate in that his sister, being a lively and popular girl had many friends, single ladies and the unmarried sisters of male acquaintances. George had found himself attending more social events than he thought possible, soirées, garden parties, piano recitals, balls and theatre visits, all of which afforded Annabell the opportunity to effect numerous introductions. George had, he recalled, been quite bewildered by it all and had had great difficulty remembering the different ladies' names who became little vixens when he referred to Caroline as Carmen or Anna as Arabella, and in the restaurant at the New Theatre in Monmouth he came close to having the lady's drink thrown in his face so furious had the little demon become. There was Lucy who talked endlessly about herself, Florence who was the exact opposite, the limit of her conversation consisted of yes and no, the affirmative and the negative, and Maud who had attended Cheltenham Ladies College, studied for a degree in something and was determined to let everyone know together with expounding her knowledge on every subject one could imagine and several one had not heard of. Then there was Esme who asked countless questions to elicit her companion's prospects. And how could he have overlooked, the blue stocking of them all, the aptly named 'George' as she desired to be called, her real name as Georgina. A young woman who marched around throwing her weight around, which was considerable, and generally contemptuous of all and sundry. Heavy footed, loud and plain, very plain. Then Carol, she had been quite a girl, but then she had disguised her common place origin with a display not always in private of her charms which were considerable. George knew he must give her up but could not bring himself to do so. On his birthday she sent him a short letter expressing her affection for him and closing with a short rhyme which read.

"Tulips in the Garden,
Tulips in the Park.
But the Tulips I like best
Are the two lips in the dark"

It was too much, especially when his mother read it, George had accidentally or carelessly left the letter lying on the dining room table. George had to find an excuse not to see Carol; he had expected tears and a tantrum, instead she merely tossed her head and announced that Fed was better anyway.

But all's well that ends well: George and Amelia had married at St. Mary the Virgin church in Lydney, Gloucestershire. It was he knew Amelia's hometown, her father owned a comfortable spacious house on the hillside overlooking the town and the docks, important because from the vantage point of the first floor east facing windows he had a splendid view of the harbour where his ships would be unloading cargo and loading mainly coal from the numerous coal mines in the Forest of Dean.

Amelia was everything he could have wished for, sweet of nature, like Annabell, lightness of foot, it was a joy to watch her tripping along with her reticule swinging at her side. As George sat there with the evening shadows lengthening at the passing of the day he reflected on how life had panned out since he had taken an active part in the family business from the trip to Scarborough now over ten years ago. His younger brother had married in Berlin and Annabell married a chap who was now the Chief Constable for Oxfordshire, and important position with a salary to reflect the responsibility. Now he had ignored Dr. Johnson's advice and married again which disproved the good doctor's dictum that marrying a second time was a matter of hope over experience.

The business had flourished, the 'Bonny Moira' brewery had gone from strength to strength with beer sales doubling each year, much of it sold through the chain of taverns and public houses he had built up. From the initial six the number had risen to over triple to nineteen to include Chepstow and Newport to the west and Gloucester, Stroud and Cirencester to the southeast. Also, his association with the gentleman he had met in Oxford, Hamish McTaggart had led to the establishment of a manufactory of motor carriages or horseless carriages as they were sometimes referred to as. Whilst initially the capital expenditure had been considerable there seemed to be surprisingly little competition for the finished goods. George, without realising, was using the charm and confidence he had acquired when supplying carriages to the wealthy of the county when discussing the design and performance especially speed and cornering of his horseless carriages. He was building a very profitable little empire, but he realised he was light on the management skills of his senior employees. Something had to be done, and it would be for him to do it.

Suddenly he was awakened from his revelry by a loud knocking on the main entrance door though to George it sounded more like a crash. It was one of the lads from the carriage works whom Amelia had requested be made available to ride postillion on one of a pair of greys harnessed for the barouche to travel to Lydney to visit her father. George, who realised he had lost track of time and noticed it was almost dark outside became quite alarmed. His fear was quickly laid when opening the door, he was greeted by his wife whilst the lad looked towards him from holding the horses' bridles calling across.

