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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Dr. Dolittle: Medicine and Magic (12/21)

Very, very quietly, so that no one would see her, Polynesia slipped to the back of the tree and flew to the prison. She saw that Gub-Gub was sticking his nose through the bars of the window, trying to sniff the cooking smells coming from the palace kitchen. She asked the pig to bring the doctor to the window because she wanted to speak with him. So Gub-Gub went to wake up the doctor.

"Listen," whispered the parrot when John Dolittle's face appeared. "Prince Bumpo is coming here tonight to see you. You have to find a way to turn him into a golden prince. But make sure he promises to open the prison door and find a boat to cross the sea first."

"Okay," said the doctor. "But it's not as simple as turning a human into gold. You talk as if he's a dress that needs to be sewn again. It's really not that easy."

"I don't know anything else," Polynesia said impatiently. "Think of a way - think hard. You still have plenty of medicines in your bag. He'll do anything for you if you just help him. It's your only chance to get out of prison."

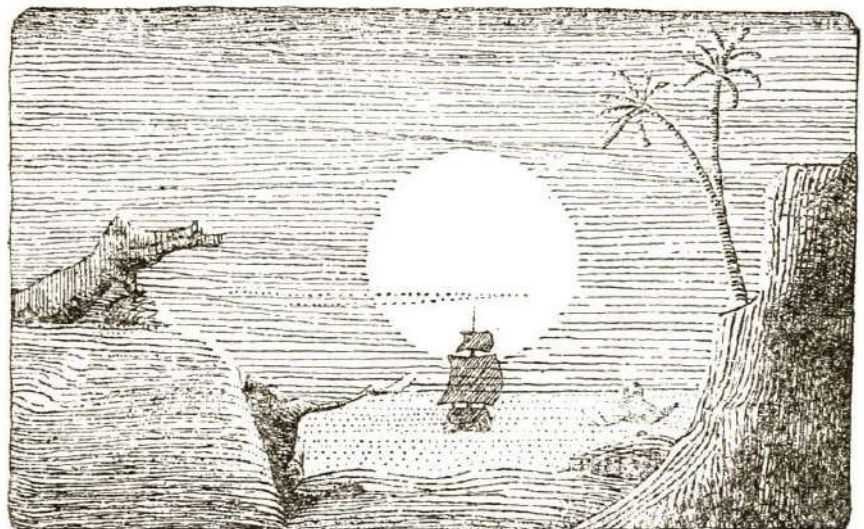
"Well, maybe it's possible," said the doctor. "Let me see..." and he went to his medicine bag and muttered

something about "mixing this with that and then spreading the magic salve over him...."

That night, Prince Bumpo came to the doctor in the prison, secretly, and said to him, "Dear doctor, I am an unhappy prince. Years ago, I went in search of Sleeping Beauty, whom I had read about in my fairy tale book. After many days of traveling through the world, I finally found her and kissed her very softly to wake her up - as the book said I should do. Indeed, she woke up. But when she saw my face, she screamed: Oh, this is just an ordinary prince but I want a golden prince." She ran away and didn't want to marry me but went to sleep somewhere else. So I returned with sadness to my father's kingdom. Now I hear that you are a great wizard and have many powerful potions. So I come to ask for your help. If you turn me into a golden prince, so that I can go back to Sleeping Beauty, I will give you half of my kingdom and everything you ask for."

"Prince Bumpo," said the doctor, looking at the bottles in his medicine bag, "suppose I can turn you into a funny prince, wouldn't that make you happier?"

"No," said Bumpo. "Nothing else will satisfy me. I want to be a golden prince."



"You surely know it's very difficult to change a prince," said the doctor, "one of the hardest things a wizard can do. You just want a golden face, right?"

"Yes, that's all," said Bumpo.

"Does your face have to be entirely made of gold?" asked the doctor.

"Yes, entirely," said Bumpo. "And I would also like to have blue eyes, a golden face with blue eyes, but that will be very difficult."

"Yes, that will be very difficult," said the doctor quickly.

"Well, I'll do what I can. You will have to be very patient. You know with some medicines you can never be entirely sure. Maybe I'll have to try two or three times. But that's okay. Come here to the light. Oh, but before I do anything, you must go to the beach and prepare a boat with food supplies so that I can sail over the sea. Don't say a word about this to anyone. And when I have done what you ask, you must let me and all my animals out of prison. Promise me that, by the crown of Jolliginki!"

The Prince promised and went to the coast to prepare a boat. When he returned, the doctor asked Dab-Dab to bring a basin. In it, he mixed many kinds of medicines and told Bumpo to put his face in it. The Prince bent down and immersed his face in it, up to his ears. He held his face submerged for so long that the doctor became terribly nervous. He wobbled from one foot to the other, looking at all the bottles he had used for the mixture, reading the labels over and over again. A strong, peculiar smell filled the prison, like the smell of burning paper.

