

Chapter 16 A Sledge with Sails

Phileas Fogg was now twenty hours late on his journey. Passepartout blamed himself for being the cause of the delay and refused to be comforted by anyone.

At that moment Fix walked up to Mr Fogg and said: 'Are you really in a hurry to get on?'

'I certainly am,' answered Phileas Fogg.

'You really want to get to New York by the 11th, before nine o'clock in the evening, when the boat leaves for Liverpool?'

'I do.'

'And if your journey had not been stopped by the attack on the train, you would have reached New York on the morning of the 11th?'

'I would. Twelve hours before the boat leaves.'

'Very well. You are twenty hours late. Between twelve and

twenty there is a difference of eight. Do you wish to make them up?’

‘On foot?’

‘No, on a sledge,’ answered Fix. ‘On a sledge with sails. A man has offered us the use of one.’

This was the man who had spoken to Fix during the night and whose offer Fix had refused.

Phileas Fogg did not answer, but Fix pointed to a man who was walking up and down in front of the station. Mr Fogg went up to him. A few moments later Phileas Fogg and this American, by the name of Mudge, entered a hut not far away. There Mr Fogg examined this strange sledge. It was built of wood, and was large enough to hold five or six people. It had a high mast, which carried a large sail. At the back was a sort of rudder by which the sledge could be made to go in any direction. It was a kind of ship, but instead of being made to sail through water, it sailed on ice or snow. During the winter, when trains are stopped by the snow, these sledges could travel between stations at great speed.

An arrangement was soon made with the owner of the sledge. A strong wind was blowing conveniently from the west. The snow was hard, and Mudge promised to take Mr Fogg to Omaha in a few hours. From Omaha there are many trains running on more than one railway line towards Chicago and New York. In this way it would be quite possible to make up for lost time, and there was no reason why the plan should not be tried.

As Aouda might suffer from the cold, Mr Fogg thought of leaving her with Passepartout at Kearney Station, and the Frenchman promised that he would bring her to Europe a little later by train and boat. But Aouda refused to be separated from Mr Fogg, and Passepartout was very happy with her decision. He had no wish to leave his master alone with Fix.

It would be difficult to say what Fix was thinking of all this. Had he changed his mind about Mr Fogg when he saw this

gentleman come back, or did he still view him as an evil man who thought that after his journey round the world he would be safe in England? Perhaps he now had a higher opinion of Mr Fogg, but he was still determined to do his duty, and was as anxious as anybody to get back to England as soon as possible.

At eight o'clock the sledge was ready to start. The travellers took their places on it, well wrapped up and protected against the cold. The sail was raised and, with the wind behind it, the sledge flew forward at a speed of forty miles an hour.

The distance between Kearney and Omaha in a straight line was not more than 200 miles. If the wind did not drop, it would be possible to do this distance in five hours. If there were no accident, the travellers should be in Omaha by one o'clock.

It was a freezing journey. The travellers pressed against each other for warmth. The cold, made greater by the speed, prevented any possibility of speech. The sledge slid across the snow as lightly as a boat on the water. When the wind blew hard, it felt as if the sledge would be lifted up in the air. Mudge kept the sledge going in the right direction.

'If nothing breaks, we shall get there,' Mudge shouted to his passengers.

It was in Mudge's interest to get there in time, since Mr Fogg, as usual, had offered a big reward.

The country over which they passed was as flat as the sea. It looked like a very large frozen lake. There was nothing in the way and there were only two things to be afraid of: that the sledge might break or that the wind might drop. But the wind did not drop. It blew more strongly than ever. It made the mast bend, but the sledge was so solidly built that there was really no danger of anything breaking.

Passepartout now had a face as red as the setting sun. He began to hope again. Instead of getting to New York in the morning, they would get there in the evening, but they had a good chance

of catching the boat. He was so happy that he was almost ready to shake hands with Fix and call him his friend. He did not forget that it was Fix himself who had suggested the sledge, which was the only way of getting to Omaha in time. But he still did not trust Fix; he felt that the detective was planning more of his old tricks.

One thing that Passepartout would never forget was the way in which Mr Fogg had gone back to save him from the Indians. To do that he had put his life and fortune in danger. No, he would never forget that.

At twelve o'clock Mudge saw that he had crossed the River Platte. He said nothing, but he was already sure that he would soon reach Omaha Station.

It took them exactly an hour. The sledge stopped, and Mudge pointed to a few hundred houses with snow-covered roofs.

'We are there,' he said.

Yes, they were really there. They had reached a station from which trains ran many times a day to the east.

Passepartout and Fix jumped off the sledge, glad to stretch their legs again after five hours without movement. They helped Mr Fogg and the young woman to climb down. Phileas Fogg gave the promised reward to Mudge, Passepartout shook his hand as if he were an old friend, and, wishing him well, they all hurried to the station.

A train was ready to leave, and Mr Fogg and his companions only just had time to jump into a carriage. They had seen nothing of Omaha, but Passepartout thought that was nothing to be sorry about.

The train passed at great speed through the countryside separating them from Chicago. The next day, the 10th, at four o'clock in the evening, they reached this famous city, which had already been rebuilt after the terrible fire that had destroyed it a few years earlier.

Nine hundred miles separate Chicago from New York, but

there were plenty of trains. Mr Fogg and his companions had only to get down from their train and to step into another. The engine started off at full speed as if it knew that Mr Fogg had no time to lose. The train flew through Indiana, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New Jersey.

At last the passengers saw the Hudson River, and on 11th December, at a quarter past eleven in the evening, the train came to a stop at the station on the river bank opposite the offices of the Steamship Company.