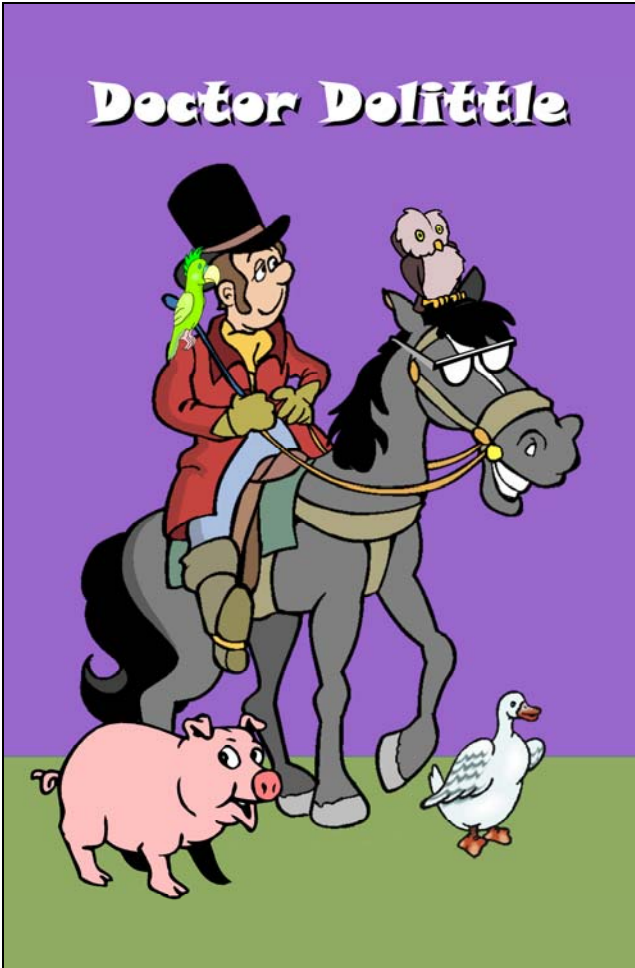


Doctor Dolittle



C. Edward Wheaton

Adapted from the novels *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* (1920)
and *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle* (1922) by Hugh Lofting

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Doctor Dolittle

CHILDREN'S CLASSIC. Adapted from *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* and *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle* by Hugh Lofting. There are rabbits in the pantry, hedgehogs in the cellar, and even a crocodile under the bed! Doctor Dolittle, a small town doctor, loves animals and has learned how to talk to animals with the help of his pet parrot, Polynesia. However, the Doctor's animal menagerie is scaring away all of his human patients and he is running out of money. One of the villagers convinces the Doctor to become an animal doctor instead of a human doctor, but when the Doctor takes in too many animals in need of help, even his own sister gets fed up and leaves. With no one left to perform household chores, Doctor Dolittle's animals band together to do the laundry, mending, cooking, sweeping, and dusting. Then one day, the Doctor is visited by the Purple Bird-of-Paradise, who informs him that many villagers on the Island of Noe are dying of a strange sickness and need his help. Soon the Doctor sets sail to the Island of Noe, where he encounters the Pushmi-Pullyu, a rare two-headed creature, and hitches a ride on a giant glass sea snail before returning home to his beloved village of Puddleby-on-the-Marsh.

Performance Time: Approximately 60-75 minutes.

About the Story

Hugh Lofting (1886-1947) was born in England and worked as a civil engineer. While serving in WWI, Lofting wrote and illustrated a series of letters to entertain his children, which featured the adventures of Doctor John Dolittle, a medical doctor who could talk to animals. *The Story of Doctor Dolittle* was published in 1920, and Lofting's second novel, *The Voyages of Doctor Dolittle* (1922), won the Newberry Medal in 1923. Lofting went on to write eight more Doctor Dolittle novels. The character of Doctor Dolittle has become one of the most popular characters in the history of children's literature.

Characters

(6 M, 6 F, 17 flexible, opt. extras)

(With doubling: 4 M, 4 F, 10 flexible. Tripling possible.)

DOCTOR JOHN DOLITTLE: A clever physician and bachelor who is fond of animals and keeps many pets including a duck, a dog, a pig, a parrot, a crocodile, and an owl; he learns how to talk to animals and becomes a veterinarian and naturalist; wears a Victorian top coat, vest, pants, an old top hat, and a pocket watch.

POLYNESIA: Doctor Dolittle's wise, old, talking pet parrot who teaches him how to talk to other animals; flexible.

JIP: Doctor Dolittle's loyal pet dog; flexible; flexible.

DAB-DAB: Doctor Dolittle's pet duck; flexible.

GUB-GUB: Doctor Dolittle's pet pig; flexible.

TOO-TOO: Doctor Dolittle's pet owl; flexible.

SALLY SIMPKINS: Doctor Dolittle's young assistant and the daughter of Joe Simpkins; has a great curiosity about nature, is well-school in sailing, and can read and write even though her family is too poor to send her to school; wears a turtleneck sweater, jeans, boots, and a cap.

JOE SIMPKINS: Works as a mussel-man in Puddleby and is one of Doctor Dolittle's friends; poor and lives in a tiny house with his daughter, Sally, by the edge of the water under a bridge.

SARAH DOLITTLE: Doctor Dolittle's no-nonsense sister who lives with him and is in charge of taking care of the household duties; disapproves of the Doctor's animal menagerie, particularly the crocodile who lives under a bed and chews up the linoleum; wears a dress and apron.

MATHEW MUGG: Works as the cat's meat-man in Puddleby and is Doctor Dolittle's friend; funny old man who is poor and has a bad squint.

MONTAQUE FITZHAPPINGTON SMYTHE: Eccentric gentleman who works as a ship hand on Doctor Dolittle's

ship in exchange for free passage; wears a green suit, a red cravat, a frockcoat, a top hat, and carries a large yellow Gladstone bag and green umbrella.

