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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Dr. Dolittle meets the King (6/21)

After walking a bit through the dense forest, they arrived at a large, bright clearing where they saw the king's palace made of mud. The king lived there with his queen, Ermintrude, and their son, Prince Bumpo. The prince was away fishing for salmon in the river. However, the king and queen were sitting under a parasol in front of the palace door, and Queen Ermintrude was sleeping. When the doctor arrived at the palace, the king asked him about his business. The doctor told him why he had come to Africa.

"You may not travel through my land," said the king.

"Many years ago, a foreign man came to this coast, and I was very kind to him. But after he had dug holes in the ground to take the gold and killed all the elephants to get their ivory tusks, he secretly left with his ship without even saying thank you. Since then, no foreign man will ever travel through the lands of Jolliginki."

Then the king turned to some of his helpers who were nearby



and said, "Take this medicine man away, with all his animals, and lock them up in my most secure prison." So six of his servants led the doctor and all his pets away and locked them up in a stone dungeon. The dungeon had only one small window high in the wall with bars on it, and the door was strong and thick. Then they were all very sad, and Gub-Gub the pig began to cry. But Chee-Chee said he would give him a beating if he didn't stop that terrible noise, and the pig fell silent. "Are we all here?" asked the doctor after he had become accustomed to the dim light.

"Yes, I think so," said the duck, and began to count.

"Where is Polynesia?" asked the crocodile. "She's not here."

"Are you sure?" said the doctor. "Look again. Polynesia! Polynesia! Where are you?"

"I suppose she escaped," grumbled the crocodile. "Well, that's just like her. Just slipped into the jungle as soon as her friends got into trouble."

"I'm not that kind of bird," said the parrot, climbing out of the doctor's coat pocket. "You see, I'm small enough to squeeze through the bars of that window, and I was afraid they would put me in a cage instead. So while the doctor was busy talking to the king, I hid in the doctor's coat pocket, and here I am. That's what you call a 'trick,'" she said, smoothing her feathers with her beak.

"Now listen," Polynesia continued, "tonight, as soon as it gets dark, I'll crawl through the bars of that window and fly to the palace. And then - you'll see - I'll soon

find a way to make the king release all of us from prison."

"But what can you do?" said Gub-Gub, wrinkling his nose and starting to cry again. "You're just a bird!"

"Absolutely true," said the parrot. "But don't forget that, although I'm just a bird, I can talk like a man - and I know these dark tricks."

So that night, when the moon shone through the palm trees and all the king's men were asleep, the Parrot slipped through the bars of the prison and flew to the palace. The window of the storeroom had been broken by a tennis ball the week before, so Polynesia was able to enter through the hole in the glass. She heard Prince Bumpo snoring in his bedroom at the back of the palace. Then she tiptoed up the stairs to the king's bedroom. She carefully opened the door and peered inside.

The queen was at a dance party with her cousin that evening, but the king was in bed, sound asleep.

Polynesia flew very softly into the room and crawled under the bed. Then she coughed, just like Doctor Dolittle always coughed. Polynesia could imitate anyone.

The king opened his eyes and said sleepily, "Is that you, Ermintrude?" (He thought it was the queen returning from the dance.)

Then the parrot coughed again, loudly, like a man. And the king sat up, wide awake, and said, "Who's there?"

"I am Doctor Dolittle," said the Parrot - exactly as the doctor would have said it.

"What are you doing in my bedroom?" cried the king. "How dare you come out of prison! Where are you? - I can't see you."

But the Parrot just laughed, a long, deep, jolly laugh, like the doctor's.

"Stop laughing and come here immediately so I can see you," said the king.

"You foolish king!" replied Polynesia. "Have you forgotten that you are talking to John Dolittle, M.D.? The most amazing man on earth? Of course, you can't see me. I have made myself invisible. There is nothing I cannot do. Listen now: I have come here tonight to warn you. If you don't let me and my animals travel through your kingdom, I will make you and all your people as sick as the monkeys. Because I can make people better but I can also make people sick just by raising my little finger. Send your soldiers immediately



to open the dungeon door, or you will get a disease before the morning sun has risen on the hills of Jolliginki."

Then the king began to tremble and became very afraid...

"Doctor," he cried fearfully, "it will be as you say. Please don't raise your little finger!"

And he jumped out of bed

and ran to the soldiers to open the prison door. As soon as he was gone, Polynesia crawled down and left the

palace through the broken window in the storeroom. But the queen, who had just let herself in through the back door with a house key, saw the parrot flying out through the broken glass. And when the king returned to bed, she told him what she had seen. Then the king realized he had been tricked, and he was terribly angry. He hurried back to the prison immediately. But he was too late. The door was open. The dungeon was empty. Doctor Dolittle and all his animals were gone.