

## Chapter 14 Full Speed!

At eleven o'clock in the morning the train had climbed to one of the highest points on its journey through the Rocky Mountains. Two hundred miles further on they would reach those wide stretches of flat country that lie between the mountains and the Atlantic coast. So in a few hours they would have passed the difficult and dangerous part of their journey through the mountains.

After a good meal the travellers began playing cards again. But before long the train moved more and more slowly and then came to a complete stop. Passepartout put his head out of the window and could see nothing that might explain the delay. There was no station in the area.

For a moment Aouda and Fix were afraid that Mr Fogg would want to get off the train. But he only turned to Passepartout and said: 'Go and see what's the matter.'

Passepartout jumped out. Thirty or forty travellers had got off, and among them was Stamp W. Proctor.

The train had stopped in front of a red signal. The engine

driver and the guard were talking very seriously to a man who had been sent from the next station to stop the train. Some of the travellers came up and joined in the discussion – among them Mr Stamp W. Proctor, with his rough, loud voice.

Passepartout heard the man say: ‘No, you can’t possibly get past! The bridge at Medicine Bow is in need of repair, and will certainly not support the weight of the train.’

The bridge of which they were talking was one that hung across a deep river about a mile further on. What the man said was clearly quite true; the bridge was unsafe.

Passepartout, not daring to go and inform his master, stayed and listened.

‘Well,’ said Mr Proctor, ‘we are not going to stand here for ever in the snow!’

‘Sir,’ answered the guard, ‘we have sent a telegram to Omaha asking them to send a train to meet us at Medicine Bow, but it can hardly get here in less than six hours.’

‘Six hours!’ cried Passepartout.

‘Yes,’ said the guard. ‘In any case it will take us that time to walk as far as the station.’

‘Walk?’ cried all the travellers.

‘How far away is the station, then?’ asked someone.

‘It is only a mile away, but it is on the other side of the river. We shall have to walk to reach a safe crossing. It will be a distance of fifteen miles in all.’

‘A fifteen-mile walk in the snow!’ cried Stamp W. Proctor. Then he started shouting, swearing, calling the railway company and its officials all the bad names he could think of. Passepartout, who was equally angry, felt like joining him. But here was something that it was no use fighting about. All his master’s bank notes were useless in the face of this difficulty.

The passengers were extremely disappointed and upset. Not only would they be late, but they would also have to walk fifteen

miles through the snow. The noise of their complaints would certainly have been noticed by Phileas Fogg if that gentleman had not been so interested in his game.

Passepartout saw that he would have to tell his master what had happened. He was just walking towards the carriage, when the engine driver, a true American by the name of Foster, raised his voice and said: 'Gentlemen, there is one way of getting across.'

'Across the bridge?' asked somebody.

'Yes, across the bridge.'

'With our train?' asked Proctor.

'With our train.'

Passepartout stopped, and listened to what was being said.

'But the bridge is unsafe!'

'That doesn't matter,' said the engine driver. 'I believe that by sending the train across at full speed, there will be a good chance of getting over.'

'Well, what a crazy idea!' thought Passepartout.

But quite a number of the travellers very much liked the idea, particularly Stamp W. Proctor.

'Quite reasonable and quite natural!' he cried. 'Why,' he went on, 'there are engineers who are now designing trains that, travelling at full speed, can cross rivers without any bridge at all!'

In the end all the travellers agreed to the idea. Passepartout was too surprised to speak. He was ready to attempt anything in order to get across the river, but this seemed to him to be rather too 'American'.

'Besides,' he thought, 'there is a much simpler way, and these people have not even thought of it.'

'Sir,' he said to one of the travellers, 'the plan seems to me a little dangerous, but—'

'There is nothing more to be said,' answered the man. 'The engine driver says we can get across, and that is an end of the matter.'

'Yes, I am sure we can get across,' said Passepartout, 'but would it not be less dangerous—'

'What's that! Dangerous?' cried Proctor. 'Don't you understand? At full speed!'

'Yes, I understand,' said Passepartout, trying again to finish what he wanted to say. 'But don't you think it would be a better idea—'

'What? What's that? What's he talking about?' everybody shouted.

'Are you afraid?' asked Proctor.

'Afraid? I, afraid?' cried Passepartout. 'I'll show these Americans whether a Frenchman is afraid!'

'Take your seats! Take your seats!' shouted the guard.

'All right! All right!' shouted Passepartout to him. 'But I can't help thinking that it would be safer for us to walk over the bridge first, and then to let the train follow!'

But nobody heard this wise advice, and in any case nobody would have agreed to the idea.

The travellers all went back to their seats, and Passepartout went back to his, without saying anything of what had happened. The card players were sitting there thinking only of their game.