GREAT GLASS SEA SNAIL: An enormous saltwater sea snail that has a shell that is as made of transparent mother-of-pearl and is as large as a house; flexible. Note: Only the head and neck of the snail appears onstage. A large cutout of the snail's head and neck can be slide on and off the stage.

MIRANDA: The Purple Bird-of-Paradise who lives in Brazil but makes annual visits to Doctor Dolittle's home in Puddleby; female.

PLOW HORSE: Puddleby plow horse with bad eyesight that is one of Doctor Dolittle's animal patients; flexible.

SEAGULL: Seagull sent by the Purple Bird-of-Paradise to find Doctor Dolittle and help him find Noe Island; wears a seagull costume; voice only; flexible. (Note: A stuffed seagull can be used by attaching a fishing line and "flying" the bird onstage.)

PUSHMI: One half of a rare two-headed creature which has a body that resembles a gazelle or unicorn; flexible.

PULLYU: One half of a rare two-headed creature; flexible.

NATANGA: Popsipetel native; male.

NONA: Popsipetel native; female.

KATONGA: Leader of the Bag-Jagderag tribe; male.

MAYA: Katonga's wife.

NATIVE 1: Bag-Jagderag native; flexible.

NATIVE 2, 3: Popsipetel natives; flexible.

PATIENT: Popsipetel native who is sick; flexible.

ELDERS 1-3: Popsipetel elders; flexible.

MRS. DALLOWAY: One of Doctor Dolittle's human patients in Puddleby.

EXTRAS (Opt.): As Popsipetel and Bag-Jagderag Natives and Animals who live in Doctor Dolittle's house.

NOTE: The Popsipetel and the Bag-Jagderag inhabitants of Noe Island represent no particular tribe or race.

Options for Doubling

Male Roles:

Joe Simpkins/Natanga

Matthew Mugg/Katonga

Female Roles:

Sarah Dolittle/Nona

Mrs. Dalloway/Maya

Flexible Roles:

Dab-Dab/Native 1

Gub-Gub/Native 2

Too-Too/Native 3

Snail/Elder 1

Plow Horse/Elder 2/Patient

Seagull/Elder 3

Setting

1840s, Puddleby-on-the-Marsh, England and Noe Island.

Set

This play is written to have short, fast scenes. Due to the many scene changes, only a minimal set is required and small set pieces are brought on to indicate new locations.

Doctor Dolittle's parlor. There is a sofa, chair, secretary, desk, table, and doors SR and SL.

Doctor Dolittle's kitchen. There is a table and chairs with window on the rear wall.

Doctor Dolittle's study. There are collections of birds eggs and seashells in glass cases scattered about the room. There is a telescope, microscope, or various pieces of scientific equipment. On the walls are pictures of animals, fish, and strange plants. On a table is the "listening tank" (small glass aquarium) filled with water and some sort of shell creature on the bottom.

Joe Simpkins' house. There are two chairs.

Ship's deck. There is a captain's wheel and ship railings.

Noe Island beach. There are rocks and bushes.

Bag-Jagderags' throne room. There are two thrones made of natural materials.

Synopsis of Scenes

Scene 1: Doctor Doolittle's parlor.

Scene 2: Doctor Doolittle's parlor, a few weeks later.

Scene 3: Doctor Dolittle's kitchen.

Scene 4: Doctor Dolittle's study.

Scene 5: Doctor Dolittle's parlor.

Scene 6: Joe Simpkins' home.

Scene 7: Deck of "The Curlew."

Scene 8: Deck of "The Curlew."

Scene 9: Inside the ship's cabin.

Scene 10: Inside the ship's cabin.

Scene 11: Inside the ship's cabin, a short time later.

Scene 12: Deck of "The Curlew."

Scene 13: Deck of "The Curlew," the next day.

Scene 14: A beach on Noe Island.

Scene 15: Noe Island, Popsipetels' Village.

Scene 16: Noe Island, the Bag-Jagderags' village, throne room.

Scene 17: Noe Island, Popsipetels' Village, two weeks later.

Scene 18: Noe Island.

Scene 19: A beach on Noe Island, five months later.

Scene 20: A beach on Noe Island, moments later.

Scene 21: A beach on Noe Island, moments later.

Scene 22: A beach on Noe Island, the next day.

Scene 23: A beach on Noe Island, moments later.

Scene 24: A Beach on Noe Island, that evening.

Scene 25: Marshland just outside of Puddleby-on-the-Marsh,
4 p.m. It is foggy and drizzly.

Props

Tea tray	Basket
Teapot and teacups	String
Stuffed hedgehog	Green umbrella, for Smythe
Perch, for Polynesia	Umbrella, for Pushmi
Eye chart	Ship's log
Piece of paper	Pencil
Notebooks	Sextant
Suitcase	Lantern
Coat, for Sarah	Sticks
Glass jar containing a silver fish	Lifeboat
Small aquarium to serve as "listening tank"	Bush
4 Rolled-up charts	Black medical bag
2 Men's handkerchiefs	Duffel bag
List of supplies	Book
Large yellow Gladstone bag, for Smythe	Log
	Rocks
	Bag containing bandages
	Medicine bottle

Special Effects

Church bells ringing
Whale sounds
Fog
Crunching sound
Low moaning
Head and neck of giant snail cutout

**“John Dolittle,
I hope you’re not
going around
the neighborhood
telling people
that you
talk to animals.”**

—Sarah Dolittle

Scene 1

(AT RISE: 1840s, Puddleby-on-the-Marsh, England. Doctor Doolittle's parlor. Darkness. Doctor Dolittle, Mrs. Dalloway, and Polynesia are onstage.)

MRS. DALLOWAY: (*Startled.*) Oh!

(*Lights up. Mrs. Dalloway makes a hurried exit and Doctor Dolittle helplessly watches her.*)

DOCTOR: I'm terribly sorry, Mrs. Dalloway!

(*Sarah Dolittle enters, carrying tray with a teapot and teacups.*)

SARAH: What in heaven's name is wrong with Mrs. Dalloway?

