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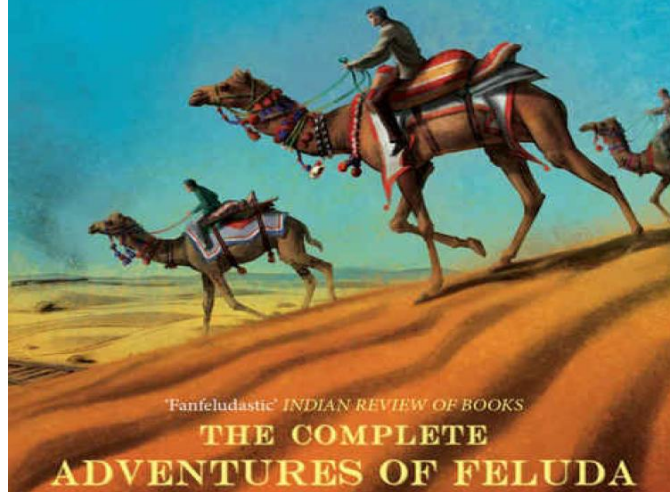
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**Adapted and modified by  
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# SATYAJIT RAY



'Fanfeludastic' *INDIAN REVIEW OF BOOKS*

**THE COMPLETE  
ADVENTURES OF FELUDA**

# The Mystery of the Elephant God

## Nine

'I may as well give up. I do not deserve to be called a sleuth,' said Feluda. I had never heard him talk like this. But then, we had never been in a situation like this before.

A whole day had passed after Shashi Babu's death. Durga Puja had begun the day before. We had just finished breakfast and were sitting in our room. Mr Tiwari had rung a few minutes earlier to say that Shashi Babu's son, Nitai, had been arrested. He had never got on well with his father. In fact, Shashi Babu had threatened to hand him over to the police on many occasions. So Nitai might have had a motive for killing his father, although he had denied it. He had apparently been watching a film at the time of the murder. The police did find a torn ticket in his pocket. The knife with which Shashi Babu was stabbed had not been found.

According to what Vikas Sinha had told the police, Shashi Babu had finished painting the eyes of the goddess and put the last finishing touches by 6 p.m. that evening. Then he had gone straight to Vikas Babu to get some more medicine as his temperature had risen again. Vikas Babu gave him a fresh dose of homoeopathic medicine, and Shashi Babu left for his home soon afterwards. Someone stabbed him on the way.

'It is perhaps a good thing,' Feluda continued to speak, more to himself than the two of us, 'to fall flat on my face occasionally. At least it stops me from getting arrogant, and reminds me that I am no different from most men . . . Hey, Lalmohan Babu, you'll come with us to the play, won't you? I believe their standard of acting is pretty high.'

'Yes, of course, that is if you decide . . .'

'And what shall we do tomorrow? See a film? Why not? Let's go and see *Tarzan*. And a Hindi film after that. I'll also take you to Durga Bari. You'll find lots of monkeys there. Each one of them has more intelligence than your Felu Mitter.'

In the end, we did go and see *Kabuliwala* at the Bengali Club, and discovered that Feluda was right.

It was a very good performance.

The next day was Mahashtami, the third day of Durga Puja. We went out to visit a few places where Puja was being held, including Mr Ghoshal's house. He invited us to lunch, but Feluda declined.

We ordered lunch in the hotel. Feluda normally had a light meal but, to my surprise, today he had a huge plate of rice and curry and went to sleep straight after. I realized later that this was only the lull before a storm. But, at this precise moment, it broke my heart to see Feluda so depressed.

In the evening, we went to see *Tarzan, the Ape Man*. But Feluda, for some reason, left the hall virtually as soon as the film began. All he got to see was the name Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, followed by the title of the film. He did not explain where he was going, but shot up from his chair and left immediately, with a brief: 'You stay here and watch the film. I've got some work to do.'

Lalmohan Babu and I did stay on till the end of the film, but neither of us could enjoy it properly.

Where had Feluda gone? And why?

We returned to the hotel at a quarter past eight, to find Feluda deeply engrossed in making new entries in his notebook.

'You go ahead and have your dinner,' he said as we appeared. 'I've ordered a cup of coffee for myself.'

'Won't you eat anything at all?'