"Evening Sir, sorry we're late, one o' them 'orses go' 'er stone wedged under 'is shoe, 'ad to ge' it ou', took a bi' o' doin' it did."

George hurried towards the carriage to help Amelia descend, telling the lad to take the

carriage to the stables, though that was not really necessary. The commotion had seemingly awakened the house from its slumber; William appeared, so too did the maid Morgan and another young woman, Ada's daughter from Liverpool whom George had reluctantly agreed to provide a temporary home for, as he thought against his better judgement, to please his mother who had pleaded for the girl. Alice had come begging almost ten years ago and contrary to George's expectation she had proved to be quite different to her parents and brother, possibly taking after her and his (George's) grandparents. Nine years ago, Alice had arrived at the Ashborne family residence with a letter from her mother addressed to her brother-in-law, William, asking that they take Alice in and saying that she would work hard and willingly. Both Emily and William had argued strongly against setting Alice to work stating that she is part of their family however remote. Unlike her mother she had arrived in a clean and tidy condition, and although her clothes had not been anything approaching good quality she had a charming and winning way about her which was immediately engaging, polite and spoke of honesty.

Persuaded by the others George arranged for Alice to attend elocution classes in Cherltenham once a week and on Wednesdays, classes in deportment. Emily said she would do her best to improve the girl's education by introducing her to such lady like subjects as needlework, painting and drawing together with literature. Fortunately, Alice proved to be a willing pupil, and great strides were made in departing from the unpleasant ways of slum dwellers, and when ten months later she offered to help with the business accounts both George and William were delighted.

It was Amelia, who by now was married to George and therefore had moved to Weston-under-Penyard, who took charge of Alice's wardrobe sending for the dressmaker and ordering skirts, blouses and dresses, whilst a visit to a milliners secured a small collection of hats and at a haberdashers in Ross the young woman's underwear was not so much as replaced as provided, the poor girl when she arrived had virtually no underclothes whatsoever which Amelia found quite awful. It was a warm day in early October and at Amelia's behest they repaired to the Royal Hotel where she obtained a table on the terrace overlooking the horseshoe bend of the River Wye. A tranquil scene with Dock Pitch the road leading down quite steeply to the river steamers moorings. It was whilst participating of a cup of coffee each, a drink quite foreign to Alice that she had explained that her mother had made her do most of the work in the one room where they had all lived including cooking, cleaning, washing and bringing water from a tap in the yard to the third floor. Her brother, she explained did nothing and father even less when he was there, which was not very often. At twelve years of age, she had been sent to work for a lady in a smarter part of Liverpool as a maid of all work, starting at 5.30 in the morning and often not being allowed to go to the garret room she shared with a scullery maid and laundry maid until after ten o'clock.

"Is that why you left, sheer exhaustion?!" Enquired Amelia.

"No!" Said Alice. "I seemed to be doing quite well; Madam was going to promote me to become the parlour maid. You see the girl who held that position was leaving and Madam said I could take her place, only her ladies maid found out. She thought she was superior to us all and should have been consulted. When one of Madam's brooches went missing there was an awful rumpus and then it was discovered under my pillow. That was it, I was

instantly dismissed and was lucky the police were not informed.”



Madam dismisses Alice after the broach had been found under her pillow.

“Thus, you went home to mother.”

“No, not exactly. Mum had talked about all of you down south, well on the one occasion I saw her when she came back. She said how posh you all were and it made her most uncomfortable, but she also said you were all very kind. Well after I got the sack I’d nowhere to go, I just wandered about for a few days, then I tried pub work, you know as a bar maid. That were alright for a week or more, they let me sleep in a sort of box room, then the master’s son came home. Seems he had been to Burton-on-Trent and other places buying beer for the pub, but he took a fancy to me. Not good, he just wanted to have his way with me, became quite fresh. I told him I weren’t having any of it, don’t think you’re going to get me in the family way I said, after that I left.”

“What did you do then?”