DOCTOR: Rheumatism.

SARAH: (*Sighs.*) I mean, why did she yell and leave in such a hurry?

(*Doctor Doolittle goes to the sofa and picks up a hedgehog.*)

DOCTOR: Oh. She sat on a hedgehog.

(*Sarah sets the tea tray on the table.*)

SARAH: John Dolittle! How can you expect sick people to come and see you when you keep all these animals in the house? It's a fine doctor would have his parlor full of hedgehogs and mice! That's the fourth person these animals have driven away! Squire Jenkins and the parson say they wouldn't come here again no matter how sick they are. We are getting poorer every day. If you go on like this, none of the best people will have you for a doctor.

DOCTOR: But I like animals better than the "best people."

SARAH: You have only made a sixpence in the last six months, and you wouldn't have that if little Charlie Jones hadn't eaten too many green apples and come down with a stomachache.

DOCTOR: Sarah, money is such a nuisance. We'd be better off if it had never been invented. What does money matter so long as we are happy?

SARAH: The way you are going, you are going to join all the other happy people in the poorhouse!

(Sarah exits. Doctor Doolittle sighs and strokes the hedgehog.)

SARAH: *(Offstage, from the next room.)* Go right on in. He's in the parlor.

(Matthew Mugg enters. Doctor Doolittle steps forward to greet him.)

DOCTOR: Ah, Matthew. How are you feeling today?

MUGG: I'm sorry to say I'm feelin' quite fine, Doctor.

DOCTOR: What? You're unhappy because you are not sick?

MUGG: Well, Doctor, I'm unhappy because if I was sick, then you could give me some medicine, and I could give you some money.

DOCTOR: Nonsense! Come in and sit down.

MUGG: Thank you, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Have some tea. Sarah brewed a fresh pot.

MUGG: Thank you. *(Doctor pours a cup of tea for Mugg and hands it to him. Mugg sits in a chair. Doctor pours a cup of tea for himself and sits. Mugg takes a sip.)* I heard about Mrs. Dalloway.

DOCTOR: *(Sighs.)* She'll probably never come back again.

MUGG: I wish I could've seen it. I'll bet that's the fastest she's moved in years. *(Mugg and Doctor laugh. Mugg takes another sip of his tea.)* You know, Doctor, you should give up being a

people doctor and be an animal doctor. You know all about animals—much more than these here vets do. That book you wrote about cats, why, it's wonderful. I can't read or write myself, or maybe I'd write some books, too. But my wife, Theodosia, she's a scholar, she is, she read your book to me. Well, it's wonderful. That's all that can be said...wonderful. You might have been a cat yourself. You know the way they think. You could make a lot of money doctoring animals. I could send you a lot of old women who had sick dogs or cats. And if they didn't get sick fast enough, I could put something in the meat I sell them to make 'em sick, see?

DOCTOR: Oh, no. You mustn't do that. That wouldn't be right.

MUGG: Oh, I didn't mean real sick. Just something to make them droopy-like was what I had in mind. But as you say, maybe it ain't quite fair on the animals. But they'll get sick anyway because old women always give 'em too much to eat. And look at all the farmers roundabout who had lame horses and weak lambs...they'd come. Be an animal doctor. *(Puddleby church clock begins to strike.)* Well, I've got to be going to finish my rounds. *(Drains his cup of tea, rises, and hands his teacup to the Doctor.)* Think about what I said. Be an animal doctor.

(Mugg exits. Pause. Polynesia has been sitting quietly on her perch listening intently to the conversation. The Doctor pours another cup of tea.)

POLYNESIA: The man's got sense. That's what you ought to do...be an animal doctor. Give the silly people up if they haven't the brains enough to see you're the best doctor in the world. Take care of animals, instead. They'll soon find it out. Be an animal doctor.

DOCTOR: Oh, but there are plenty of animal doctors.

POLYNESIA: Yes, there are plenty. But I'll wager not a one can actually talk to the animals.

Doctor Dolittle

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DOCTOR: Well, I guess you are right there. But they could learn if they had as good a teacher as you. (*Pause.*) You are a wise old bird, Polynesia. (*Sighs.*) It will make Sarah happy.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: Doctor Doolittle's parlor, a few weeks later. A Plow Horse is standing in the middle of the room swishing his tail back and forth. Doctor Dolittle has set up an eye chart.)

PLOW HORSE: I am so glad to finally find a man who can speak horse language. The trouble is that everyone thinks they can be an animal doctor just because animals don't complain.

(Doctor Dolittle covers one of the Horse's eyes with a piece of paper.)

DOCTOR: Okay. Read the second line.

PLOW HORSE: E, D, B, C, F.

DOCTOR: Good.

PLOW HORSE: As a matter of fact, it takes a much cleverer man to be a really good animal doctor than it does to be a good people doctor. The boy of the farmer who owns me thinks he knows all about horses. He's got as much brain as a potato bug. He tried to put a mustard plaster on me last week.

DOCTOR: Where did he put it?

PLOW HORSE: I didn't give him the chance. He dropped the pad on the ground, and when he bent over to pick it up, I kicked him into the duck pond. *(Horse laugh.)*

DOCTOR: Oh, dear. Was he hurt?

PLOW HORSE: Only his pride. I'm a very patient creature by nature. But that was the last straw. It was bad enough the vet was treating me for six weeks with the wrong medicine. He kept giving me the worst tasting big pills.

DOCTOR DOLLITTLE: What you need is spectacles.

PLOW HORSE: That's what I tried to tell the vet. I'm going blind in one eye. There is no reason why horses shouldn't wear glasses the same as people, is there?

DOCTOR: None at all.

PLOW HORSE: I would like a pair like yours, only green. They'll keep the sun out of my eyes while I'm plowing the 50-acre field.

DOCTOR: Yes. That's exactly what you need. Green ones you shall have.

PLOW HORSE: When will my glasses be ready?

DOCTOR: I'll have them for you next week. Come in again Tuesday.