'No, I'm not hungry. Besides, I'm expecting an urgent call from Tiwari.'

The cook had produced a special meal today because of puja, but I had to rush through it. This time, I was determined to hear myself what Feluda said to Tiwari.

His call came half an hour after we had finished eating. This is what Feluda said to him:

'Yes, Mr Tiwari? Yes, very good . . . no, no, don't do anything yet, wait till the last moment . . . Yes, that's why there was such confusion at first . . . And did you find out about the house? Yes, all right. . . See you tomorrow Good night.'

Lalmohan Babu had gone to our room straight after dinner. 'I must get some writing done,' he had told me on our way back from the cinema. 'Your cousin's

behaviour has got me all confused and mixed up. I must think carefully and chalk out my plot.'

When Feluda and I returned to the room, he was sitting with a writing pad and a pen in his hand, looking a bit put out. Feluda did not seem to notice him at all. He lit a Charminar and began pacing the floor.

Lalmohan Babu pushed the writing pad away. 'This,' he declared, 'is most unfair. I cannot concentrate on my own writing; nor can I make out what's going on. Why are you being so secretive? Why can't you tell us if you're on to something? After all, we're not entirely brainless, are we? Why don't you give us a chance?'

'All right,' said Feluda, blowing out a smoke ring, 'I'll give you five clues.' 'Go ahead.'

'The king of Africa, Shashi Babu's "lie", the mouth of a shark, one to ten, and Maganlal's barge.' Lalmohan Babu stared at him for a few seconds, then let out a long sigh, shaking his head slowly. 'Promise me one thing,' Feluda said seriously. 'From tomorrow, you are not going to ask me any more questions.'

'I wouldn't dare. I've learnt my lesson, thank you.'

'I may have to go out from time to time,' Feluda went on, 'but not with you. You are free to go where you like, there's no risk in that. I will, of course, tell you if I think there's any danger anywhere. And—Lalmohan Babu, you can swim, can't you?'

'Swim? Why, yes, I mean—'

'That'll do. As long as you can stay afloat if thrown into the water. Can you manage that?' 'Yes, I think so.'

'Very well. It may not be necessary, but it's good to know, just in case.'

The next day was the last day of Durga Puja. Lalmohan Babu and I went sightseeing. When we returned at about 11 a.m., Feluda was stretched out on his bed, looking carefully at the enlargements of some of his photos. He had dropped in at a studio on our way to the Bengali Club two days ago to get the film developed.

Mr Tiwari rang again in the evening. Feluda went down to take the call and returned only a couple of minutes later. I did not bother to go with him this

time. A little later, Lalmohan Babu and I left again for a long walk. We were both getting bored with having nothing to do in the hotel.

Feluda was still in the room when we came back.

'I don't think anyone followed us today,' said Lalmohan Babu for the third time. Feluda said nothing.

'Did you go out?' I asked.

'No. Mr Ghoshal rang. He asked me if I had given up.' 'What did you tell him?'

'Only that I hadn't.'

I rose at six the next morning, and found, to my surprise, that Feluda had already gone out. His bed was neatly made; on it was a small bowl that he had been using as an ashtray. Under this bowl was a piece of paper with 'I'll ring you' scrawled on it.

This meant that we could not leave the hotel. I didn't mind waiting, but I couldn't help worrying about Feluda's safety. Although he had said nothing to us, we suspected that Shashi Babu had been killed by one of Maganlal's men. If he could get rid of one man, why would he spare Feluda?

Lalmohan Babu said over breakfast, 'After what Maganlal said the other day, your cousin should simply have withdrawn from the case.'

'He did, didn't he? Then God knows what happened to him when we went to see that Tarzan film.' 'Who knew Tarzan would cause such trouble?'

We waited until lunch time, but Feluda did not call. After lunch, possibly for want of anything better to do, Lalmohan Babu told me his own theory about the theft of the Ganesh.

'You see, dear Tapesh,' he said, 'I don't think that the little Ganesh was stolen at all. Ambika Babu opened the chest that evening after he had had a dose of opium and took it out. The next morning, when the effect of the drug had worn off, he forgot all about it!'

'Oh? Well then, where is it now?'