Finally, the Prince lifted his face and breathed deeply in and out. And all the animals shouted with amazement. Because the Prince's face shone like gold, and his eyes, which had been muddy-colored, were now brilliantly blue! When John Dolittle lent him a small mirror to look at himself, the Prince sang with joy and began to dance. But the doctor asked him not to make so much noise; and when he hurriedly closed his medicine bag, he told him to open the prison door.

Bumpo begged to keep the mirror because there was no mirror in the kingdom of Jolliginki, and he wanted to look at himself all day. But the doctor said he needed the mirror for shaving. Then the Prince took a large bunch of keys from his pocket and unlocked the big double locks. The doctor ran with all his animals as fast as they could to the coast. Bumpo leaned against the wall of the empty cell and smiled happily, with his face of shining gold, as bright as the light of the sun. When they reached the beach, they saw Polynesia and Chee-Chee waiting for them on the rocks by the ship.

"I feel sorry for Bumpo," said the doctor. "I'm afraid the medicine I used won't last long. Most likely, he won't have a golden face anymore when he wakes up tomorrow morning. That's why I didn't leave the mirror with him. Honestly, I was surprised that it worked so well. But I had to do something, didn't I? I also didn't want to scrub the kitchen floor for the rest of my life. But still, poor Bumpo!"

"Oh, of course, he will know we played a joke on him," said the parrot.

"They had no reason to lock us up," said Dab-Dab, shaking her tail angrily. "We never did them any harm." "But actually, the Prince had nothing to do with it," said the doctor. "It was the king, his father, who had us imprisoned. It wasn't Bumpo's fault. I wonder if I should go back and apologize. Well, I'll send him something nice when I'm in Puddleby-on-the-Marsh. And who knows? Maybe he'll turn into gold."

"Sleeping Beauty would never want him, even if he was completely made of gold," said Dab-Dab. "He looked better when he was himself, I thought.

"He has a good heart," said the doctor, "a romantic heart, of course, but a good heart."

"I don't believe that poor, silly Prince really found Sleeping Beauty and kissed her," said Jip the dog. "He probably kissed some other woman who was napping under an apple tree, and that woman was startled. I wonder who he'll kiss next. It's a crazy thing!"

Then the Pushmi-Pullyu, the white mouse, Gub-Gub, Dab-Dab, Jip, and the owl Too-Too went with the doctor to the ship. But Chee-Chee, Polynesia, and the Crocodile stayed behind because Africa was their true home, the land where they were born. But when the doctor stood on the boat and looked out over the sea, he remembered that they had no one with them to guide them back to Puddleby-on-the-Marsh. The vast sea looked terribly big and lonely in the moonlight. He began to wonder if they would get lost. But suddenly they heard a strange whispering sound, high in the sky, coming towards them through the night. The animals all became quiet and listened.

The sound grew louder and louder. It seemed to be getting closer, a sound like the autumn wind blowing through the leaves of a tree, or a heavy rainstorm beating down on the roof. And Jip, with his nose sniffing the air and his tail straight up, said, "Birds! Millions of birds, flying through the air, that's it!"

Then they all looked up and saw, swarming over the surface of the moon, thousands and thousands of little birds. Soon the whole sky seemed full of them, and more and more were coming. There were so many that for a while they even covered the whole moon, so that it gave no light. And the sea became dark and black, as when a thundercloud comes over the sun.

Soon all these birds came closer and down, skimming over the water and the land. The night sky became bright again, and the moon shone as usual. But there was still no cry, no call, no song. No sound was heard except the loud rustling of feathers, which now grew louder than ever. Then they landed on the sand and sat on ropes of the ship. They sat everywhere except in the trees. The doctor could see that they had blue wings and white breasts and very short, feathered legs. As soon as they had all found a place to sit, there was suddenly no more sound, everything was quiet.

And in the quiet moonlight, John Dolittle spoke, "I had no idea that we had been in Africa for so long. It will almost be summer when we get home. For these are the swallows going back. Swallows, I thank you for waiting for us. It's very kind of you. Now we needn't be afraid of getting lost on the sea! Heave up the anchor and hoist the sail!"

As the ship sailed away, those who were left behind, Chee-Chee, Polynesia, and the Crocodile, were terribly sad. For never in their lives had they known anyone as kind as Doctor John Dolittle from the City-by-the-Pool. And after shouting goodbye many times, they still stood on the rocks, crying and waving until the ship was out of sight.