PLOW HORSE: Thank you, Doctor.

(Doctor Dolittle leads the Plow Horse to the door and opens the door for him to exit.)

DOCTOR: Good morning. *(Plow Horse exits. Doctor begins making notes in his notebook. Polynesia laughs.)* What is it, Polynesia?

POLYNESIA: I was just thinking about people. They think they are so wonderful...always talking about "dumb animals." Dumb! Huh! The world has been going on now for thousands of years, hasn't it? And the only thing in animal language that people have learned to understand is that when a dog wags his tail he means "I'm glad!" Golly, I suppose if people ever learn to fly like the common hedge sparrow, we shall never hear the end of it!

(Blackout.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: Doctor Dolittle's kitchen. Doctor Dolittle is sitting at the kitchen table writing in his notebook. Too-Too and Polynesia are perched near a near window. Sarah enters.)

SARAH: John, you've got to do something about all these animals.

DOCTOR: I thought you were happy now that I am an animal doctor and making money.

SARAH: I am. But I didn't think you were going to turn our home into a menagerie. It's unhealthy to keep all these animals in the house.

DOCTOR: The animals don't mind.

SARAH: I didn't expect to have a whole house full of wild animals.

DOCTOR: But, Sarah, my dear, they are not wild.

SARAH: I thought you were going to take care of family pets and farm animals.

DOCTOR: They all need help. I haven't the heart to turn them out.

SARAH: You have rabbits in the pantry, white mice in the piano, a squirrel in the linen closet, hedgehogs in the cellar...all manner of birds and farm animals. Why must you keep a monkey?

DOCTOR: His owner was abusing him.

SARAH: And the alligator?

DOCTOR: It's a crocodile.

SARAH: I don't care what you call it. It's a nasty thing to find under the bed. He eats the linoleum. I am scared to death of it, and I won't have him in the house. Send it back to the circus.

DOCTOR: But you saw how he reacted when the men from the circus came to get him. He was unhappy there and doesn't want to go back.

SARAH: How do you know? Did he tell you so?

DOCTOR: As a matter of fact, he did. He doesn't like the circus. He has promised me that he will not bite anyone. He minds his own business and on the whole is very well behaved. Sarah, you are altogether too fussy.

SARAH: John Dolittle, I hope you're not going around the neighborhood telling people that you talk to animals.

DOCTOR: What would be so unusual about that? People talk to their dogs and cats all the time. Now what is quite extraordinary is when the animals talk back.

SARAH: Are you telling me that these animals actually speak to you?

DOCTOR: Yes.

SARAH: (*Sighs, shakes her head.*) Do you remember what happened to Great Uncle Henry?

DOCTOR: Great Uncle Henry?

SARAH: He was taken away when they caught him talking to the wallpaper.

DOCTOR: Oh, Sarah, he was just eccentric.

SARAH: He was just plain crazy, that's what he was. (*Pause.*) Well, are you?

DOCTOR: What? Crazy?

SARAH: No. Are you going to get rid of that alligator?

DOCTOR: It's a crocodile.

SARAH: Oh, John. Either that alligator goes—

DOCTOR: Crocodile.

SARAH: Or I'll go and get married!

DOCTOR: All right, go and get married. It can't be helped.

(*Sarah exits and then enters, carrying a suitcase and wearing a coat.*)

SARAH: Goodbye, John.

(*Sarah exits. Doctor Dolittle sighs, puts on his hat and coat, and exits.*)

TOO-TOO: (*To Polynesia.*) Poor Doctor Dolittle. What is he going to do now?

(*Jip, Dab-Dab, and Gub-Gub enter.*)

JIP: What's going on?

DAB-DAB: We saw Sarah leave carrying a suitcase.

GUB-GUB: Then the Doctor came out looking very sad.

POLYNESIA: Sarah has left the Doctor because she is upset with him.

DAB-DAB: About what?

TOO-TOO: Keeping all of us animals. In particular, she wanted him to get rid of the crocodile because she is afraid of him.

DAB-DAB: Well, I don't blame her. When he is lying still and staring at me with those yellow eyes, it just gives me the shivers. (*Shivers.*)

POLYNESIA: Now, he gave the Doctor his word that he would not bite anybody and that's good enough for me.

JIP: With Sarah gone, who's going to take care of the Doctor?

POLYNESIA: We'll have to take care of him ourselves. At least we can do that much. Chee-Chee can do the cooking and mending. Jip, you can sweep the floors. Dab-Dab, you can dust and make the beds. Too-Too can keep the household accounts.

GUB-GUB: What about me?

POLYNESIA: I was coming to you. You can do the gardening.

GUB-GUB: Wonderful! I like rooting around in the garden.

TOO-TOO: And Polynesia can be the housekeeper and laundress because she is the oldest.

POLYNESIA: Then we are all agreed?

(*Everyone agrees. Blackout.*)

Scene 4

(AT RISE: Doctor Dolittle's study. Jip, Polynesia and Too-Too are onstage. Sally Simpkins enters, carrying a glass jar containing what appears to be a silver fish. Jip meets Sally at the door.)

SALLY: Hello, Jip! *(Sets jar down. Kneels down and scratches Jip behind the ears. Jip wags his tail. Sally stands up.)* Hello, Polynesia.

POLYNESIA: Hello, Sally.

SALLY: Hello, Too-Too.

TOO-TOO: Hooo!

SALLY: Why, you, that's who! *(Laughs. Too-Too looks at Polynesia and winks. Sally steps over to the listening tank and is examining it as Doctor Dolittle enters from the next room.)* Good morning, Doctor Dolittle.

DOCTOR: Why, good morning, Sally. Going to be a nice day, don't you think?

SALLY: A very nice day, Doctor.

DOCTOR: And how is your father?

SALLY: He's just fine. He said to say hello.

DOCTOR: Good. Good. What brings you here this morning?

SALLY: Oh, yes...

(Sally picks up the jar and gives it to Doctor Dolittle, who examines its contents.)