'Did you notice the size of his slippers? I did. His slippers were much larger than his feet. If an old man sits in his room with his slippers on his feet, who is going to look inside them?'

I felt a little suspicious. 'Is your new story going to have a little detail like this?' I asked.

Lalmohan Babu smiled, 'Yes, you guessed it. But in my story, it's not a statuette, but a diamond.

Two thousand carats.'

'What! Two thousand? The biggest known diamond in the world is called the Star of Africa. Do you know how much it weighs?'

'How much?'

'Five hundred carats. And the Koh-i-noor is only a hundred and ten.'

Lalmohan Babu shook his head gravely. 'My readers would not be impressed by anything less than two thousand,' he said.

At half past four, a waiter came up to say that there was a call for me. I sped downstairs as fast as I could and almost snatched the receiver from Nirranjan Babu's hand.

'Is that you, Feluda?'

'Yes. Listen carefully,' Feluda's voice sounded solemn. 'On one side of Dashashwamedh Ghat is Munshi Ghat. Next to it is Raja Ghat. Are you listening?'

'Yes, yes.'

'Between Munshi and Raja Ghat is a quiet spot, where one set of steps ends and another begins.' 'Yes, I've got that.'

'There is a big hand-painted poster on the wall, and just below it, quite a large shed.' 'OK.'

'You two should get there by 5.30 and wait for me by the shed. I'll meet you at six.' 'All right.'

'I'll be in disguise.'

My heart missed a beat. I couldn't say a thing. If Feluda was going to be in disguise, it could only mean that the drama was reaching its climax.

'Are you there?' 'Yes, yes.'

'I'll try and be there by six. Wait for me. Do you understand?' 'Yes. But are you all right?'

'Bye.'

With a click, the line was disconnected. Where was Feluda?

## Ten

We knew Dashashwamedh would be crowded as it was Bijaya Dashami. So we decided to take a different route, past Abhay Chakravarty's house, to reach Kedar Ghat. Raja Ghat wasn't far from Kedar.

While we were waiting for Feluda's call, Lalmohan Babu had stepped out for a minute and bought a few ayurvedic pills. 'To calm my nerves,' he explained. I noticed now that the pills had had the desired effect. The first lane we turned into had a huge bull standing diagonally across, blocking our way completely. Lalmohan Babu, instead of getting nervous, walked boldly up to it and said, 'Get out of the way, you!' The bull stepped aside. Lalmohan Babu passed through. I lingered deliberately, simply to see what he would do next. To my amusement, he turned around, beckoned to me, and said, 'Come along, Tapes. Don't be afraid.'

The number of people gathered both in and outside Abhay Chakravarty's house seemed much larger than usual. Then I remembered that this was the day Machchli Baba was supposed to leave Varanasi. This meant that there was going to be another big event, in addition to the immersion of Durga.

I saw a man from our hotel standing outside. 'Do you know which ghat Machchli Baba will go from?' I asked him. 'Would it be Kedar?'

'No, I think it's going to be Dashashwamedh.'

'We'll have to witness the event from a distance,' I said to Lalmohan Babu. 'Good,' he replied cheerfully. 'At least we won't get trampled in the rush!'

It took us five minutes to reach Raja Ghat from Kedar. A number of tall buildings on one side blocked out the sunlight. The river had risen considerably after the rains. The buildings cast long shadows up to the edge of the water. It was only a matter of minutes before the sun would disappear altogether.

A row of boats stood by the side of the ghat. From Dashashwamedh came a constant cacophony. It included the sound of drums and bursting of crackers. The immersion of Durga had started.

We had crossed Raja Ghat and were walking towards Munshi. I saw the hand-painted poster on the wall a minute later. The spot Feluda had chosen was really very quiet. Besides, we could see Dashashwamedh fairly clearly, although we were not very close.

*'Durga Mai ki jai!'* shouted the crowd. A figure of Durga was raised on top of a barge and lowered into the water. The sun had gone. But the crowd at Dashashwamedh seemed to have swollen further. Lalmohan Babu looked at his watch. 'Twenty to six,' he said. 'If only your cousin was here with his telefocus—' he couldn't finish. A fresh shout had risen from the crowd.

