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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Dr. Dolittle and his pets (1/21)

Long ago, when our grandfathers were young children, there was a doctor whose name was Dolittle - Doctor John Dolittle.

He lived in a small town called Puddleby-on-the-Marsh. All the people, young and old, knew him by sight. And when he walked down the street wearing his tall hat, everyone said, "Look, there goes the doctor! He is a clever man." And the dogs and the children all ran up to him and followed him, and even the crows that lived in the church tower cawed and nodded their heads.

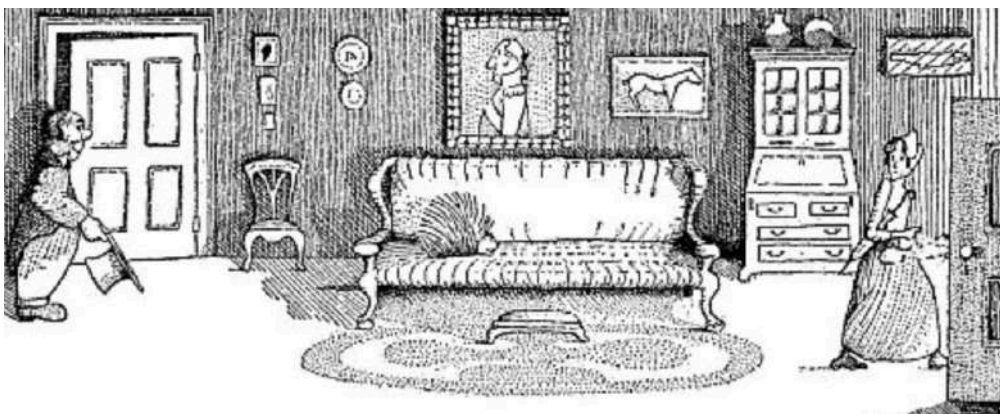
The house where he lived, on the edge of the town, was quite small, but his garden was very big and had a wide lawn and stone chairs and weeping willows hanging over the water's edge. His sister, Sarah Dolittle, did the housekeeping for him, but the doctor took care of the garden himself.

He loved animals and kept many kinds of pets. Besides the goldfish at the bottom of the pond in his garden, he had rabbits in the pantry, white mice in his piano, a squirrel in the linen closet, and a hedgehog in the cellar. He also had a cow with a calf and an old lame horse of twenty-five years, as well as chickens and pigeons and two lambs and many other animals. But his favorite pets were Dab-Dab the duck, Jip the dog, Gub-Gub the baby pig, Polynesia the parrot, and the owl Too-Too.

His sister always grumbled about all the animals and said they made the house dirty. And one day, when an old lady with rheumatism came to visit the doctor, she accidentally sat on the hedgehog, which was sleeping on the couch. The old lady never came back to visit the doctor. She preferred to drive all the way to Oxenthorpe, another town sixteen kilometers away, to see another doctor.

Then his sister, Sarah Dolittle, came to him and said: "John, how do you expect sick people to come visit you when you keep all these animals in the house? A good doctor but his parlor is full of hedgehogs and mice. Who wants that? That's now the fourth person that these animals have driven away. Sir Jasper and the rector are also saying that they will not come near your house anymore - no matter how sick they are. We're getting poorer every day. If you keep this up, none of the best people will want you as a doctor."

"But I love the animals more than the kindest and best people," said the doctor.



"You're ridiculous," said his sister and left the room. So as time went by, the doctor acquired more and more animals as visitors; and the number of people who came

to see him became fewer and fewer. Until he had no one left - except the Cat's-meat-man, who had no objection to animals. But the Cat's-meat-man was not very rich, and he only got sick once a year - at Christmas. Then he gave the doctor six coins for a bottle of medicine.

Six coins a year was not enough to live on - even in those days, long ago. If the doctor had not saved some money in his piggy bank, no one knows what would have happened.

And he acquired more and more pets; and of course, it cost a lot to feed them. And the money he had saved was getting less and less.

Then he sold his piano and let the mice live in a desk drawer. But the money he got for that began to run out too, so he sold the brown suit he wore on Sundays and became poorer and poorer.

And now, when he walked down the street wearing his tall hat, people said to each other, "Look, there goes John Dolittle! There was a time when he was the most famous doctor in the West - look at him now - he has no money and his socks are full of holes!"

But the dogs and cats and children still ran up to him and followed him through the town - just as they had done when he was rich.