DOCTOR: Well, what have you here? *(Holds up jar.)* Upon my word! Extraordinary!

SALLY: What is it?

DOCTOR: Sally, this is a Silver Fidget. Where did you get it?

SALLY: Yesterday, when I was out with my father collecting mussels. It was trapped in a small pool of water.

DOCTOR: Let's put him in the listening tank.

SALLY: Listening tank? What do you listen to?

DOCTOR: I use it to communicate with fish and other aquatic life. It's my own invention.

SALLY: You can actually talk to fish?

DOCTOR: Oh, yes.

SALLY: How does the tank work?

DOCTOR: You see that funnel attached to the inside of the tank?

SALLY: Yes.

DOCTOR: It is specially designed so that when I attach my listening and communication device, I can hear the fish talk and I can talk to them.

SALLY: That certainly is amazing, Doctor.

DOCTOR: I've been trying to communicate with this fellow here. *(Points to a sea creature in the tank.)*

SALLY: What is it?

DOCTOR: Wiff-Waff. Its full name is Hippocampus Pippitopitus. I went all the way to the Eastern Mediterranean to get him. He's a particular kind of pipefish—half shellfish and half ordinary fish. I was in hope that I might learn shellfish from him, but so far he hasn't been a great deal of help to me.

SALLY: Perhaps a larger shellfish would talk more. After all, he is very small, isn't he?

DOCTOR: Yes, that's true. Oh, I have no doubt that there are shellfish who are good talkers, not the least doubt. But the big shellfish, the biggest of them, are so hard to catch. They are only found in the deep parts of the sea. I do wish I could find some way of going down to the bottom of the sea. I could learn a lot if I could only do that. What I would like to do is go down to the great depths...deeper than any divers have ever gone...miles deep. Well, well, I daresay I shall manage it someday. *(Pause, as he thinks of the possibilities. He snaps out of it. He pours the fish into the tank, connects his device, makes noises into the funnel, and then listens.)* Hmmmm. I guess he is not very communicative today. Well, maybe

when he gets used to his new environment, he'll have something to say.

(Dab-Dab enters.)

DAB-DAB: Doctor.

DOCTOR: What is it, Dab-Dab?

DAB-DAB: There is a mother rabbit outside. She says her children have the sniffles.

DOCTOR: All right. Tell her I'll be right out. *(Dab-Dab exits.)*

Let's see, where is my bag? *(Looks around.)* Ah, here it is. *(To Sally.)* I'll be right back. *(Exits.)*

POLYNESIA: It's a scandal the way he works. The animals are so inconsiderate at times. They come 'round and call the Doctor away from his meals and wake him out of his bed at all hours of the night. I don't know how he stands it. I really don't. Why, the poor man never gets any peace at all. He is so frightfully kind and considerate. He never refuses to see them if there is anything wrong with them. He says urgent cases must be seen at once. We animals do the best we can to help him, but it would be nice for him to have help doing the things we can't do.

(Doctor Dolittle enters.)

SALLY: *(To Doctor Dolittle.)* How were the rabbits?

DOCTOR: Nothing serious. Just an over-anxious mother.

(Pause.)

SALLY: Do you know what you need, Doctor?

DOCTOR: No. What, Sally?

SALLY: You need an assistant.

DOCTOR: An assistant?

SALLY: Yes. You have so much work to do around here with doctoring animals and doing your experiments.

DOCTOR: Well, I could use an extra pair of hands at times.
Yes, that is an excellent idea. But the person I need would have to be a good note-taker and, most certainly, have to like animals.

SALLY: I can read and write. And I do like animals.

(Doctor pretends not to hear her.)

DOCTOR: I suppose I could put a sign out on the front gate advertising for an assistant...

SALLY: *(Discouraged.)* Yes, you could. *(Decides it's time to speak up.)* Why couldn't I be your assistant?

DOCTOR: You? Why, that idea never crossed my mind.

SALLY: Then can I?

DOCTOR: What about your father.

SALLY: When I'm not helping Papa collect mussels, I could come here and help you.

DOCTOR: Perhaps you should ask your father.

SALLY: Well, I thought you might speak to him about it. I'm sure he would let me if you asked him. He thinks you are a very fine man.

DOCTOR: Well, er...all right. I'll speak to him about it. You can be my assistant, but only if he agrees.

SALLY: Oh, thank you, Doctor Dolittle!

(Blackout.)

Scene 5

(AT RISE: Doctor Dolittle's parlor. Sally and the Doctor Dolittle enter carrying packages. Miranda, the Purple Bird-of-Paradise, is asleep on a perch. Polynesia is seated on her perch.)

POLYNESIA: Doctor, the Purple Bird-of-Paradise has arrived.

DOCTOR: At last! I had begun to fear some accident had befallen her.

SALLY: Oh, she's beautiful. What's her name?

DOCTOR: Miranda.

SALLY: Where does she come from?

DOCTOR: Brazil. She comes to visit every year about this time. *(Approaches Miranda and gently strokes her back. Her head pops out from under her wing and she stretches. To Miranda.)* I'm so glad to see you. Did you have a hard time getting here?

MIRANDA: The worst passage I've ever made. But I'm here. *(Pause. Stretches again.)* I have a message from the Popsipital.

DOCTOR: Popsipital?

MIRANDA: That's one of the two tribes that live on Noe Island. There is a terrible sickness among them. I have told them about you and they asked me to beg you to come to the island.

DOCTOR: Noe Island...

(Doctor goes to his desk, retrieves four rolled-up charts, clears the table, and unrolls one of the charts.)

SALLY: Where is Noe Island?

DOCTOR: *(Looking at chart.)* I believe it is off the coast of Brazil. Ah, yes. *(Points.)* Here it is.

SALLY: Why does it have a question mark by it?

DOCTOR: That means that the island's position in the ocean is not known very exactly—that is, somewhere about there. (*Points.*) Ships have probably seen it in that neighborhood most likely. Now, look at this chart. (*Unrolls the second chart.*)

SALLY: Why, the island is in a different position on this chart.

