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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Dr. Dolittle receives a message from Africa (4/21)

The winter had been very cold and had a white snow cap. And one evening in December, when they were all gathered around the warm fire in the kitchen and the doctor was reading to them from books he had written in animal language, the owl Too-Too suddenly said:

"Shh, be quiet! What's that noise outside?"

They all listened; and soon they heard the sound of someone running. Then the door flew open and the monkey, Chee-Chee, ran in, heavily out of breath.

"Doctor!" he cried, "I've just received a message from a cousin of mine in Africa. There is a terrible disease spreading among the apes there. They all get it and they die by the hundreds. They have heard of you, and they are begging you to come to Africa to stop the disease."

"Who brought the message?" asked the doctor, taking off his glasses and laying down his book.

"A swallow," said Chee-Chee. "She's outside on the rain barrel."

"Bring her to the fire," said the doctor. "She must be nearly frozen. The swallows flew south six weeks ago!" So the swallow was brought in. The bird was all huddled up and shivering. Although she was at first a

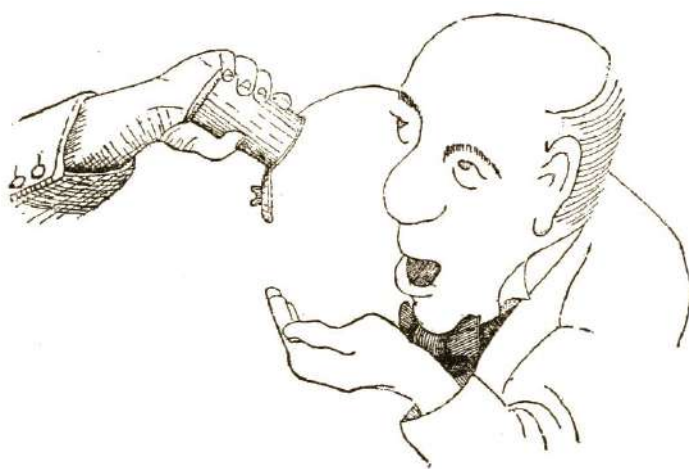
little scared, she soon warmed up and perched on the edge of the mantelpiece and began to speak. When she finished, the doctor said, "I would like to go to Africa to help, especially since the weather is so bad here. But I'm afraid we don't have enough money to buy the tickets. Bring me the money-box, Chee-Chee." So the monkey climbed up and took the money-box from the top shelf of the dresser. There was nothing in it - not even a penny!

"I was sure there were two coins left," said the doctor.

"There were," said the owl. "But you spent them on a rattle for the baby badger, when he was teething."

"Still, I'm sure there were two coins left. I really thought so," said the doctor. "Goodness gracious! Money is such a nuisance, that's one thing I'm sure of! Well, never mind. Perhaps if I go to the coast, I can borrow a boat to take us to Africa. I once knew a sailor who brought his baby with measles to me. Maybe he'll lend us his boat, now that the baby is better."

So the next morning, the doctor set out early for the coast. And when he returned, he told the animals that it was all right - the sailor would lend them his boat. Then the crocodile and the monkey and the parrot were very happy and started to sing, for they were

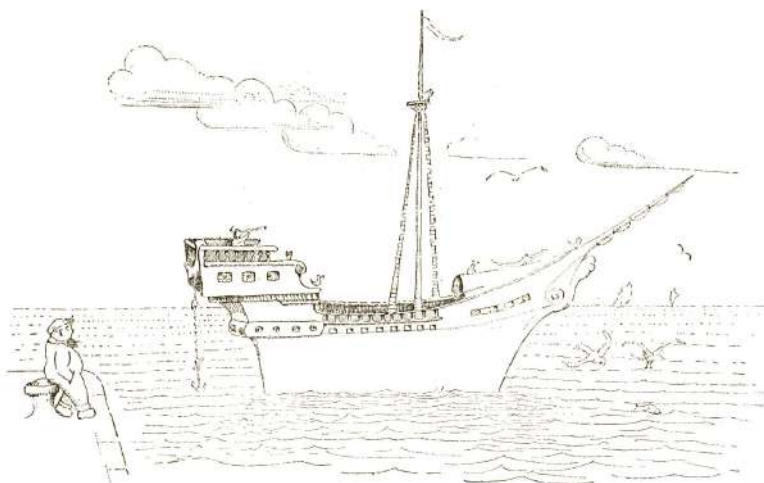


going back to Africa, their real home. And the doctor said:

"I can only take three animals with me - besides Jip the dog, Dab-Dab the duck, Gub-Gub the pig, and Too-Too the owl. The rest of the animals, like the chipmunks and the water-rats and the bats, will have to go back to the fields where they were born, until we come home again. But since most of them sleep through the winter, they won't mind. Besides, it wouldn't be good for them to go to Africa."

Then the parrot, who had already made long sea voyages, began to tell the doctor what he should take on the ship.

"You must have plenty of ship's biscuits," he said, "hardtack is best. And you must have canned beef, and of course an anchor."



"I expect the ship will have its own anchor," said the doctor.

"Well, make sure to have an anchor," said Polynesia. "An anchor is really important. You can't

stop without an anchor. And you need a bell."

"What is that for?" asked the doctor.

"To let you know the time," said the Parrot. "You'll ring it every half hour and then you'll know what time it is."

And take a lot of rope with you - it's always useful on long journeys."

Then they started wondering where they would get the money to buy all the things they needed.

"Oh, see, there it is again! Money is the problem," exclaimed the doctor. "I'll be glad to go to Africa, they surely don't have any thieves there! I'll go ask the grocer if he can wait for his money until I return - no wait, I'll send the sailor to ask him." So the sailor went to the grocer. And soon he came back with all the things they wanted.

Then the animals packed and after they had shut off the water so the pipes wouldn't freeze, and placed the shutters, they locked up the house and gave the key to the old Horse that lived in the stable. And when they had seen that there was enough hay in the manger to last the Horse through the winter, they carried all their luggage to the shore and got on the boat. The Cat's-meat-man was there to see them off. He also brought a large pudding made of kidneys as a gift for the doctor. This pudding, as he was told, could not be found abroad.

As soon as they were on the ship, Gub-Gub the pig asked where the beds were, because it was four o'clock in the afternoon and he wanted to take a nap. So Polynesia took him downstairs, inside the ship and showed him the beds. The beds were all stacked up one above the other, like bookshelves against a wall.

"Well, that's not a bed!" exclaimed Gub-Gub. "That's a plank!"

"Beds are always like that on ships," said the Parrot.

"It's not a plank. Climb in and go to sleep. This is called a 'bunk bed.'"

"I don't think I'll go to bed just yet," said Gub-Gub.

"The journey has just begun, I'm too excited. I want to go up and see the departure again."

"Well, this is your first trip after all," said Polynesia.

"You'll get used to this life after a while." And he went back up the stairs of the ship, humming this song to himself:

"I've seen the Black Sea and the Red Sea, I've sailed around the Isle of Wight, I discovered the Yellow River, And the Orange River too - at night, Now I'm leaving Greenland behind me, And sailing over the Blue ocean, I'm tired of all these colors, Jane, So I'll be back to you soon."

They were just about to begin their journey when the doctor said he had to go back to ask the sailor for directions to Africa. But the Swallow said she had been to that country many times and would show them how to get there. So the doctor told Chee-Chee to hoist the anchor and the journey began.