*'Guruji ki jai! Machchli Baba ki jai!'*

At one end of Dashashwamedh, about twenty-five yards from where we were standing, facing us was a platform. A few people were standing on it. Now they suddenly grew a bit restless. Each one of them was craning his neck and staring at the steps of the ghat. The reason soon became clear.

A large group was coming down the steps, making its way to the platform. Its leader was none other than Machchli Baba. He was still clad in bright red, except for a yellow patch round his throat. Clearly, his followers had heaped garlands on him.

Most of the people got down from the platform. Only a couple of them remained, to help the baba climb up. He raised his arms and faced the crowd. We couldn't hear what he said. Then he turned around and began walking towards the edge of the platform, his arms raised high. He stood still for a moment, facing the river. 'Machchli Baba ki jai!' shouted his devotees. The baba dived into the water.

A strange noise rose from the crowd. Lalmohan Babu called it 'mass wailing'. Machchli Baba could be seen swimming for a few minutes. Then he disappeared.

'He'll swim all the way to Patna, not stopping anywhere, not seen by anyone . . . thrilling, isn't it?' said Lalmohan Babu. I turned my head to answer him, but froze at what I saw. While we were both taking in the events at Dashashwamedh Ghat, a figure had stolen up silently in the fading light, and

was standing next to us. His face was hidden behind a thick beard and moustache. He wore a turban, a long shirt, a waistcoat, loose pyjamas and Afghani shoes.

An Afghan? Here? Then it dawned upon me. Kabuliwala! The figure raised a reassuring hand.

Feluda! He had come dressed as a Kabuliwala. Why, wasn't this the costume an actor at the Bengali Club was wearing the other day?

'Wonder—' began Lalmohan Babu. Feluda put a finger against his lips and stopped him. Neither of us knew what was about to happen, or why Feluda had found it necessary to put on a disguise. What we did know—very well—was that if Feluda asked us to keep our mouths shut, we would have to.

I glanced at him. He was looking straight at Dashashwamedh Ghat. My eyes automatically followed his gaze. There were two barges on the river. One was waiting near the steps. The other was at some distance, slowly making its way to the ghat. Five or six men were sitting on its roof. It was impossible to see them clearly.

'*Durga Mai ki jai! Jai Durga Mai ki!*' began the crowd once more. Another figure of Durga was being brought down the steps. It glittered as it caught the light from the gas lamps. I could recognize it easily even from afar. It was the one from Mr Ghoshal's house. The three of us stood like statues, watching the process of immersion.

The idol was carried to the top of the barge, which began to move slowly towards the centre of the river, where the water was deeper. Then, with a sudden movement, the idol rose high into the air, tilted to one side, and disappeared behind the barge. The sound of a loud splash came a moment later.

What Shashi Babu had created with such devotion was now sunk under several feet of water.

Perhaps all the paint had already been washed away.

A few of the garlands Machchli Baba had been wearing came floating past.

The second barge, which had been at a distance, had, by now, crossed Dashashwamedh and was coming towards the spot where we were standing. I

could now see whose barge it was. Maganlal was sitting on its roof. Four other men sat with him.

Feluda's right hand was placed on his waist. His left was curled around a stout stick. I could see it, even in the dark.

The loud, thudding noise I had heard in that alley a few days ago began again. Only, it was not a grinder this time, but my own heart.

My throat began to feel dry. I couldn't take my eyes off Feluda's left hand. I knew the little finger of his left hand had a long nail.

The Kabuliwala's nails were all cut short. Feluda had a mole on his left wrist.

There was no sign of a mole on this man's wrist.

This man was definitely not Feluda. Who was he? What was he doing here? Did Lalmohan Babu realize this man was an impostor? Should I tell him?

The barge was getting closer to the platform from which Machchli Baba had taken his departure. Feluda—no, the stranger—motioned us to get into the shed. Before I could say anything, Lalmohan Babu stepped in, pulling me in with him. We could still see the barge, although no one from it could see us.

The barge had almost come to a halt.

What was that, moving in the water behind the platform? A head bobbed up from the water.

Lalmohan Babu clutched at my sleeve.

One of the men from the barge detached himself silently from the group and jumped into the water.

No, it was not a man. It was a boy.

Suraj! It was Ruku's friend, Suraj. He was swimming across to the platform.