DOCTOR: Now, the other two charts. (*Unrolls the last two charts.*)

SALLY: It's in altogether different positions. The same island?

DOCTOR: Yes. The same island.

SALLY: An island that floats?

DOCTOR: I have a theory. Air has somehow been trapped beneath the island—an air pocket that keeps it afloat, and a current that propels it along. Notice the dates on each of these charts. (*Puts charts together.*) You see, at different times of the year, the island is in a different part of the ocean. It seems to move in a circular pattern. Now, what I need is a ship.

SALLY: Papa has one for sale.

DOCTOR: Good. I'll go and see him.

(*Pause. Doctor Dolittle continues looking over his charts.*)

SALLY: Doctor.

DOCTOR: Yes?

SALLY: Couldn't I come along with you on your voyage?

DOCTOR: Well, I don't know. I don't think your father would want you to go. No telling how long we would be gone.

SALLY: But he let me be your assistant, didn't he?

DOCTOR: Yes. But...

SALLY: How can I assist you if I don't go with you? It would be much easier for you if you had someone to carry your equipment and notebooks, wouldn't it?

DOCTOR: Well, yes, it would. (*Sighs.*) I'm not making any promises, but I'll ask your father.

SALLY: Oh, thank you.

DOCTOR: Miranda, when you have rested up, will you fly ahead of us and tell the Popsipetel that I am on my way?

MIRANDA: Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR: How is the weather between here and there?

MIRANDA: Well, there should be fair weather for the next four weeks or so, but the sooner you get started, the better.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 6

(AT RISE: Joe Simpkins' home. Doctor Dolittle and Joe Simpkins are seated. Sally is standing behind her father's chair.)

JOE: Well, Doctor, "The Curlew" is a fine vessel, and I'll give you a good price. But she'll need three people to sail her. Have you found anyone else to go with you?

DOCTOR: No. Not as yet.

JOE: I know of a good sailor, a first-class seaman who would be glad of the job.

DOCTOR: No, thank you. I don't want any seamen. I couldn't afford to hire them. Besides, they hamper me so...seamen do when I'm at sea. They're always wanting to do things the proper way, and I like to do them my way.

JOE: Well, I would offer to go, but this is the busiest time of the year for mussels.

(Sally gets the Doctor's attention to remind him to ask her father.)

DOCTOR: Well, come to think of it, there is one person who comes to mind.

JOE: Who?

DOCTOR: Well, you see, it's, ah...Sally.

JOE: *(Surprised.)* Sally?!

DOCTOR: Well, Sally has asked if she might accompany me on this voyage.

(Joe hesitates. He looks down and rubs his chin as he ponders this.)

JOE: Well, of course I know Sally would be in good hands with you, Doctor, and she would be of valuable help to you on your voyage. She knows as much about sailing as any sailor. I taught her myself. Her mother, God rest her, taught her to read and write. That's important to get on in life.

And she does have a curiosity about nature, always bringing home some kind of creature or shell or rock.

(Joe sighs. Sally kneels beside her father's chair.)

SALLY: Please...

JOE: There aren't many opportunities of this kind for girls.
(Looks at Sally.) Maybe someday it'll be different. *(Rises.)* I'll move the boat downriver and tie it up along the river wall so it will be easier to load.

(Excited, Sally stands up, puts her arms around Joe's neck, and kisses him on the cheek.)

SALLY: Oh, thank you, Papa!

JOE: I know she'll be in good hands with you, Doctor.

DOCTOR: I promise I'll take good care of her.

(Teary-eyed, Joe takes a handkerchief from his back pocket, wipes his eyes, and blows his nose.)

JOE: *(Trying to hide his emotions.)* I must be coming down with a cold.

(Blackout.)

Scene 7

(AT RISE: Deck of "The Curlew." Doctor Dolittle is alone on deck checking over a list of supplies. Montague Fitzhappington Smythe enters.)

SMYTHE: I say, are you Doctor Dolittle?

DOCTOR: Yes, sir, I am.

SMYTHE: I am Montague Fitzhappington Smythe.

DOCTOR: I am glad to know you.

SMYTHE: I have been given to understand that you are embarking on a sea voyage.

DOCTOR: That's right.

SMYTHE: I don't suppose you would consider taking on a passenger?

DOCTOR: Well...

SMYTHE: You see, my doctor has recommended that I take a long sea voyage for my health.

DOCTOR: Well, I hadn't planned on taking on any passengers.

SMYTHE: Oh, I see.

(Pause.)

DOCTOR: Do you know anything about navigation and the sailing of ships.

SMYTHE: No, I'm afraid not.

DOCTOR: Hmmm. I am pressed for time...would you be willing to work for your passage?

SMYTHE: Why, yes. Of course.

DOCTOR: Good! Welcome aboard! How long will it take you to get packed?

SMYTHE: *(Holds up his bag.)* Oh, I have all I need right here. I don't believe in a lot of luggage. It is such a nuisance. And it really isn't necessary.

DOCTOR: Well, I'll be! I'm delighted to have you! I think you are exactly the man I need. (*Sally, Joe, and Matthew enter.*) Ah! (*To group.*) I want you to meet the third member of my crew. This is Montague Fitzhappington Smythe. (*To Smythe.*) This is Joe Simpkins and Matthew Mugg.

SMYTHE: (*To Joe and Matthew.*) How do you do?

DOCTOR: (*Introducing.*) And Sally Simpkins, the other member of our crew.

SMYTHE: (*Takes off his hat and bows.*) How do you do, Miss Simpkins?

(*Joe takes Doctor Dolittle aside.*)

JOE: (*To Doctor Dolittle.*) Are you sure you don't want a seaman on board?

DOCTOR: We'll do just fine.

MUGG: Excuse me, Doctor. (*Holds out a basket.*)

DOCTOR: What is this?

MUGG: Suet pudding. You probably won't be able to get any where you are going.

