



The Amazing Race

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THE GOOD DOCTOR LEAPT onto the caboose of the moving freight train, his hands gripping the steel pole attached to the carriage. Air whipped through his clothing and the trees blurred. Nobody believed he could do it. It was nine o'clock in the evening and 'Abdu'l-Bahá's entourage was set to leave Lake Mohonk at ten o'clock the following morning. This gave Dr. Zia Bagdadi exactly thirteen hours to travel from Lake Mohonk to New York and back again.

'Abdu'l-Bahá kept several beautiful Persian carpets in his New York apartment. On the final evening of the Lake Mohonk Peace Conference he decided to make a gift of one of them to Mr. Albert Smiley, the conference's president. Only one thing stood in his way: one hundred and eighty miles. Still, 'Abdu'l-Bahá entrusted Dr. Bagdadi to the task.

With the keys to 'Abdu'l-Bahá's New York apartment on his person, Dr. Bagdadi held on tight. Straining to pull himself inside, he eventually secured a place for himself in the safety of the car.

Then . . . more trouble. A trainman spotted him, angrily protesting his stowing away. Once Dr. Bagdadi produced a business card with the credentials "Dr.," the trainman relented, unaware that this doctor's "urgent mission" involved delivering an oriental rug to a man named Smiley.

At two hours past midnight, Mrs. Grace Ober and her sister Ella Robarts, who minded 'Abdu'l-Bahá's residence when he was away, woke up to the sound of a key turning in the lock, then the creaking of floorboards. They found Dr. Bagdadi, droopy-eyed, hastily rolling up one of 'Abdu'l-Bahá's small carpets, then stealing away into the night.

Dr. Bagdadi arrived at the Lake Mohonk train station with an hour to spare.

Yet he still had to get to the Mountain House. Three days earlier, this last leg of the journey was a glorious trip filled with song. Now it was a frantic race against time. The doctor's eyes scanned for a vehicle. The wagon of a mail carrier caught his eye, and he begged the driver to take him the rest of the way.

Back at the Mountain House, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Mr. Smiley were shaking hands and saying their goodbyes. Dr. Bagdadi came rushing up. It wasn’t so much the doctor’s disheveled appearance that shocked Mr. Smiley, nor even the gift of a Persian rug, but the gift of this *particular* Persian rug.

“Why this is just what I have been seeking for years!” Mr. Smiley exclaimed, “we had a Persian rug just like this one, but it was burned in a fire and ever since my wife has been broken-hearted about it.”

Mr. Smiley would bequeath the carpet to the Lake Mohonk Mountain House, where it remains to this day.

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FOOTNOTE / ENDNOTE:

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