The head bobbed up again; but this time I could see up to his shoulders. Good heavens, was I dreaming? It was Machchli Baba! There he was again, raising himself higher. He appeared to be holding something in his hands. What was it? A large ball?

Suraj was swimming quickly. Very soon, he would join the baba. Everyone from the barge was watching these two figures.

Two things happened at this moment that took my breath away. Machchli Baba rose from the water and threw the strange object in his hand on the steps of our ghat. In a flash, the man dressed as Kabuliwala rushed out, picked it up with one hand and, with the other, took out a revolver from his pocket, aiming it at the barge.

Maganlal leapt to his feet. I saw that he, too, was holding a gun in his hand. His companions were probably armed as well. Suddenly, there was a flurry of activity around us. A number of policemen jumped over the wall that had the poster on it, and came and stood beside our shed. Each carried a rifle.

The noise began a second later. It was difficult to say who fired first, but for a few moments there was nothing but the ear-splitting noise of gunfire. A bullet came and hit the wall of our shed, making a small portion of it crumble. Lalmohan Babu sneezed.

A scream from the barge made me look at it again. Maganlal's gun had been knocked out of his hand. He was now running to the opposite end of the barge, moving remarkably quickly for a man of his size. Then he gave a loud yell, raised his arms over his head and threw himself into the water, making it spray high into the air.

But it was no use. Two boats were already by his side, filled with policemen. And what was Machchli Baba doing?

Why, there he was, coming out of the water with Suraj in his arms. 'Thank you, Tiwariji,' he said as he reached the steps.

The Kabuliwala grinned and stretched out an arm to pull him out of the water. 'Thank you, Mr Mitter,' he replied.

Lalmohan Babu and I sat down quickly. If we hadn't we might have fainted.

Suraj was handed over to a constable. Now that Feluda was standing so close, I could see just how good his make-up was, although some of it had washed away. His real skin peeped through these gaps.

'I hope it doesn't look as though I've got a skin disease,' he remarked casually.

'Wonderful!' exclaimed Lalmohan Babu, suddenly finding his voice. 'Now I can tell why the real Machchli Baba never had a bath!'

Feluda turned to Mr Tiwari.

‘My towel and clothes are in your jeep. Could you tell one of your men to get them for me, please?’

## Eleven

It was now nearly 10 p.m. We were sitting in Mr Ghoshal’s living room. Besides ourselves and Inspector Tiwari, in the room were Ambika Ghoshal, Umanath Ghoshal and his wife, Ruku, Vikas Sinha, and visiting guests. Occasionally peering through the curtain were Trilochan and Bharadwaj.

We had just finished demolishing a great mountain of sweets. Usually, people feel depressed after the immersion. Today, however, in the Ghoshal household, all sadness had been wiped out by the prospect of the return of the Ganesh.

Perhaps I should mention here that we didn’t yet know where the Ganesh was. What had been revealed was the story of Machchli Baba.

An hour before his devotees arrived, at 4 p.m., the police got in through the back door of Abhay Chakravarty’s house and arrested him. His real name, it turned out, was Purinder Raut, and he was indeed the same man who had escaped from prison.

Purinder Raut had started his career with little magic shows near the Monument in Calcutta. Over a period of time, he moved to serious fraud and deception. At some point, he came in contact with Maganlal Meghraj. To have him promoted as Machchli Baba was, apparently, Maganlal’s idea. The police managed to get the whole story from Purinder, including every detail of the drama Maganlal had planned at the ghat this evening.

Feluda had just finished explaining all this. Every eye was fixed on him. Only Lalmohan Babu kept breaking into fits of laughter without any apparent reason. Perhaps someone had given him a glass of *bhang* to celebrate Bijaya Dashami. I had heard that *bhang* often made people laugh.

Feluda had paused to have a drink of water. Now he replaced the glass carefully on a Kashmiri table and continued, ‘Maganlal, for reasons of his own, wanted to spread the story about Machchli Baba’s so-called supernatural powers. It wasn’t difficult for a man like him to get a few details about the lives

of Abhay Chakravarty and Lokenath. The rest was easy, partly because of Abhay Babu's gullibility, and the faith of the people of Kashi.'

Feluda stopped. Lalmohan Babu threw his head back and opened his mouth to laugh once more. I had to prod him sharply with my elbow to make him stop.