DOCTOR: You won't forget to take the usual provisions to the house every Thursday? And be particularly careful to remember the extra supply of herrings for the baby minks.

MUGG: Don't worry about a thing, Doctor.

DOCTOR: (*To Sally and Smythe.*) Well, we had better get started. (*Sally approaches Joe, puts her arms around his neck, and kisses him on the cheek. Joe gives her a big hug and then takes out his handkerchief, wipes his eyes, and blows his nose. Teary-eyed, Dr. Dolittle takes out his handkerchief, wipes his eyes, and blows his nose. To Joe.*) I think I'm catching your cold.

(*Blackout.*)

Scene 8

(AT RISE: Deck of "The Curlew." Doctor Dolittle is at the wheel. Jip is up in the peak of the boat with his ears cocked and nose stuck out, keeping a sharp lookout. Polynesia is sitting on the rail holding a string in one claw, which extends into the "water.")

POLYNESIA: *(To any melody, sings.)*

"I've seen the Black Sea and the Red sea;
I rounded the Isle of Wight;
I discovered the Yellow River,
And the Orange, too—by night.
Now Greenland drops behind again,
And I sail the ocean blue.
I'm tired of all these colors, Jane,
So I'm coming back to you."

(Sally enters.)

DOCTOR: *(To Sally.)* Is everything fastened down?

SALLY: Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Good. We wouldn't want anything rolling around should we encounter rough weather.

SALLY: But didn't Miranda say that we would have good weather for several weeks?

DOCTOR: Yes. But it is always best to be prepared for any situation. How is Mr. Smythe doing?

SALLY: He is coiling the ropes. *(Pause.)* What's Polynesia dangling at the end of that string?

DOCTOR: She's using my bath thermometer to check the sea's temperature to make sure there are no icebergs near us.

SALLY: Doctor...

DOCTOR: Yes.

SALLY: If the island is floating around, won't it be difficult to locate it?

DOCTOR: Well, I think by using the charts, I can calculate the rate of drift. At the very least, I can bring us within sight of the island.

SALLY: How long will it take us?

DOCTOR: If we continue to have a good wind and fair weather, we should make it in four weeks.

(Smythe enters, holding an open umbrella.)

SMYTHE: The rope is coiled and neatly stacked.

DOCTOR: Good. Now that we are all together, I have some instructions to give. From here on, there will always be two of us on duty. Each of us will have our duties to perform. If you have any questions, either Polynesia or I will help you. Mr. Smythe, can you cook?

SMYTHE: Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Good. That will be one of your duties.

SMYTHE: Very good, Doctor.

DOCTOR: Sally, you'll be in charge of the ship's log.

SALLY: Yes, Doctor.

DOCTOR: *(To Sally and Smythe.)* Now, I'll show you how to take turns at the wheel, the proper manner of keeping the ship on her right course, and what to do if the wind changes suddenly...

(Blackout.)

Scene 9

(AT RISE: Inside the ship's cabin. Sally is writing in the ship's log. Polynesia is sitting on a perch watching Sally write. Sally stops writing.)

SALLY: Polynesia, I'm worried.

POLYNESIA: What about?

SALLY: Do you think it is safe for the Doctor to cross the Atlantic without any regular seaman aboard?

POLYNESIA: You are always safe with Doctor Dolittle. Remember that. Of course, it is perfectly true the Doctor does do things his way and sometimes they are wrong. But with him it doesn't matter. If you travel with John Dolittle, you always get there. I've been with him lots of times and I know. Sometimes the ship is upside down when you get there, and sometimes it's right way up. But you get there just the same. *(Thoughtfully.)* He always has extraordinarily good luck. He may have his troubles, but with him things seem to have a habit of turning out all right in the end. *(Pause.)* You know, in your spare time you should learn animal language.

SALLY: It must be pretty hard.

POLYNESIA: Not if you are a good noticer.

SALLY: A good noticer?

POLYNESIA: Do you notice things well? I mean, for instance, supposing you saw two cock starlings in an apple tree, and you only took one good look at them, would you be able to tell one from the other if you saw them again the next day?

SALLY: I don't know.

POLYNESIA: That is what you call powers of observation. It's noticing the small things about birds and animals...the way they sniff the air, twitch their whiskers, and wiggle their tails. Being a good noticer is terribly important in learning animal language.

SALLY: It does sound pretty hard.

POLYNESIA: You'll have to be very patient. It takes time even to say a few words properly. But once you get started, you'll be surprised how fast you get on.

SALLY: Oh, I'd love to learn animal language!

POLYNESIA: Good. In our spare time, school will be in session.

(Blackout.)

Scene 10

(AT RISE: Inside the ship's cabin. Doctor Dolittle is at his listening tank making notes in notebook. Knock at the door.)

DOCTOR: *(Turns.)* Come in.

SALLY: *(Sticks her head in.)* Hope I'm not disturbing you...

DOCTOR: No. No. No. Not at all. Come here. I want you to hear something.

(Doctor Dolittle hands Sally the listening device. She puts it in her ears and listens for a moment.)

SALLY: He's whistling! An English tune!

DOCTOR: Yes. Keep listening.

SALLY: Did I hear right?! He said, "The big tank needs cleaning!" It doesn't make sense. Now he's talking fish talk again. *(Takes the device out of her ears.)* What does this mean?

DOCTOR: From what the little fellow told me, some time ago, he was caught and put on display. During that time, he picked up bits and pieces of the English language.

SALLY: But how did he get back into the ocean?

DOCTOR: He's a very intelligent little fellow. He pretended to be dead, allowing himself to float to the top of the tank, and he was thrown back into the ocean, where he made his escape. The best part is...he has offered to teach me the basics of shellfish language.

SALLY: That's wonderful, Doctor!

DOCTOR: Yes. But I had to promise to release him back into the ocean. I have to hurry because he says the water in the tank is getting warm and sickly. I'm going to need you to take notes as I give them to you.