The engine driver took the train back nearly a mile, in the same way as a jumper steps back before he makes his jump. Then he made it go forward again, more and more quickly, until the train was moving at a frightening speed. It seemed to be going at about 100 miles an hour. It flew over the bridge! Nobody even saw the bridge – the train simply jumped from one side of the river to the other, and the driver could not stop it until it was five miles the other side of the station.

But the train had hardly crossed over the river when the bridge fell with a crash into the water below.



That evening the train reached the highest point of its journey. It now had only to go down until it reached the Atlantic. The travellers had come 1,382 miles from San Francisco in three days and three nights. In another four days and four nights they should be at New York.

The next day the three companions were playing cards as usual. None of them complained about the length of the journey. Fix had begun by winning a few pounds, and was now losing them again. Mr Fogg held very good cards, and he was just going to play one of them when a voice was heard behind him saying: 'Don't play that; play a diamond instead.'

Mr Fogg, Aouda and Fix looked up to see Stamp W. Proctor standing there.

'Oh, it's you, is it, Mr Englishman!' cried he. 'You are the one who wants to play a heart.'

'Yes, and I shall play it,' answered Phileas Fogg, as he did so.

'Well, I want you to play the diamond.' And the man bent forward to take hold of it, adding, 'You don't know how to play this game.'

'Perhaps there is another game that I know better,' said Phileas Fogg, getting up from his seat.

'Well, you can try,' replied Proctor with an ugly smile on his face.

Aouda looked very frightened. She took hold of Mr Fogg's arm, but he gently pushed her away. Passepartout was ready to throw himself on the American, but Fix stood up, went to Proctor, and said: 'The quarrel is between you and me. You were not only disrespectful towards me, but you even struck me.'

'Mr Fix,' said Mr Fogg, 'I beg your pardon, but this is my business alone. This man will answer to me for his behaviour.'

'When and where you like,' replied the American.

Aouda tried to hold Mr Fogg back, but without success. The detective attempted to take the quarrel on himself. Passepartout

wanted to throw the American out of the window, but a sign from his master stopped him. Phileas Fogg left the carriage, and the American followed him.

'Sir,' said Mr Fogg to his enemy, 'after our meeting in San Francisco I made up my mind to come back to America to find you as soon as I had finished the business that calls me to England.'

'Really!'

'Will you meet me in six months' time?'

'Why not in six years' time?'

'I said six months,' answered Mr Fogg.

'You want to escape from me!' cried Stamp W. Proctor. 'You will fight me now or never.'

'Very well,' answered Mr Fogg. 'You are going to New York?'

'No.'

'Chicago?'

'No.'

'Omaha?'

'That's no business of yours. Do you know Plum Creek?'

'No,' answered Mr Fogg.

'It's the next station. The train will be there in an hour's time. It will wait there for ten minutes. That will give us time enough to fight.'

'Agreed,' said Mr Fogg. 'I will stop at Plum Creek.'

'And you will stay there!' said the American, with an ugly laugh.

'Who knows, sir?' answered Mr Fogg, returning to his seat. 'People who talk loudly are not to be feared,' he remarked to the anxious Aouda, to calm her. Then he took Fix on one side and asked him to help him prepare for the fight when the time came. Fix could not refuse, and Phileas Fogg picked up his cards and went on with his game.

At eleven o'clock the train reached Plum Creek Station and

stopped. Mr Fogg got up and, followed by Fix, left the carriage. Passepartout went too, carrying a pair of revolvers.

They had not been outside long when the door opened and Mr Proctor came out with a friend. But just as the two enemies were preparing themselves, the guard ran up, saying: 'Nobody is to get out here, gentlemen.'

'Why not?' asked Proctor, angrily.

'We are twenty minutes late, and the train is not going to wait.'

'But I have to fight this gentleman.'

'I am sorry,' said the guard, 'but we are starting immediately. There is the bell ringing.'

As he said this, the train started to move and the two men jumped on.

'I am really very sorry, gentlemen,' said the guard. 'I would like to have helped you. But as you have had no time to fight at Plum Creek, is there any reason why you should not fight on the train?'

'Perhaps that would not suit this gentleman,' said Proctor with an unpleasant laugh.

'It will suit me perfectly,' answered Phileas Fogg.

'We are certainly in America!' thought Passepartout. 'And the guard is a perfect gentleman!' He followed his master.

The two men, their friends and the guard passed through the carriages until they reached the end of the train. In the last carriage there were only about ten people. The official asked these passengers whether they would be good enough to give up the carriage for a few minutes to two gentlemen who wished to fight.

Well, of course! They were only too happy to be of any service to the two gentlemen, and immediately went out and stood in the passage.

The carriage was fifty feet long, and very suitable for the purpose. The two men could walk towards each other between the seats and shoot at each other without difficulty. Mr Fogg and

Mr Proctor, each carrying two revolvers, would go inside. The two supporters would shut the door and stay outside. A signal would be given, and shooting would begin. Then, after two minutes, the door would be opened and what was left of the two gentlemen would be carried out. Nothing could be simpler.