'I spoke to Maganlal recently. He told me he had the Ganesh, and that Umanath Babu had sold it to him,' said Feluda.

'What!' Umanath Ghoshal jumped to his feet, outraged. 'Did you believe him?'

'At first it simply struck me as a new angle to the case. I did not reject the idea straightaway, I have to admit. But when Maganlal offered me money to stop the investigation, I began to have doubts. He did give me a reason, of course, but I couldn't quite believe it. If what he said was true, it would have made better sense for Mr Ghoshal to stop all enquiries. After all, if the truth came to be known, he would have been in a very embarrassing position. But it was he who had asked me to find the Ganesh. It just didn't make sense!'

'Nonsense!' said Lalmohan Babu, gurgling uncontrollably. 'No sense at all! Ha ha ha!'

Feluda ignored him. 'It was then that I began to suspect that the Ganesh had not left your house, and that Maganlal was still hopeful of getting it,' he continued. 'But if it was not in the chest, where was it? And who was Maganlal in touch with in this house? Surely he couldn't expect to get the Ganesh unless someone here was going to help him? While I was trying to think things through, I discovered that Vikas Babu had kept back a piece of evidence. When I questioned him closely, he confessed that he had overheard the conversation between Maganlal and Umanath Babu. Concerned about the safety of the Ganesh, he had opened the chest the day Umanath Babu went out with his wife and son. The Ganesh was missing.'

'Missing? You mean it had already been stolen?' asked Mr Ghoshal, frowning.

'No, not stolen.' Feluda stood up. 'It wasn't stolen. A highly intelligent person had hidden it, simply to keep it out of Maganlal's grasp.'

'Captain Spark!' said Ruku.

All eyes turned on him. He was standing in a corner, clutching at a curtain.

'Yes, you're right. It was Captain Spark, alias Rukmini Kumar. Tell me, Captain Spark, that day when your father was talking to that fat man—'

'Daku Ganderia! Captain Spark fools him each time!'

'All right. But did you hear their conversation from the next room?'

'Yes, sure I did. And that's why I took the Ganesh out immediately and hid it. Or Daku Ganderia would've found it, wouldn't he?'

'Yes, you did right,' Feluda turned to the others. 'I asked Ruku before if he knew where the Ganesh was. He told me it was with the king of Africa. I didn't realize then what he meant. It dawned upon me when we went to see the Tarzan film.'

'What! Tarzan? Why Tarzan?' asked a lot of voices, all at once. Feluda did not reply. He turned to Ruku again. 'Captain Spark, can you tell me how that film begins?'

'Yes, of course. It says, "Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer presents", and then the lions roars.' 'Thank you. Mr Tiwari!'

Inspector Tiwari bent down and brought out an object wrapped with a newspaper. He then removed the newspaper, and several amazed eyes fell on the disfigured and damaged head of a lion. Even a few hours ago, the figure of Durga had been standing on it.

'This,' Feluda said, holding the lion's head, 'is the king of Africa, and the animal Durga rides. The Ganesh had been hidden inside the parted mouth of this lion. It was Captain Spark's belief that, after the immersion, it would float all the way to the sea and would be swallowed by a shark. Captain Spark himself would then kill the shark with a harpoon and rescue the little Ganesh. Isn't that right, Captain Spark?'

'Yes, absolutely,' Ruku replied.

'But Machchli Baba had other plans. He had decided to swim for a little while, so that people knew he was actually in the water. Then he was going to swim under water, return to Dashashwamedh unseen and hide behind a boat until the idol was immersed. Once the lion had been thrown into the river, it would have taken him only a few minutes to detach its head. Then he had instructions to go to a quiet spot between Munshi and Raja Ghat, where Maganlal would arrive in his barge and collect the loot.'

'But,' said Mr Ghoshal, frowning once more, 'the date of the Baba's departure had been decided by his devotees. How could he be sure that he would get to

leave on this very day? Besides, how could either he or Maganlal have known that the Ganesh was inside the lion's mouth?

'Very simple. Seven days before Bijaya Dashmi, he asked his followers to choose a number between one and ten. He knew most people would choose seven. So that gave him his date of departure. As for the Ganesh, Ruku might not have told many people where he had hidden it, but he did mention it to his friend Suraj. Didn't you, Ruku?'