(Doctor Dolittle hands Sally his notebook and a pencil. Blackout.)

Scene 11

(AT RISE: Inside the ship's cabin, a short time later.)

DOCTOR: *(To Fidget.)* I cannot thank you enough for all the information you have given me. You have been very helpful and patient. *(Sally drops the pencil on the table, flexes her fingers, and leans back with a sigh. Doctor Dolittle goes to the porthole and opens it. He returns to the tank and carefully scoops the Fidget out of the water, goes back to porthole, and dumps the Fidget back into the sea. Sadly.)* Goodbye. *(Closes porthole.)*

SALLY: Why are you so sad?

DOCTOR: There is so much more I wanted to ask him. *(Perks up.)* But I did learn the basics of shellfish language. With this knowledge, I'll be able to communicate with the Great Glass Sea Snail. He inhabits the area around the floating island.

SALLY: What is the Great Glass Sea Snail?

DOCTOR: He is an enormous saltwater sea snail, one of the winkle family but as large as a house. His shell is made of transparent mother-of-pearl so that you can see through it, but it is thick and strong. There is room in it for a wagon and a pair of horses. If I could only speak to him...

(There is a loud scratching at the door. Doctor Dolittle opens the door and Polynesia enters.)

POLYNESIA: A nice state of affairs! What sort of ship is this?! That Smythe fellow is almost asleep at the wheel! I left Jip on deck with him so that every time he nodded off, Jip will pull on his pants leg to wake him up.

DOCTOR: I'm afraid it is my fault, Polynesia. I was so excited about the information I received from the Fidget, I forgot about the time. He told me all about the Great Glass Sea Snail. Just think, Polynesia, if I could meet the Great Glass

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Sea Snail! Just think of all the wonderful things he could tell me!

POLYNESIA: That's all well and good, Doctor, but we must get to the island of Noe first.

DOCTOR: You are a wise old bird, Polynesia. Of course you are right.

(Doctor Dolittle and Sally exit. Blackout.)

Scene 12

(AT RISE: Deck of "The Curlew." Sally is at the wheel. Polynesia, Jip, and Smythe are on deck. Smythe is shading himself with an open umbrella. Doctor Dolittle is standing at the rail making whale sounds and the whales are responding.)

SMYTHE: *(To Sally.)* I say, what is Doctor Dolittle doing?

SALLY: He's talking to the whales.

SMYTHE: Extraordinary! You mean to say that the Doctor can speak to whales?

SALLY: That's right.

SMYTHE: And he understands them?

SALLY: Yes.

SMYTHE: Amazing!

(Doctor Dolittle takes out a sextant and begins making calculations.)

DOCTOR: According to the whales and my calculations, we are on the right course. In another day, we should come within sight of Noe Island.

(Blackout.)

Scene 13

(AT RISE: Deck of "The Curlew," the next day. Sally is at the wheel. Doctor enters.)

DOCTOR: What's wrong? Why have we stopped?

SMYTHE: It seems as though we have run out of wind.

POLYNESIA: (*To Doctor Dolittle.*) He's right. We've lost the wind.

SMYTHE: I don't suppose we have a bellows on board?

(*Fog drifts in.*)

POLYNESIA: If this isn't the worst bit of luck. We've not only lost the wind, but we've run afoul of a fog bank. No telling how long we'll be stranded.

DOCTOR: Don't worry.

SMYTHE: I wish you would tell me what I should worry about. I would feel much better.

DOCTOR: If my calculations are correct, we won't be stranded long.

SALLY: What do you mean, Doctor?

(*Doctor goes to the railing.*)

DOCTOR: Mr. Smythe, bring a lantern here.

SMYTHE: Right away, Doctor. (*Takes a lantern off the wall and takes it to Doctor Dolittle.*)

DOCTOR: Now, hold it over the railing.

(*Smythe leans over the railing with the lantern. Doctor Dolittle takes some sticks out of his pocket and drops one over the railing into the sea.*)

SALLY: What are you doing, Doctor?

(Doctor Dolittle doesn't reply but intently watches the sticks in the water.)

DOCTOR: *(Points.)* Look!

(Sally goes to the railing and looks down into the "water.")

SMYTHE: What are we looking at?

DOCTOR: The stick. Watch the stick.

SMYTHE: Is the fog affecting my eyes, or are we moving?

SALLY: Yes, we are. We are slowly moving.

DOCTOR: Sally, you'd better get back to the wheel and hold it on its present course.

SALLY: Yes, Doctor.

(Sally returns to the wheel.)

DOCTOR: Smythe, you better lower the sails to reduce drag.

SMYTHE: Right away, Doctor. *(Exits.)*

DOCTOR: We're picking up speed. *(Throws more sticks into the water, takes out his watch, and makes rapid calculations in his notebook.)* Ah, yes, according to my calculations, we are now traveling 14 and a half knots an hour. Yes. Yes. I do believe we are caught in the same current that propels the island of Noe.

SALLY: But, Doctor, if we can't see the island, we might sail right past it. Jip, can you smell anything?

JIP: Not yet.

SALLY: Perhaps Polynesia could fly above the fog and get a bird's-eye view. *(There is a sudden jolt and a loud crunching sound. Smythe enters, and it is obvious he took a tumble when the ship hit the rocks.)* Mr. Smythe, are you all right?

SMYTHE: Quite all right, Miss Sally. Fortunately, the deck broke my fall. Doctor Dolittle, what do we do now?

DOCTOR: Gather up what supplies we can and put them in the lifeboat.

(A Seagull enters or a stuffed seagull can be lowered on a string and can land on the rail.)

SEAGULL: Which of you is Doctor Dolittle?

DOCTOR: I am.

SEAGULL: I was sent by the Purple Bird-of-Paradise to find you. I'll guide you to safety. Get in your small boat and follow me. Quickly now. From the size of the hole in the side of your ship, you haven't much time.

DOCTOR: *(To others.)* Just take what you absolutely need.

(Blackout.)

[END OF FREEVIEW]