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IMAGINATION OVER KNOWLEDGE

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Dr. Dolittle receives a warning from the rats (14/21)

Dragging a ship through the sea is hard work. And after three hours, the swallows started to get tired and short of breath. They sent a message to the doctor saying that they needed to rest quickly. They would pull the boat to an island not far away and hide in a deep bay until they had regained their strength.

And soon the doctor saw the island. It had a very beautiful, high, green mountain in the middle.

After the ship had safely entered the bay where it was not visible from the open sea, the doctor said that he would go to the island to look for water because there was nothing left to drink on his ship. He told all the animals to go ashore as well to romp on the grass and stretch their legs.

As they left the ship, the doctor noticed that a lot of rats were coming up from below and also leaving the ship. Jip started running after them, because chasing rats had always been his favorite game. But the doctor told him to stop.

A large black rat, who seemed to want to say something to the doctor, shyly crawled along the railing to the front and looked at the dog from the corner of his eye. And after he had coughed nervously two or three

times, cleaned his side-whiskers, and wiped his mouth, he said:

"Ahem - eh - you do know that all ships have rats, don't you, doctor?"

"Yes," answered the doctor.

"And have you heard that rats always leave a sinking ship?"

"Yes, I have been told that," said the doctor.

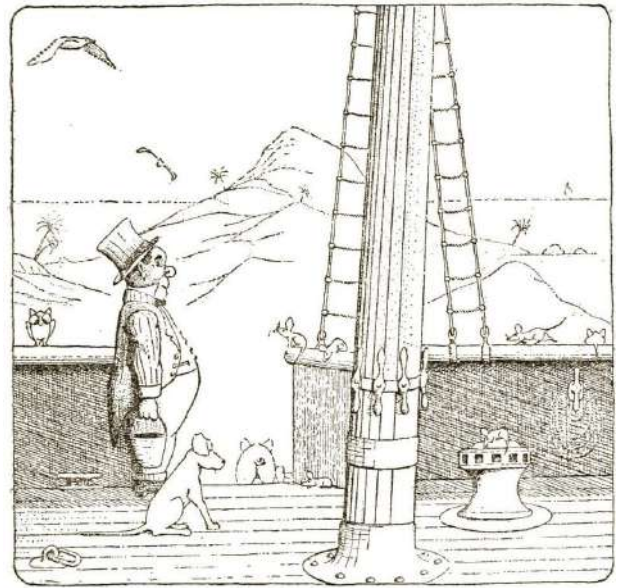
"People," said the rat, "always talk about it with a sneer - as if it were something shameful. But you can't blame us, can you? After all, who would stay on a sinking ship if they could get off?"

"That is perfectly natural," said the doctor, "really very natural. I understand it very well... Was there... Was there anything else you wanted to say?"

"Yes," said the rat. "I came to tell you that we are leaving this ship. We wanted to warn you before we go. This is a bad ship. It's not safe. The sides are not strong enough. The planks are rotten. By tomorrow night, it will sink to the bottom of the sea."

"But how do you know that?" asked the doctor.

"We always know," answered the rat. "The tips of our tails get a tingling feeling - like your foot falling asleep. This morning, at six o'clock, while I was having breakfast, my tail suddenly started to tingle. At first, I thought it was my rheumatism coming back. So I went to my aunt and asked her how she felt - do you



remember her? – the long, spotted rat, quite thin, who came to you last spring in Puddleby-on-the-Marsh with jaundice?

Her tail was tingling too! Then we knew for sure that this boat would sink in less than two days. We all decided to leave the ship as soon as we were close enough to land. It's really a bad ship, doctor. Don't sail on it anymore or you will certainly drown... Goodbye! We are now looking for a good place to live on this island."

"Goodbye!" said the doctor. "And thank you very much for coming to tell me. Very kind of you! Give my regards to your aunt. I certainly remember her... Leave that rat alone, Jip! Come here! Lie down!"

So the doctor and all his animals went off, with buckets and pans, to search for water on the island, while the swallows rested.

"I wonder what this island is called," said the doctor as he climbed the mountain slope. "It seems like a cozy place. And there are so many birds here!"

"Well, these are the Canary Islands," said Dab-Dab.

"Don't you hear the canaries singing?"

The doctor stopped and listened.

"Yes, of course!" he said. "How silly of me! I wonder if they can tell us where to find water."

And soon the canaries came, who had heard everything about Doctor Dolittle from the migratory birds, and brought him to a spring with cool, clear water. This is where the canaries usually took their bath. They also showed him beautiful meadows where birdseed grew and showed him all the other attractions of their island.

And the Pushing Pullyu was happy that they had come because he found the green grass so much tastier than the dried apples he had eaten on the ship. And Gub-Gub, the pig, squeaked with joy when he found a whole valley full of wild sugarcane.

Later, when they had all had enough to eat and drink and were resting, while the canaries sang for them, two of the swallows came rushing in. They were very nervous and excited.

"Doctor!" they cried. "The pirates have entered the bay and they have all gone onto your ship. They are below deck looking for things to steal. They have left their own ship without anyone on it. If you hurry and come down quickly, you can take their ship. It's a very fast ship and then we can escape, but you'll have to hurry."

"That's a great idea," said the doctor.

And he immediately called his animals together, said goodbye to the canaries, and ran to the beach.

When they reached the shore, they saw the pirate ship with three red sails. It was exactly as the swallows had said - there was no one on the ship. All the pirates were below deck in the doctor's ship, looking for things to steal.

So John Dolittle told his animals to walk very softly and they all crept onto the pirate ship.