Ruku nodded in silence. He looked puzzled.

Feluda sighed. 'Shaitan Singh, I fear, lived up to his name. Suraj, you see, is Maganlal's son. His full name is Suraj Meghraj. Maganlal and his men live in the house we had gone to. His family live in that red house near yours. It was Suraj who told his father where the Ganesh was hidden.'

'Traitor!' cried Ruku.

Ambika Babu spoke for the first time. 'You found the head of the lion. Where is the Ganesh?'

Feluda picked up the lion's head once more and put his hand in its mouth. When he brought it out, it was empty except for a sticky white substance that was smeared on a fingertip.

'Captain Spark found an amazingly simple way to make sure the Ganesh did not slip out,' Feluda said.

'Chiclet!' said Ruku.

'Yes, he used chewing gum. There are traces of the gum still to be found, as you can see. But the Ganesh is no longer here.'

There was an audible gasp of disappointment as everyone drew in their breath. Mr Ghoshal slapped his forehead. 'What are you saying, Mr Mitter? After all these revelations, how can you stand there and tell us the Ganesh isn't there?'

Feluda placed the lion's head back on the table.

'No, Umanath Babu,' he spoke calmly, 'I didn't ask you to gather here simply to pour cold water on all your hopes. The Ganesh hasn't vanished. But before I tell you where it is, I'd like to remind you of an unhappy event—the death of Shashi Babu.'

‘But wasn’t he killed by his son?’ Mr Ghoshal interrupted. ‘Did his son steal the Ganesh?’

‘Wait, Mr Ghoshal, please let me finish. What I am now going to tell you remains to be proved. But I am sure of getting enough evidence.’

There was complete silence in the room. Lalmohan Babu had stopped laughing loudly, although a smile still lingered on his lips.

‘Shashi Babu was one man who was most likely to have spotted the Ganesh inside the lion’s mouth,’ Feluda went on, ‘especially when he was painting the lion’s face, the day before Puja began. He was killed the same day.’

‘You weren’t home that evening, if you remember. Trilochan told me you had all gone to the temple of Vishwanath.’ Mr Ghoshal nodded.

‘We learnt from the police,’ Feluda said, ‘that Shashi Babu had started feeling unwell by the time he finished his work. So he took some medicine from Vikas Babu and left immediately. Trilochan tells me that a few minutes later, Vikas Babu went out, too. May I ask him why he did so?’

Vikas Babu looked faintly annoyed. ‘I don’t see what that has to do with anything. However, since you ask, the answer is that I stepped out only for some fresh air. I walked to Harishchandra Ghat, where I ran into someone I know—Dr Ashok Datta. You can check with him, if you like.’

‘No, I’m sure you’re telling the truth. There was a special reason why you went to the ghat, but I’ll come to that later. I now have another question for Ruku. Captain Spark, Suraj knew your secret. Did you also tell your assistant, Little Raxit?’

‘He didn’t believe me,’ said Ruku.

‘I know. That is why he opened the chest to see if what Ruku had told him was true. When he discovered that it was, he felt tempted to steal the Ganesh. But strangely enough, he didn’t actually have to do anything himself. It fell into his hands the day Shashi Babu found it in the lion’s mouth. Oh yes, the story of giving him a dose of medicine is true enough. But what Vikas Babu did not tell the police was that Shashi Babu had handed the figure of the Ganesh over to him since there was no one else in the house. But, even so, there was every chance that Shashi Babu would talk about it the next day. So he had to be silenced. Vikas Babu followed him, stopping on the way at the Sreedhar Variety Stores to buy a sharp knife. It couldn’t have been difficult to catch up with an

old, sick man and stab him in a dark alleyway. He didn't know, of course, that we would find Shashi Babu and he would try to tell us about the lion. So he coolly walked to Harishchandra Ghat and threw away the knife into the river.'

'Lies!' Vikas Babu shouted, very red in the face, his eyes bulging. 'It's nothing but a pack of lies! If I took the Ganesh, where is it now? Where did it go?'

'If we had waited for just a day longer, you would have sold it to Maganlal. But because you couldn't go out of the house during the five days of Durga Puja, you had to hide it.'