“I went home, told mum what had happened and she said she weren’t surprised, a pretty girl like you invites trouble. Then she said I couldn’t stay with them I’d have to go! While you’re here you better have a cup o’ char. While were both drinking tea she suddenly announced I could go to Herefordshire. What for says I? You can stay with my father-in-law, they’ll have you. Then she wrote that letter I brought with me and made me go.”

“But without money how did you manage to get here?”

“It were like this. Don’t you tell anyone, please.”

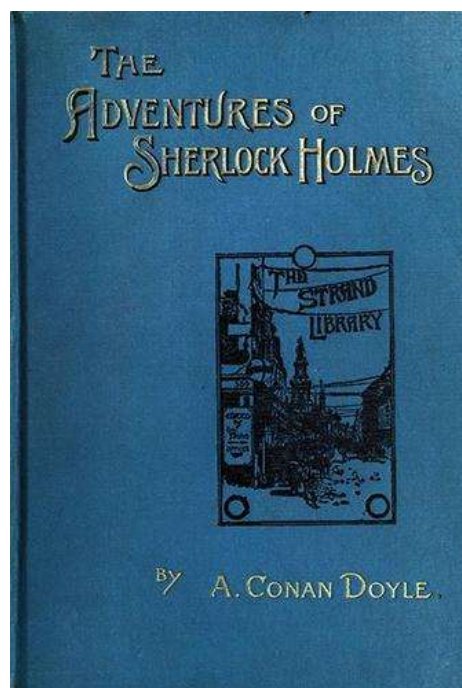
“I won’t.” Said Amelia thinking it wouldn’t be much to tell anyway.

“I went to the goods yard near Lime Street Railway Station and got talking to a guard on a

goods train. I was very lucky; he had a train of fish and whale oil bound for Worcester and he let me ride in the guard's van with him all the way. Older chap he was, seemed about eighty to me but probably only sixty – too old to want me which was good. He said I had been a good lass keeping him company and when we arrived at Worcester he got me a space on a train to Hereford, don't know how he done it, but those that asks no questions ai'nt told no lies. That's right ai'n' it." With the telling of her story, she began to forget her speech committing the social sin of missing 'hs' and 'ts'.

Alice sat watching the river as it flowed past several hundred feet below, or so it seemed to Alice, she was letting her mind drift, rather like a broken piece of branch drifting in the river. There was a strange round small boat which a man was controlling with a paddle, how odd she thought as it turned round effortlessly, she had never seen a coracle and was quietly fascinated, but then her mind involuntarily turned to the humiliation of her dismissal when Madam's maid had taken it upon herself to supervise her departure. She was required to leave her uniform behind, black calico dress, white pinafore apron, white mop cap, black shoes and socks. Not content with degrading the former house maid Alice had been made to strip naked so her body could be inspected to make sure she had not hidden any of Madam's jewellery about her person anywhere. Not content with such awful treatment she had criticised Alice's own clothes which were little more than rags, so the poor girl had fled as quickly as she could.

When Amelia enquired if her friend was quite well and if she was enjoying the view. Alice merely said she was very happy and yes, enjoying the view. She could not tell Amelia what had happened, could not admit the shame. On leaving the hotel the pair called in at a bookshop where Amelia purchased a copy of 'The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes' by Arthur Conan Doyle the book having been ordered a week earlier. Previously published in the 'Strand Magazine' it had been well received in published book form by literary journalists in the better-quality newspapers and Amelia planned to give the copy to Annabell as a Christmas present. She was a young lady who liked to plan ahead, disliking last minute panicky rushes.



Saucy Sophia's Snippets



The Charms of Ishtar by the contemporary American artist Emily Belivet is a modern interpretation of the ancient Mesopotamian goddess of Love, War and Fertility, the three most basic requirements of life.

Humorous Quotations

**It costs a great deal to be reasonable,
It costs youth**

Madam de la Fayette

Trailer for November/December.

In Herefordshire there are developments, especially for George and his sister Annabell, both personal and business.

Dorian M. Osborne

1st October, 2026.

