

Chapter 5 Saving Aouda

It is difficult to describe the disappointment of the four men. They had got so near to the woman that they wished to save, but they could not save her. They had failed in their efforts. Sir Francis was biting his fingers. Passepartout was in a state of terrible anger and the Indian had some difficulty in keeping him quiet. Fogg, though, showed no feelings at all; he was as calm as ever.

‘The only thing that we can do now is to go away,’ said Sir Francis, in a low voice.

‘We must go away: that is all that we can do,’ agreed the Indian.

Passepartout said nothing.

‘Let us wait,’ said Phileas Fogg. ‘I need not get to Allahabad before midday tomorrow.’

‘But what are you hoping for?’ asked Sir Francis. ‘In a few hours daylight will come and then . . .’

‘The chance that we are hoping for may come at the last

moment,' answered Fogg.

Sir Francis wondered what Fogg was thinking. What could this cold Englishman possibly be planning to do? Was he going to rush up to the young woman and carry her off at the moment when the Indians were going to burn her? To try to do that would be crazy. But Phileas Fogg was not crazy, so Sir Francis decided to trust him and to wait.

The young Indian did not let his companions stay so close to the temple, but made them come back to the safer place among the trees from where they could see everything but not be seen themselves.

But Passepartout, sitting on the lowest branches of a tree, had an idea, and he began to make a plan. At first he thought, 'What a stupid plan! It cannot succeed.' But later he thought, 'Why not, after all? It's a chance, perhaps the only one!' So then he began to make his way as silently as possible out along the low branches of the tree, the ends of which bent down towards the ground.

The hours went by, and at last there were signs that the sun would soon rise. The moment had come. The sleeping men woke up; the singing and crying started again. The poor girl was now going to die.

The temple doors opened. Mr Fogg and Sir Francis Cromarty could see her as two priests carried her out. For a second it looked as if she were going to make an effort to escape, but a moment later she fell back into the state of sleep caused by whatever they had forced her to take. The crowd of Indians went forward towards the pile of wood. Phileas Fogg and his companions followed. Two minutes later they reached a little stream, not fifty steps away from the pile on which the dead body of the prince lay. They could see the young woman lying beside him.

Oil had been thrown on the wood to make it burn easily. The priests brought fire, and a moment later the wood began to burn.

At that moment Sir Francis and the guide held back Mr Fogg, who was just about to jump forward towards the fire. He pushed them away... and at that point the whole scene changed. Cries of terror were heard, as all the Indians threw themselves on the ground.

The old prince was not dead, after all. He was seen to stand up suddenly, to pick up the young woman in his arms and to come down from the pile of wood, carrying her out of the clouds of smoke.

The priests and others turned their faces to the ground: they did not dare to look at the terrible sight. Mr Fogg and Sir Francis were in a state of the greatest surprise. The Indian's mouth hung open, and Passepartout must surely have been equally surprised.

Carrying the girl in his arms, the man who had come to life again walked quickly towards the travellers, and said, 'Let's go!'

It was Passepartout himself! During the night he had slipped off the branch and, unnoticed by the Indians, had climbed onto the pile of wood. There in the darkness he had put on the long golden coat which he took from the dead body of the prince, and had lain down beside the body. In this way, when the right moment came, he was able to do what has just been described.

Acting with the greatest daring, he was fortunate enough to succeed. A moment later the four men disappeared into the forest, the elephant carrying them away as fast as it could go.

But the cries and shouts behind them told them that the trick had been discovered. For on the pile of burning wood the real body of the old prince could now be clearly seen. The priests were returning to their senses and realizing that the young woman had been carried off. They tried to follow and to catch the travellers, but they were too late.

An hour later Passepartout was still laughing over his success. Sir Francis had taken the brave man by the hand. His master had said 'Well done', which, from him, was very high praise.

Passepartout answered that all the honour of the affair belonged to his master. He could only see the funny part of the business, and laughed to think that he had been the dead husband of a beautiful woman: an old Indian prince!

As for the girl, she had no idea of what had happened. She was still asleep.

The elephant moved quickly through the forest, and an hour after leaving the temple the travellers came to a stretch of flat country. At seven o'clock they stopped to rest. The young woman was still in the same state, but Sir Francis had no anxiety about her condition; he knew that in a few hours she would come to her senses and be all right. What he was afraid of was her future. He told Mr Fogg that if Aouda stayed in India, she would certainly, in the end, be caught again by those who wanted to kill her. She would be safe only when she was out of the country.

Phileas Fogg answered that he would give the matter serious consideration.

At ten o'clock they reached Allahabad. From this point the railway started again, and trains ran in less than twenty-four hours from here to Calcutta. Phileas Fogg should, then, get to Calcutta in time to catch the boat that left there the next day, 25th October, at midday, for Hong Kong.

Mr Fogg found a room at the station for the young woman to rest in, and sent Passepartout to buy the clothes and other things that she would need. By the time the servant got back to the station, having enjoyed as many of the sights as possible along the way, Aouda was already much better. She was now awake, and understood, more or less, what had happened. She was certainly beautiful. She spoke English perfectly, and was in every way a lovely and educated woman.