'That's not true!'

'Mr Tiwari!' Feluda stretched out a hand. The inspector handed him another object. It was Vikas Babu's transistor radio.

Feluda opened the compartment for batteries and slipped in a finger. A second later, on his palm lay a two-and-a-half inch long, diamond-studded, golden Ganesh.

Spat!

Ambika Ghoshal had taken off one of his huge slippers and thrown it at Vikas Sinha. It struck him on his cheek.

'Traitor! Traitor! Traitor!' Ruku shrieked.

We were walking back to the hotel, after a sumptuous meal with the Ghoshal family. Before we came away, Mr Ghoshal had thrust a thick white envelope into Feluda's hand, which was now nestling in his pocket.

Lalmohan Babu had stopped laughing. It was difficult to tell whether it was because the effects of *bhang* were wearing off, or whether it was the result produced by frequent stern looks from Feluda and sharp nudges from me.

However, when we stopped at a paan shop, he burst into a guffaw once again.

'What is the matter with you?' Feluda asked, surprised. 'Do you want to be sent to Ranchi? Or did this whole mysterious affair strike you simply as a joke?'

'No, no,' Lalmohan Babu replied, controlling himself with some difficulty. 'You don't know what happened. It really is funny. Mystery no. 63 in the adventure series—*The Bleeding Diamond* by Jatayu—was right there on the bookshelf in Ruku's room. Do you know what happens in the book? The hero hides a diamond in the statue of a crocodile to keep it safe from the villain. Just

imagine, my friend, Ruku got the idea from my own book, and yet I failed to spot it. You came out as a hero once more!

Feluda stared at Lalmohan Babu for a few moments. Then he said, 'No, Lalmohan Babu, that's not true. The mystery you created with your pen almost led to my retirement from my profession! So you are as much a hero as anyone else.'

Lalmohan Babu stuffed a huge paan into his mouth.

'You're quite right, Felu Babu,' he said with a complacent air. 'Jatayu is the greatest!'

## **Comprehension**

Question 1: Why was Feluda feeling discouraged at the beginning of the passage?

Question 2: What was the initial suspicion regarding Shashi Babu's death?

Question 3: What did Feluda, Lalmohan Babu, and the narrator do on the day after Shashi Babu's death?

Question 4: Why did Feluda leave the cinema hall during the Tarzan film?

Question 5: What were the five clues Feluda gave to Lalmohan Babu?

Question 6: What disguise did Feluda use when he met Lalmohan Babu and the narrator at the ghat?

Question 7: Who was Machchli Baba, and what was his real name?

Question 8: What role did Ruku play in hiding the Ganesh statue?

Question 9: Where was the Ganesh statue hidden, and how was it secured?

Question 10: Who was revealed to be the murderer of Shashi Babu, and where was the Ganesh statue ultimately found?

## **Answers**

Answer 1: Feluda was feeling discouraged because he had never been in such a challenging situation before and felt he was failing as a detective.

Answer 2: The initial suspicion was that Shashi Babu's son, Nitai, killed him, as they had a strained relationship, and Nitai had a possible motive.

Answer 3: They went to see a play at the Bengali Club, visited Durga Puja sites, including Mr Ghoshal's house, and watched the film Tarzan, the Ape Man.

Answer 4: Feluda left the cinema hall to attend to some urgent work related to the case, though he did not specify what it was.

Answer 5: The five clues were: "the king of Africa," "Shashi Babu's 'lie'," "the mouth of a shark," "one to ten," and "Maganlal's barge."

Answer 6: Feluda disguised himself as a Kabuliwala, wearing a turban, long shirt, waistcoat, loose pyjamas, and Afghani shoes.

Answer 7: Machchli Baba was a fraudster named Purinder Raut, who had escaped from prison and was promoted as a holy man by Maganlal.

Answer 8: Ruku, alias Captain Spark, hid the Ganesh statue to keep it safe from Maganlal after overhearing his conversation with his father.

Answer 9: The Ganesh statue was hidden inside the mouth of a lion's head (part of the Durga idol) and secured with chewing gum.

Answer 10: Vikas Sinha was revealed as Shashi Babu's murderer, and the Ganesh statue was found inside his transistor radio's battery compartment.